

Straidbilly Primary School



Adverse Weather/Exceptional Closure Policy

Date Ratified by Board of Governors: October 2023

Review Date: October 2027

Straidbilly Primary School is committed to safeguarding the Health and Safety of its pupils, parents and employees, and as such, may have to close the School during exceptional circumstances. In doing so, we will endeavour to ensure that any disruption to the normal functioning of school will remain minimal, whilst not compromising the safety and well-being of all who enter the premises.

WHAT IS AN "EXCEPTIONAL CLOSURE"?

"An Exceptional Closure" is unplanned and is due to unforeseen circumstances such as adverse weather conditions, power failure or situations which affect the safety of pupils and staff. Exceptional Closures require approval from the Department of Education to allow a school to reduce its number of working days to below 200 in a school year.

HOW WILL STRAIDBILLY PRIMARY SCHOOL DECIDE IF WE NEED TO CLOSE?

Although it may not always be possible to make such a decision, where feasible, and in order to facilitate early communication with parents and staff, the principal, in consultation with the Chair of the Governors, will endeavour to plan for an exceptional closure as far in advance of the actual closure as possible i.e. the afternoon/ night before the closure if circumstances allow.

Decisions will only be taken when all the indications are that conditions affecting our school will continue overnight.

If there are doubts, the principal will defer decisions until early morning. The Chair of Governors will be contacted regarding any decisions. Refer to Criteria to be considered for Closure.

If there is a directive or advice from the Department of Education or the Education Authority that schools must/should close due to risk to health and safety, Straidbilly Primary School will follow their instruction.

Extreme Weather conditions such as snow, wind and rain.

- 1. We will consider local conditions and, in consultation with the Building Supervisor, (Mrs F Hanna) will conduct a risk assessment of the grounds and premises of Straidbilly Primary School.
- 2. The Principal will seek to consult with the school staff who live in the proximity of the school and relevant staff from local schools. However, any decisions made will be applicable to our own school and not based on neighbouring schools whose conditions may be different to ours.

CRITERIA TO BE CONSIDERED FOR CLOSURE

The following questions will form part of our Risk Assessment:

- Can parents, pupils and staff access the school building safely?
- Can enough Teaching Staff and Classroom Assistants attend school to ensure the adequate supervision of pupils?
- Are pedestrian routes into school safe and accessible- has grit been applied?
- Can pupils and staff be evacuated in an emergency?
- Is the car park accessible and is parking at all possible within the vicinity of school grounds?
- In an emergency, could the Emergency Services access the school?

- Have local weather forecasts and road conditions, including those for areas from which staff will be travelling, been considered?
- Are there any areas within the school locality particularly impassable or dangerous in times of extreme bad weather?
- Are there any N. Ireland Met Office warnings available?
- Can the school premises be heated?
- Is there provision of water for sanitary use or drinking?
- Is the severe weather likely to clear quickly and allow safe access to the school building?

It should be noted that the inside of the school building, the clearing of access points and pathways around the school and classrooms are the priority for clearing and gritting. The buildings supervisor and the principal will do their best to clear and salt entry and exit gateways for traffic, but this may not be possible.

Parents/carers are responsible for making their own decisions based on their circumstances whether to travel to school or to enter the school grounds in vehicles.

CLOSURE OF STRAIDBILLY PRIMARY SCHOOL

- ❖ Straidbilly Primary School has contact details for all parents/guardians, pupils and staff. We will alert parents by means of our school Facebook Page/Seesaw and by our Text Messaging Service. Parents are requested and reminded to update the school of any changes to contact details on a regular basis.
- ❖ The Buildings Supervisor and the principal will remain in contact late night/early morning regarding the conditions.
- ❖ Where possible, the Buildings Supervisor and the principal will visit the school site by 7:30 a.m. to assess the viability of school opening, taking account of the factors as detailed previously in this policy.
- ❖ The principal will inform the school secretary and staff of the school as a matter of urgency.
- ❖ Parents and staff will be informed of an exceptional closure through the C2k Text Service, the principal and secretary have login details. The Department of Education will be contacted through the C2k system.
- ❖ Details of closures will also be emailed with the school's information to ni_news@bbc.co.uk The details will then be shared on the Northern Ireland news website at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/ninews>
- ❖ Parents/staff will also be updated later in the day with a view to the 'next day' so that all have time to make suitable family arrangements.

Please note: Exceptional closures require approval from the Department of Education

CLOSURE DURING SCHOOL HOURS

- ❖ Parents will be informed through Seesaw/School Text Messaging Service and on the school facebook page.
- ❖ Parents who fail to receive messages will be contacted by telephone.
- ❖ Should a parent not be able to be contacted or a child cannot be picked up by parent/carer, additional contacts provided by parents for collection purposes throughout the year will be used as the next means of communication.
- ❖ The principal & class teacher will not leave the premises for home until all children have been collected by a person nominated by the parent.
- ❖ Parents/staff will be updated later in the day with a view to the 'next day' so that all have time to make suitable family arrangements.

FURTHER STRATEGIES IN PLACE

- ❖ Heating, lighting and water services will be regularly maintained either through the EA Manhattan Help Desk or directly through the school. During severe weather conditions or when they are predicted, the heating system will run for periods of time during the night and during periods of closure or holidays by setting the timer appropriately (Building Supervisor's responsibility).
- ❖ The Building Supervisor will be responsible for the laying down of salt at the beginning/ end of the school day, should conditions require this approach to be taken. Sufficient supplies of salt for application to footpaths and the car park area will be maintained by the EA Maintenance Team.
- ❖ The Building Supervisor will make regular checks of the premises, both inside and out to ensure that the school is safe and fit for purpose at all times. Any perceived hazards (such as fallen down branches etc. in snowy or windy circumstances) will be removed, where possible, by the Building Supervisor, and with EA Health and Safety requirements being always adhered to. Any such incidents and those of a more serious matter, will be reported by the Building Supervisor to the principal, who may then, on some occasions, decide on any possible further course of action required e.g., reporting to Maintenance Department for response/ support/ guidance.

For further information please refer to the following:

https://www.eani.org.uk/sites/default/files/2021-09/EA%20-%20Transport%20in%20Adverse%20Weather_1.pdf

<https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/articles/exceptional-closure-days>

