

GUIDANCE IN RELATION TO ADVERSE WEATHER AND SCHOOL CLOSURES

The purpose of this guidance is to remind heads of establishment of the procedures to be adopted during school closures and severe weather conditions.

All Schools are requested to ensure that:

1. the appropriate guidance and information has been forwarded by schools to parents prior to the anticipated onset of adverse weather conditions (in accordance with para 5.2 below);
2. emergency addresses and closure procedures have been reviewed;
3. the 0800 564 2272 telephone information service is operational and given highest priority in communicating school closures to parents; and
4. procedures are in place to notify Service Centre to update school closures due to adverse weather or other reasons on www.highland.gov.uk/schoolclosures
5. Please ensure that this new website address is communicated to all relevant contacts.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 In times of severe weather conditions the safety of pupils and staff is the prime consideration.
- 1.2 Where such conditions prevail, or are forecast, Head Teachers have total discretion as to closure of schools in respect of those pupils and staff likely to be adversely affected. The health and safety of staff, pupils and any other users of the school building should be the main determining factor when considering school closure. At such times it may well be that children living close to the school can continue in education while those with longer journeys are sent home and this should be a prime consideration. Parents affected by such closures should be advised by whatever means available of the circumstances affecting their children and the arrangements made.
- 1.3 At normal closure times or where closure, or partial closure, occurs in the course of the school day, schools should establish that all pupils will, on leaving school, be able to safely reach either their own home or other acceptable place of safety. Schools are required to ensure that they have on record alternative emergency addresses for pupils which should be reviewed annually. These alternative addresses should be as close to the school as possible. In extreme conditions it may be necessary for some pupils to remain in school overnight if there is doubt as to the certainty of such pupils reaching a suitable place of safety. The Catering Service holds stocks of emergency food supplies in designated establishments.
- 1.4 Where it is clear to Head Teachers in advance of the school day that the school cannot open, parents should be advised as early as possible of the circumstances and information service arrangements activated (see 2.3 to 2.4 below). Head teachers also have the option of delaying the time of the school opening at their discretion in response to weather conditions locally. In either case the Transport Co-ordination Unit and the Catering and Cleaning Service should be informed. The Service Centre will update the website automatically notifying public.transport@highland.gov.uk, CALcatering@highland.gov.uk, and CALcleaning@highland.gov.uk.

- 1.5 School transport providers and the Facilities Management Service (where relevant for appropriate primary and secondary schools, see Appendix 3) should also be advised of closures or delayed openings as early as possible. Please note that if more than 12 hours notice is given to contractors that a school transport journey will not be required, the Council is only required to pay a retainer of 1/3 of the contracted rate; where less notice is given the full rate for the journey is payable.

2. Exchange of Information

- 2.1 Schools are required to establish their own methods of obtaining information on road reports, weather conditions and forecasts. Such sources of information should be used in the knowledge that weather conditions can be very localised and need to be considered alongside other national and local media broadcasts and including the police and other public agencies. Local knowledge may offer the best guidance and schools should be aware of such information sources, including neighbouring schools.
- 2.2 Schools should have a system whereby families affected by closure in adverse weather conditions or other reasons can be advised of the circumstances affecting their children. This should include use of the 0800 564 2272 telephone information service. These local arrangements should be made known to all parents.
- 2.3 The 0800 564 2272 telephone service should be given highest priority by schools in communicating school closures to parents. Each school has a specific code which allows (i) executive access to the answering system from a remote location e.g. Head Teacher's home through 0870 050 6222 and (ii) access by parents, pupils, staff and others, e.g. transport contractors, to an answering service. Website update - Head Teachers must contact the Service Centre on 01349 886658 (open from 7.00am throughout the year), giving school PIN for verification, details of closure, Service Centre will update the website and email notification to local Members, Director of Care and Learning, Area Manager, Ward Manager, Transport, Catering, Cleaning and Care and Learning Information and Support. Notifications also go out through Highland Council's Facebook and Twitter accounts.
- 2.4 The School Closures page will be cleared at the end of each school day, if your closure is ongoing the Service Centre require to be notified each day.

3. School Transport

- 3.1 Contractors are instructed in the Conditions of Contract that "in times of actual or impending adverse weather the final decision as to whether it is safe to operate, bearing in mind the prevailing weather and road conditions, will rest with the driver of the vehicle. In this decision the safety of the pupils will be paramount."

Morning journey

- 3.2 Where transport is shared between schools, there should be agreed arrangements for adverse weather closure or delayed opening which should include an agreed system of communication between schools. If a school is opening late, instructions to delay transport should be issued by the school and the Transport Co-ordination Unit should be informed using public.transport@highland.gov.uk. Some contractors, particularly public transport operators, may not be able to retime journeys, and the school should agree appropriate arrangements with them.

- 3.3 Transport contractors may also delay journeys by an hour if road conditions are unsafe at the normal journey time. The school should advise parents of the retimed journey and update the telephone information line accordingly.

Afternoon journey

- 3.4 Operators are provided with guidelines as to proper practice, the main elements of which are: -
- (a) pupils should remain at the school if it would be unsafe to operate the journey;
 - (b) pupils may be left at designated points notified by the Head Teacher if it is not possible to convey them to their homes or normal set-down points;
 - (c) otherwise arrange appropriate shelter in consultation with the school.

Schools must therefore be reliably contactable by drivers after closure.

- 3.5 Operators are advised that pupils should not be allowed to leave the vehicle if they would be required to walk for such distances or in such conditions *that they would be placed at risk*. If the vehicle is unable to reach the normal drop-off point, or conditions are such that walking from the normal drop-off point would be unsafe, pupils should be taken to a place of safety as described above.

In the event of early school closure

- 3.6 Transport operators may be required to run the homeward journey early in the event of an emergency school closure. Instructions should be issued by the school, as soon as possible, and the Transport Co-ordination Unit should be informed.
- 3.7 Where transport arrangements involve pupils from more than one school, there should be appropriate communication between establishments, with pupil safety as the priority.
- 3.8 In the case of public service operators, the requirements of 3.5 may have to be varied in view of responsibilities to other members of the public. No additional run will be required if a service bus with sufficient capacity is available within one hour of the emergency school closure time. (This assumes that the conditions are such that the bus service is able to continue operating for public use.)

4. School Residences

- 4.1 The following guidance applies only to the five secondary schools who have school residences.
- 4.2 Where closure, or partial closure, occurs in the course of a school day, Head Teachers should liaise with the relevant Residence Officer to discuss whether pupils lodged in residences should return to the residence or be sent home. In taking this decision both Head Teachers and Residence Officers should have regard to the forecast for subsequent days and to the ability of residence staff to attend their place of work to provide care for the pupils.
- 4.3 If Residence pupils are being sent home, transport contractors may be required to operate on a day not normally required for residence transport. Close liaison will be required with the Transport Co-ordination Unit to implement any necessary alterations to normal timetables.
- 4.4 Where it is clear to Head Teachers in advance of the school day that the school cannot open, but where pupils are already at a school residence, the Residence Officer should be advised of the situation as soon as possible.

4.5 Finally, where a school has been closed in advance on a Friday, but where pupils are already at a school residence, it will be necessary for Head Teachers to liaise with the Transport Co-ordination Unit to ensure that school transport is provided to take the pupils home. If this is not possible then the Residence Officer must be informed so that alternative arrangements are made.

5. Conclusions

- 5.1 The safety of pupils and staff in times of adverse weather conditions relies heavily on the efficient flow of information and Head Teachers are required to establish:
- (a) adequate means of securing reliable information on weather conditions throughout the area served by their school;
 - (b) means whereby information regarding school closures and changed transport arrangements can be communicated promptly to parents and any affected neighbouring schools;
 - (c) close liaison with transport operators and Transport Co-ordination Unit so that any necessary changes in requirements can be quickly and safely implemented;
 - (d) the current home circumstances of pupils, availability of parents during the school day and knowledge of emergency contact arrangements for all pupils.
 - (e) that the system in place allows the school to check that certain groups of pupils are considered at the time of closure such as pupils on an out of school trip or placement, ASN pupils and pupils at risk.
- 5.2 Guidelines for parents are attached. These guidelines **should be amended as appropriate to meet the local needs and circumstance of each** school and issued to all parents annually with a summary included in the school handbook.
- 5.3 Full day closures (including instances where the school is partially closed to all or some groups of pupils) should be notified to the Service Centre by 9.30 am. Local Catering Service colleagues should be kept informed of any changes in meal requirements.

6. Confirmation of Procedures

- 6.1 Schools are required to ensure that, in accordance with 4.2 above, appropriate guidance and information has been forwarded to parents prior to the anticipated onset of adverse weather conditions and that closure procedures and pupil emergency contacts have been reviewed.

CARE AND LEARNING SERVICE

GUIDELINES FOR PARENTS

TRAVELLING TO SCHOOL DURING ADVERSE WEATHER

It is the responsibility of parents or carers to decide if a pupil should attempt to travel to school, by transport or on foot, in adverse weather conditions. The Council encourages full attendance at school but in severe weather conditions the safety of pupils is much more important. Parents and pupils are often concerned that important examinations may be missed, but this should not over-ride good judgement. Schools normally make alternative arrangements for missed examinations.

The school updates its procedures for adverse weather closure annually, therefore

- **parents** should advise schools of an alternative address, as close as possible to the school, which may be used by their children in emergencies
- **the school** will advise parents of normal local arrangements for school transport and any special arrangements in the event of adverse weather
- **the school** will establish a system of communication with parents and local transport operators and ensure that parents are fully informed of any revised arrangements. A telephone service is offered to provide parents with up-to-date information. Parents may call **0800 564 2272** to access your schools' information. Please note, you will need the unique pin number for your school which is available from your school or Highland Council website.
http://www.highland.gov.uk/downloads/file/4653/telephone_pins_for_checking_if_a_school_is_closed

The Highland Council Website, Facebook and Twitter

- The Council's **website** <http://www.highland.gov.uk/schoolclosures> will be updated with information for individual schools
- The Council's **Facebook** page at <https://www.facebook.com/highlandcouncil> will show updated posts on the latest news of school closures and weather related problems
- The Council's **Twitter** page at <https://twitter.com/HighlandCouncil> will list Tweets of the latest news of school closures and weather related problems

When weather conditions are poor

Local radio stations issue news and weather bulletins on traffic conditions and school closures. Transmissions may not cover all households and may be subject to re-scheduling but should be helpful. Parents are advised to remain "tuned in" to ongoing road weather, or school information updates.

Broadcast times

BBC Radio Highland

6.30 am
12.30 pm

7.30 am
4.30 pm

8.30 am
5.30 pm

In extreme conditions, Radio Highland will interrupt Radio Scotland transmissions (usually on the hour), to carry emergency bulletins.

Nevis Radio will carry bulletins at roughly ten minute intervals between 7.00 am and 8.00 am

Lochbroom FM will carry bulletins at quarter-hour intervals between 7.15 am and 8.45 am.

Moray Firth Radio www.mfr.co.uk

Local news on the hour 6am – 6pm carries local information on weather, roads and conditions affecting schools. In severe conditions normal programmes will be interrupted more frequently to carry emergency bulletins.

Two Lochs Radio will broadcast a local news bulletins from 7.30am. In severe conditions normal programmes will be interrupted more frequently to carry emergency bulletins.

Please do not telephone local Radio for advice but listen to appropriate broadcasts.

For pupils using school transport

- Parents should note that the final decision on whether it is safe to operate rests with the driver of the school transport vehicle. Therefore there may be occasions on which a school is open but some routes, or parts of routes, are unable to operate
- Parents should advise their children on how long they should wait at the pick up point for their transport. This will depend on the prevailing weather conditions and the availability of shelter at the pick-up point. During adverse weather conditions no pupil is expected to wait longer than twenty minutes past the normal “pick-up” time
- Morning journeys may be delayed by an hour if road conditions are unsafe at the normal journey time but have improved within the hour. Before pupils return to a pick up point parents should check the schools telephone information line for updated messages from their schools Head teacher. Please note that for some routes the transport operator may contact the parent directly
- Drivers are advised not to drop off children where there is a risk that they may not safely reach home or other place of shelter. This may involve children being taken to an alternative place of safety, agreed in consultation with the school
- Where parents are concerned about weather conditions at “drop-off” points, they should contact the school as early as possible

Please note: when weather conditions are poor, parents should ensure that children are met at the “drop-off” point, especially where public service transport is used.

Appendix 2

WINTER READY ACTION CHECKLIST

- Have 'Guidelines for Parents' been issued to all parents?
- Are Emergency contacts for all staff and pupils updated on Click+Go?
- Have Closure procedures been reviewed?
- Is the 0800 564 2272 telephone information system operational for your school?
- Do all necessary staff have PIN code details etc for 0870 050 6222 telephone information system and Service Centre number, 01349 886658, for web update information?
- Are arrangements in place for emergency communications?
- Are arrangements in place for snow and ice clearance?
[Winter Services - Available Suppliers Tool](#)
- Have supplies of salt/grit been checked and Community Services contacted if replenishment required?
Lochaber: communityservices.lochaber@highland.gov.uk
Badenoch: communityservices.badenoch@highland.gov.uk
Sutherland: communityservices.sutherland@highland.gov.uk
Nairn: communityservices.nairn@highland.gov.uk
Skye and Lochalsh: communityservices.skyeandlochalsh@highland.gov.uk
Caithness: communityservices.caithness@highland.gov.uk
Inverness: communityServicesTECSinverness@highland.gov.uk
Ross & Cromarty: CommunityServices.RossandCromarty@highland.gov.uk
- Is the School aware of the Council's [Winter Services Information](#)?
- Preparation for pupil homework during prolonged snow closure?
- Facilities Management Service Contacts – Please see [here](#) for your local contact

Further useful information is available on the national Ready Winter website
<http://www.readyscotland.org/>