



Northumberland

County Council

Your ref:
Our ref: JV
Enquiries to: Jill Varney
Email: schooladmissions@northumberland.gov.uk
Contact Centre: (0345) 600 6400
School Admissions: 01670 624889
17 March 2020

Dear Colleagues,

SUBJECT: CLOSURE DUE TO EMERGENCY CONDITIONS, INCLUDING ACTION IN THE LIGHT OF CORONAVIRUS.

Purpose: To advise Headteachers on what action to take in relation to communicating that a school has taken the decision to close on the basis of an unforeseen emergency (including need to take action in relation to Coronavirus).

ACTION - SCHOOL CLOSURE NOTIFICATIONS SHOULD BE SENT TO

school.closures@northumberland.gov.uk.

All schools should have an up-to-date emergency plan to help deal with a crisis or unexpected event quickly and in an organised way. Headteachers need to be clear about how they will communicate information to staff, parents, children and the media, with named contacts and their responsibilities should an emergency occur. If you need further advice or assistance on your emergency plan, you can refer to

<https://www.northumberland.gov.uk/Education/Schools/Emergency.aspx>

The Civil Contingencies Office will offer Support to schools in the creation of the School Emergency Plan.



County Hall, Morpeth, Northumberland, NE61 2EF
(T) 0345 600 6400 (E) contactcentre@northumberland.gov.uk
(W) www.northumberland.gov.uk



ADVICE FOR SCHOOLS CONSIDERING CLOSURE ON THE BASIS OF CORONAVIRUS

Schools seeking advice on closure in relation to Coronavirus must in the first instance contact PUBLIC HEALTH ENGLAND at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-to-educational-settings-about-covid-19/guidance-to-educational-settings-about-covid-19>

ADVICE FOR SCHOOLS CONSIDERING CLOSURE ON THE BASIS OF BAD WEATHER

There is a presumption against the complete closure of a school due to adverse weather conditions, therefore headteachers must be seen to have explored a range of options in order to maintain an educational provision for children before deciding to close.

The School Admissions and Inclusion Manager at County Hall should also be copied into the email schooladmissions@northumberland.gov.uk, giving the reason for closure and the duration of the closure. The reason for closure should be more detailed than 'adverse weather' and should include underlying issues, for example Health and Safety implications. If the County Council is made aware of the reasons for closure, measures could be put in place to help your school open at the earliest opportunity.

NB: If you have internet connection issues and cannot send an email, contact the Council on either of the numbers above. If phone lines are busy or there is no one available please leave a voicemail message.

The County Council website will contain regular weather updates during periods of bad weather and schools can publicise school closures using the secure County Council computer network.

The attached document provides additional information on how to disseminate notification of a decision to close school to parents, staff etc. If you have any queries or you need advice on any of the attached documents please contact me as above.

Yours sincerely

Jill Varney

School Admissions and Inclusion Manager



Northumberland

County Council

CLOSURE DUE TO CORONAVIRUS OR OTHER UNFORESEEN CIRCUMSTANCES (SUCH AS ADVERSE WEATHER)

Introduction

The Local Authority is under a statutory duty to provide an education service in which schools are open to pupils for 190 days per year. Decisions to close the school should, therefore, only be taken when the safety or welfare of the pupils during their time at the school or travelling to school is likely to be adversely affected by local circumstances. The school will not normally close for additional teacher days unless permission has been sought from the local authority. Because of the size and diverse nature of the County, judgements on the most appropriate action to take can best be formed locally. The Local Authority will, therefore, be guided by the advice it receives from Headteachers.

To report a closure please email: school.closures@northumberland.gov.uk

Making the decision to close as a result of Coronavirus

As stated, advice on closure in the light of concerns regarding Coronavirus should be taken from Public Health England at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-to-educational-settings-about-covid-19/guidance-to-educational-settings-about-covid-19>

Making the decision to close as a result of adverse weather and other unforeseen circumstances

In relation to closure for adverse weather, a school ought not to be closed because drives and footpaths are inaccessible. Headteachers are advised that it is the responsibility of the caretaker to create a safe access to the main door. Schools are reminded that they should have gritting plan agreed by Headteacher, the caretaker and Facilities. The school is responsible for the costs. Headteachers should ensure that they have sufficient salt for those areas that need to be cleared.

With regard to school car parks this will need to be at the discretion of the headteacher as to whether this needs to be done. In the case of large school premises, total clearance may not be possible without external assistance and alternative solutions may need to be considered. Highways and transport are responsible for the clearance of roads leading up to and outside of school premises. This may need to include off site lay-bys and turning areas that are used by home to school transport providers, although it needs to be recognised that some of these are on school premises. The County Council is responsible for the costs of off-site clearance.

There is now no direct area contact as previously; Highways Maintenance can be contacted through the contact centre on **0345 600 6400**.

As a Headteacher you should:

- Assess what hazards any snow, for example, could bring; identify the measures you already have in place to reduce risk to your pupils and staff; and do your best to bring in any extra measures that will enable your school function as normal despite bad weather. Closing the school could be the right decision, where your judgement is that pupils or staff would face significant risks of serious injury in school or travelling to school.
- Consider whether it is practicable for you to open or keep your school open. Full closure should only be considered in the most exceptional of circumstances, in the main headteachers should consider that partial closure, albeit with a modified curriculum, should be the norm.

Local children who can walk to school should be retained even when those on transport are not in attendance, provided that there are sufficient staff to provide a modified curriculum for the number of pupils that remain in the school. Consideration should also be given to provide continuity for those students in exam groups

On the Northumberland County Council website there is access to localised weather warnings. Headteachers should use this website whilst considering the closure of the school due to inclement weather.

Where a Headteacher feels it is appropriate to close the school during the course of a school day, or not to open the following day, he/she should contact the Admissions Team either by phone or email to inform Children's Services of the reasons for the recommendation and to obtain agreement.

If forecasts make it likely that a school will not be able to open the next day then a decision the previous afternoon may be appropriate.

If Heads are unable to contact Children's Services prior to closure, they should do so as soon as practicable. **Agreement will not normally be given in advance to closures of more than one day.**

To announce a school closure

Please send an email to: school.closures@northumberland.gov.uk

Please make the subject title of the email: **School closure – your school name**

To verify that this is a valid closure your email *must* contain:

- Your name and position at the school
- DfE school number and school name and location
- Radio Newcastle closure password (BORIS)
- Date of closure
- Reason for closure
- A direct contact number so we can quickly speak to you if needed (this will not be made public, so mobile number would be appreciated - unless your school has staff in attendance the school number is of no use.)
- Website address - only needed if you have additional information on your school webpage concerning the closure.

We will use the Radio Newcastle password as authority to post your closure notice.

You will appreciate that during severe weather conditions, a large number of schools may be advising the local authority of their intention to close, so **it is important that we receive your email by 7.30 a.m. at the latest**. If it is received later than this, there is no guarantee that it will be displayed by 8.00 a.m.; early enough to be useful to parents.

Your closure notices will appear in the following places:

- County Council: www.northumberland.gov.uk
- Facebook: www.facebook.com/nccalerts
- Twitter: www.twitter.com/northumberlands

The public are advised to check the County Council homepage during periods of bad weather for regular weather updates and announcements of any schools closed, or services affected.

Dissemination of notification of closure to parents, staff and other parties

Please note: whereas the local authority will endeavour to support schools in their efforts to broadcast school closures **it is the responsibility of schools to contact parents**.

Confirmation of closure should also be forwarded to the School Admissions and Inclusion Manager at County Hall, in writing or by e-mail, as soon as possible, giving the date, the reason for closure and the possible duration of the closure.

When closure arises from a property-related problem, like a heating system failure, in addition to informing Children's Services, headteachers should also make direct contact with a relevant officer in the Operational Services Department to ensure that the problem can be resolved as soon as possible.

If it is envisaged that the closure may not be resolved within a couple of days headteachers should be prepared to consider how alternative educational provision can be maintained for pupils.

Notification of Decision

Responsibility for notification of a decision to close the school lies with the individual school. Schools should have set procedures in place in order to inform the following groups of the decision to close:

- (a) **Parents** – some schools have found it useful to have a 'round robin' or 'cascade' system of telephone calls to alert as many parents as quickly as possible. Block e-mails can ensure that parents receive immediate information.

Schools will also need to consider the position of children whose parents or guardians are not at home during the day, particularly if transport is sent back at the beginning of the school day or the school is to close earlier than usual.

- (b) **Staff** - teaching and non-teaching - Where a school remains open staff are expected to make every effort to attend work. Headteachers are expected to remind staff that getting to work is deemed to be an essential journey. However, where individual staff are not able to attend for genuine reasons Heads need to deal with them in a sympathetic but consistent manner and, where possible, agree alternative arrangements such as undertaking appropriate professional duties at home, taking annual leave if this is available or making up the lost time as additional hours once

the weather improves. Ultimately if none of the above options are suitable, staff can take unpaid leave of absence to cover any lost time.

The above arrangements will also apply if a school is closed for pupils but remains open for staff.

Where a management decision is made to close the school to pupils and staff, heads should direct staff, where appropriate, to undertake appropriate professional duties offsite. Where this is not practical as there is no or insufficient work that can be undertaken offsite during the period of closure then staff will be given paid leave of absence.

It is recognised that headteachers might have fewer staff to supervise pupils in days of bad weather. Schools should plan for how, if they have fewer staff in the short term, they should continue to supervise pupils and deliver as much of the curriculum as possible.

- (c) **School Catering staff** - If a school is closed to pupils on two or more successive days, you should contact Operational Services concerning arrangements for school meals staff. This should help avoid the issue of possible deductions from salary. If a school remains open to children, then school meals should continue to be served, provided that school meals staff are available.
- (d) **Crossing patrols.**
Crossing patrols need to be advised when a school is closing early or if a school will not be open to pupils.
- (e) **Home to School Transport.**

Particular care needs to be taken if your school's transport is linked to that of another school.

Before you make the final decision to close ensure that the Home to School Transport Team is aware of your plans, as an early closure may not be the best course of action. You will need to be advised either by the provider or by the Home to School Transport Team.

If a transport provider deems it necessary to collect children from school early due to adverse weather conditions you should release only those children travelling with that provider. It may not be necessary to close the school entirely.

Before releasing pupils, take into account any feeder journeys where pupils may be dropped off by a bus part way home, and need to use a taxi for the remainder of their journey.

Where feeder journeys exist you **MUST** ensure that **all** appropriate operators have been contacted.

Where parents have brought their children into school when transport is not running, they need to be made aware that they will be responsible for getting them home again.

- (f) **Other schools or 'meals on wheels'** receiving meals from the school kitchen or schools which supply school meals to the school.

- (g) **Publicity.** When the decision to close is made before the start of the school day, Radio Newcastle will broadcast the information. Contact numbers for radio broadcasts are printed below along with the relevant Northumberland County Council password for identification purposes.

School absence

If the school is open, and some pupils whose homes are not within walking distance travel to school by transport provided by the school or the local authority, and that transport is not available because of adverse weather conditions, those pupils should be marked using code Y (forced and partial closure). Code Y does not count as absence in the statistics. All other children should be expected to attend and should be recorded as present/absent as normal.

Emergency Planning

In the event of an emergency or weather conditions which affect a large area it is likely that the County Council's Emergency Community Assistance Plan would be activated. The issuing of advice on school closures **OTHER THAN FOR CORONAVIRUS** (see above advice) would be taken by a team of Emergency Coordinators which would include senior officers from the Children's Services Directorate.

Information will be circulated via the Northumberland website and the media.

The School Admissions Team will still be the contact source for Children's Services and will hold up to date information. The School Admissions Team will ensure that the website is kept up-to-date.

Contact numbers for alerting parents of school closure:

Metro Radio offer a service for publicising school closure details. Headteachers or county officials will be able to register on their website. Metro Radio will issue a password in return which can be used to input information directly onto the Metro Radio website.

To register go to www.metroradio.co.uk/schools

**Radio Newcastle – Tel. 0191 244 1450 –
Password BORIS**

BBC Tyne - www.bbc.co.uk/tyne

Radio Borders –Tel. 01896 759444

Email: news@radioborders.com