



Community Services: Education

Argyll House
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To: Heads of all Educational Establishments

Dear Colleague

Emergency closure of schools and other educational establishments

From time to time circumstances arise which can lead to the emergency closure of schools or other educational establishments. Examples of such circumstances include severely inclement weather, abnormal temperatures, burst pipes, disruption of fuel, power or water supplies. The length of closure may vary from an early closure for a brief period with a return to normal on the following day to a closure for one or more full days.

Parents should be advised by letter and through standard advice in the school handbook that there may be occasions when emergencies make it necessary for children and young people to be sent home prematurely and that in these circumstances parents should have advised their children of where they should go.

With regard to NPDO schools it is essential that any decision regarding emergency closure is immediately communicated to Mitie's representative (the maintenance contractor within the NPDO schools) in order that Mitie may be fully aware of matters so they may take appropriate steps to ensure the security of the school building. Close cooperation between the Head Teacher/Campus Principal and the Mitie representative is essential in a situation such as emergency closure of a school.

All schools have a School Activity Recovery Plan (CARP) which will require to be updated at the start of each school year by the Head Teacher/Campus Principal.

Schools should follow the flow chart at Appendix 4 for all emergency school closures.

Early closure

- 1 Early closure should be considered only when the circumstances are such that it is impossible to continue to make reasonable provision for children and young people. Head Teachers/Campus Principals should make every effort to provide education for as long as possible and for as many children and young people as possible. Consideration should be given where feasible to partial rather than full closure.
- 2 When considering early closure Head Teachers/Campus Principals should regard the health and welfare of children and young people as paramount. All arrangements should ensure a standard of care for each and every child and young person as would be expected of a prudent parent. Arrangements should take account of age, ability and capacities (physical and mental) of the children and young people concerned; the location of the school in relation to children and young peoples' homes and to road traffic and other hazards; the home circumstances of the children and young people and any other emergency arrangements. In some circumstances the safer option could be to have the children and young people remain in school.

No primary aged child and young person should be sent home without ensuring that an adult's presence is available. In the absence of parental/carer acknowledgement or consent to the amended time of dismissal, or acceptance of responsibility for the reception of the child and young person by an adult nominated by the parent as an emergency contact point, supervision and care will have to be provided in school, or another appropriate location, until such arrangements are made or until normal dismissal time.
- 3 If early closure is being considered because of abnormal temperatures appendix 1 to this circular should be consulted.

Action required

If after considering all of the above factors the Head Teacher/Campus Principal still feels that there is no alternative to early closure the **School Services Support Manger should be consulted in advance on 01369 708509** other than in the most exceptional circumstances. Where it has been agreed that the proposed early closure should take place the Head Teacher/Campus Principal should take the following action:

- 1 Notify parents of early closure and ensure arrangements are in place for each child.
- 2 Any alterations to transport arrangements should be agreed with the operators. (See appendix 2).
- 3 Where appropriate, arrangements should be made to provide school meals as on a normal day.

- 4 Advise any after school care scheme which involves children at the school.
- 5 Consideration should be given to the health and welfare of staff, though the authority expects staff to remain in school wherever possible. In all cases every effort should be made to retain during normal school hours a nucleus of staff including senior staff to look after children for whom alternative arrangements cannot be made, to deal with enquiries and to maintain contact with Argyll House.
- 6 In an NPDO School the Head Teacher/Campus Principal, in addition to the points above, will require to advise and liaise directly with the Mitie representative.

Full day or extended closure

- 1 In more extreme circumstances than those which might lead to only an early closure it may be necessary to consider the closure of a school for one or more days.
- 2 The possibility of a full day or extended closure can arise when emergencies such as fire, burst pipes or heating or power failure occur outwith normal school hours with the result that unless immediate remedial action is taken the school will be unable to open.
- 3 In such cases it is essential that immediately the emergency is discovered that contact is made with Property Services emergency line **01369 708575** or in the case of an NPDO School, with the Mitie representative. This contact would normally be made by the Head Teacher/Campus Principal. Head Teachers/Campus Principals and janitors should keep emergency telephone numbers for contacting the appropriate personnel readily available. If Property Services or Mitie are unable to take steps to allow the school to open they will liaise with the Head Teacher/Campus Principal who will contact the responsible member of Education staff **01369 708509 (07717 680413)** or other nominated officer who will agree with the Head Teacher/Campus Principal what action will be taken in accordance with the procedures outlined in section 7 below.
- 4 Closure for one or more days may also require to be considered in situations such as abnormally severe weather conditions or disruption to fuel supplies. Such circumstances could affect large numbers of schools at the same time.
- 5 It is possible that some emergency situations such as fuel shortages can be anticipated and that their effect can be minimised by careful forward planning. Head Teachers/Campus Principals are asked to undertake contingency planning to meet such emergencies and to review these plans each session.
- 6 Where large numbers of schools are affected an emergency team will be established. This team will co-ordinate efforts to re-open schools and keep all interested parties informed. The office and home telephone numbers of key members of the team are recorded in appendix 3; home telephone numbers should be used only where it is not possible to communicate with Argyll House.

- 7 The role of the Head Teacher/Campus Principal in ensuring that disruption to education is kept to a minimum will, however, be crucial and when faced with serious emergency situations of whatever nature which might lead to closure of the school Head Teachers/Campus Principals should note the relevant sections of the following procedures.

i Disruption to fuel supplies

Heating and fuel levels should be monitored to ensure that existing stocks are being used sensibly and that early and accurate information about fuel levels can be given to the education office. It is likely that requests for information about existing supplies and future needs will be made to schools as soon as there is any indication of an emergency situation arising. Head Teachers/Campus Principals should, however, ensure in any event that in times of disruption to fuel supplies the education office is informed when there is fuel to provide only four days normal burning.

Head Teachers/Campus Principals should not make direct contact with fuel companies.

In NPDO schools the operation, servicing and supply of fuel for heating systems in the school is the responsibility of Mitie. Should there be any disruption to the provision of heating then this should be reported by the Head Teacher/Campus Principal, or other nominated person, to the Mitie representative.

On the basis of the information provided by schools the education office staff will consult Transport and Property Services about what action should be taken. Between November and March where delivery cannot be guaranteed and where there is fuel only to provide three normal days burning, the Head Teacher/Campus Principal will be advised that the school should be closed and placed on frost firing. Details of frost firing have been included in janitors training courses and information should be available in every establishment.

Maximum use should be made of any part of the school heated by a fuel which is not in short supply. In some cases it may be possible to provide alternative forms of heating to accommodate staff or part of the school population.

ii Access to schools

Janitors and, in the case of NPDO schools, Mitie, must keep stocks of salt and gritting material available. As soon as treacherous conditions develop, gritting and/or salt scattering should be carried out.

Head Teachers/Campus Principals should check that access for fuel deliveries and for children and young people and staff is not made impossible by snow or

ice. Where the janitor or where appropriate Mitie, is unable to keep access open the education office should be informed without delay.

iii Communication with parents

Head Teachers/Campus Principals should consider how best to ensure good communication with parents. Head Teachers/Campus Principals should make every effort to advise parents in writing of the reasons for closure and indicate the methods by which they will be informed of the date for the re-opening of the school. These methods will normally include text messaging, local radio and the press. Head Teachers/Campus Principals, however, should not make direct contact with the media or with the public relations department. Arrangements for this will be made through the education office. Head Teachers/Campus Principals should also inform parents of the school telephone number and where possible the hours during which parents may telephone the school for information.

In large scale emergencies other sources of information such as an answerphone service may be provided by the emergency teams. Head Teachers/Campus Principals will be informed of any additional services to be provided.

The importance of good communication with parents and the general public cannot be over-emphasised and Head Teachers/Campus Principals should use every means at their disposal (eg notices in local shops, announcements in churches etc) to ensure that the community is aware of the up to date situation at the school. It is essential that Head Teachers/Campus Principals regularly update information about children and young people emergency contacts as part of a school communication policy.

iv Attendance of staff

The arrangements for staff attendance will depend on the situation in each establishment. While the welfare of children and young people and the requirement to maintain the maximum possible educational service remain paramount, responsible consideration must be given to the welfare of staff. Where conditions allow, staff should be asked to attend and work as normal a day as possible. It is important that teaching and support staff be treated equitably. Where it is impracticable for all members of staff to attend, a nucleus of staff should be at the school during normal working hours to deal with enquiries and maintain contact with the education office.

At the very least every effort should be made to ensure the presence of a senior member of the teaching staff and janitorial staff. If it is not possible for the switchboard to be manned or for the school to receive or make telephone calls, telephone numbers at which the Head Teacher/Campus Principal or his

representative and a member of the janitorial staff can be contacted should be provided to the education office.

As part of the school's contingency plan Head Teachers/Campus Principals should consider how staff who are not expected to attend or who for some reason are prevented from attending, can best be kept in touch with the day to day position at the school. Staff are expected to report to their nearest Argyll and Bute school if a journey to their normal place of work is totally impracticable.

v Transport

Head Teachers/Campus Principals should maintain close contact with transport operators about the needs of the school. (See appendix 2).

vi Contact with the education office

It is essential that the education office be kept fully informed of the up to date situation in each school. Head Teachers/Campus Principals or their representatives should telephone daily to report their position to the School Services Support Manager **01369 708509 (07717680413)**. Such calls must be made before 10.00 am and the information provided will form the basis of any report which will then be passed to the media. In large scale emergencies additional lines or an answerphone service will be provided to ease communication between schools and the education office.

vii School meals

Where possible arrangements should be made to make school meals available at least to those who are entitled to free school meals. It may be possible to make arrangements for meals to be provided in a neighbouring school if the need arises. The Head Teacher/Campus Principal should consult and liaise with the Council's catering service as appropriate.

viii Alternative accommodation

If the emergency situation appears likely to last for more than a day or two Head Teachers/Campus Principals should implement their School Activity Recovery Plan (CARP) which identifies an alternative accommodation. Where necessary, ex gratia payments will be made after the emergency is over for the use of buildings. Additional transport costs will also be met by agreement with the education office.

In the case of secondary schools it will be particularly important to make alternative arrangements for senior children and young people.

In NPDO schools the provision of suitable alternative accommodation in emergency situations is the responsibility of ABC Schools Limited. In the

event that it is considered that alternative accommodation is required Argyll and Bute Council will liaise directly with ABC Schools Limited.

ix School lets

Community Letting, and in the case of an NPDO school, the Mitie representative, should be kept up to date by the Head Teacher/Campus Principal on the situation at the school.

General points

1 Recording of attendance

Details of procedures for recording attendance in emergency situations are given in education management circular 3.03.

2 Establishments other than schools

While the information contained in this circular refers specifically to schools the same general principles should be applied as appropriate to other establishments.

I am sure that all Head Teachers/Campus Principals will share my desire to maintain as full an educational service as possible in times of emergencies and that the interests of children and young people will be their first consideration. I know that Head Teachers/Campus Principals and their staff have in the past shown considerable initiative and made great efforts to keep their schools open in the face of adverse circumstances and I hope that the terms of this circular will allow our emergency procedures to operate quickly and efficiently.

Yours sincerely

Executive Director of Community Services

June 2017

Appendix 1: normal temperatures

- 1 School heating systems are designed to standards which should ensure that room temperatures reach the levels indicated below when the outside air temperature is at freezing point.

Type of accommodation	Temperatures
Medical inspection room, changing room, bathroom, water closet and shower room	18.5° C (65° F)
Teaching space, dining room, nursery room, common room and staff room and school office	17° C (62° F)
Assembly area, lecture hall, theatre and cinema	15.5° C (60° F)
Sickroom	14.5° C (58° F)
Games hall	10° C (50° F)

- 2 On the relatively infrequent occasions when outside temperatures are below freezing point in the morning - and the indoor temperature is correspondingly lower - this should not in itself be regarded as a reason for sending children and young people home. Normally temperatures will rise during daylight hours.
- 3 Where there is a complete breakdown in the heating system or where the temperatures have not risen to those indicated in the above table by one hour after the start of the school day, Head Teachers/Campus Principals should inform the appropriate maintenance officer of Property Services of the fault (if the janitor has not already done so). In the case of an NPDO School, it should be reported by the Head Teacher/Campus Principal, or nominated person, to the Mitie representative in order that this may be logged on their helpdesk and appropriate remedial action taken by them if necessary.
- 4 From time to time the temperatures in some parts of the school may rise above a maximum tolerable temperature limit. Temperature in itself is not an index of discomfort but other factors such as humidity, radiation, ventilation and length of exposure must be considered. Where teaching staff have taken in advance of the situation, which can normally be anticipated, all reasonable precautions such as opening windows and doors, drawing curtains or blinds where available, it is recommended that when a temperature of 27° C (80° F), in the shade, has been experienced for a minimum of one hour, children and young people and staff should be withdrawn from that room. If the temperature rises considerably in excess of 27° C, evacuation should take place within a shorter period. In the case of an NPDO school, it should be reported by the Head Teacher/Campus Principal, or nominated person, to the Mitie representative in order that this may be logged on their helpdesk and appropriate remedial action taken by them if necessary.

Appendix 2: early closure of schools in an emergency - provision of school transport

The following arrangements should be implemented whenever the early closure of a school is rendered necessary by emergencies such as exceptionally severe weather or disruption to fuel supplies.

- 1 It is the responsibility of the Head Teacher/Campus Principal, in direct consultation with the operator, to arrange the provision of transport at an earlier hour than that specified in the contract. The Principal Administrative officer (Transport) may be able to be of assistance in difficult cases **(01369 708558)** but generally it will be more expedient for the Head Teacher/Campus Principal to liaise with the operator.
- 2 The provision of transport at other than the normal times represents a variation of the terms of the contract and in these circumstances the operator may demand an additional payment. Head Teachers/Campus Principals should endeavour to avoid this wherever possible in negotiation with the operator.
- 3 If there is no way of avoiding additional payment, the Head Teacher/Campus Principal should (a) ascertain the sum involved, (b) arrange for the account to be sent to the school, (c) verify the account, (d) pass it without delay to the Education Office (Transport), who will initiate the procedures for payment.

Appendix 3: contacts

During working hours

Malcolm MacFadyen , Head of Facility Services	01546 604412
Susan Tyre , School Support Service Manager	01369 708509
Education Directorate Secretariat:	01369 708525

Outwith working hours

Malcolm MacFadyen , Head of Planning and Performance	01546 603 560
Anne Paterson , Head of Pre School and Primary Education	
Susan Tyre , School Support Service Manager	01369 704835 07717 680 413

