



# ST. MARY'S PS RATHFRILAND

## Severe Weather Guideline 2023

## **INTRODUCTION**

Within the limitations set out by statutory guidance and health and safety legislation and wherever possible, St. Mary's Primary School will remain open during the school day to deliver education to its pupils. However, the Principal is authorised to make an emergency closure when exceptional circumstances make it absolutely necessary and in the best interests of the pupils.

## **CLOSURE OF THE SCHOOL**

The following will be considered in coming to any decision to close St. Mary's Primary School for exceptional reasons (Step 2). These include:

### **Health and Safety Requirements**

- Can pupils and staff access the school building safely?
- Can pupils and staff be evacuated in an emergency?
- Is the area designated for disembarkation from transport safe for pupils?

### **Pupil/Teacher Ratios**

- If a limited number of staff and pupils can attend, is the PTR acceptable?  
(1 teacher:30 pupils)

### **Weather and Road Conditions**

- Have local weather forecasts and road conditions, including those for areas from which staff will be travelling, been considered?

The Principal will carry out a risk assessment (Step 3). The decision will be made where possible before 8.00 am and, on the basis of information received from the media about weather, supplemented by on-the-spot observation, either personally or from staff members better placed to make such observations, and through appropriate external agencies such as the Met Office and PSNI (Step 4).

## **IN THE EVENT OF THE SCHOOL BEING CLOSED**

If the school is closed it is the responsibility of the Principal to ensure that the following events happen:

- Parents are contacted using the school's text messaging service;  
Staff are contacted using the school's text messaging service;
- The information is passed to relevant media agencies as soon as possible, ie BBC;
- Staff will be posted at the school gates to help prevent pupils from being left by parents at the start of the school day if possible. In instances of severe weather, parents should monitor the nominated phone for text contact;
- School is appropriately staffed by teachers/classroom assistants to deal with any pupils who arrive as school unescorted until parents or emergency contacts can collect the pupils;
- The EA and the Department of Education will be informed as soon as possible of the closure.

These tasks do not all have to be completed by the Principal, although she has the overall responsibility for ensuring each has been carried out.

## **CLOSURE DURING THE SCHOOL DAY**

On occasions it may be necessary for school to close during the school day, ie if the weather is deteriorating and there is doubt as to whether children can return home safely later in the day, due to health and safety considerations. In such cases the school will ensure that children are collected from their classrooms.

- Parents will be contacted through the C2K Texting Service.
- In the event of a power outage a telephone which is not connected to the network will be available in school. Also, in this event social media may be used to reach as many parents as possible. The telephone which is not connected to the network will be used to make contact with the parents of those pupils who remain in school.

## **SAFEGUARDING PRECAUTIONS ON CLOSURE**

- No pupil will be allowed to leave school unless the school is aware that an identified adult will be available to supervise him/her at their destination. It may be that a parent who collects his/her children offers to give shelter to other children. The agreement of the parents of these children must be given before pupils are released in this way.
- We will ensure that adequate supervision by members of teaching staff will be made for those pupils who cannot go home immediately and therefore have to remain at school.

### **TRAVEL TO AND FROM SCHOOL**

Parents should be aware that it is their responsibility to make sensible decisions on behalf of their children when weather conditions are severe. Parents are responsible for the safety of their children to and from school.

### **EMERGENCY CONTACTS**

Parents must give school an emergency contact point. Data collection forms are sent out to all parents. Information on emergency contacts will be held centrally in the Data Collection Folder held in school office and the Principal will maintain a hard copy of these. It is essential that parents keep the school up-to-date with any change in their contact details.

### **STAFF ATTENDANCE**

Although it is recognised that severe weather conditions make it difficult for staff to get to and from work, unless advised to the contrary by the Principal, then the expectation is that staff will present themselves for work. EA Contract Staff (Catering and Cleaning Services) also need to be advised of any emergency requirements.

### **CLEARANCE OF SNOW**

Within the school site, the school is responsible for snow clearance and the clearing of approach paths is the specific task of the Building Supervisor. When severe weather is forecast, the Building Supervisor should be tasked to lay salt and grit on arrival. The clearance of public roads is the responsibility of the Roads Service.

### **CHILDREN'S PLAYTIMES**

If there is any question of children's safety being at risk during break-time and lunch-time whereby the playground area is deemed unsafe, school has a responsibility in inclement weather to keep children indoors.

### **SERVICES**

All of the service providers who will be affected by the closure will be informed as soon as possible, once families and staff have been contacted.

### **MONITORING AND REVIEW**

The Principal will monitor implementation of this policy. St. Mary's Primary School Severe Weather Policy will be evaluated and reviewed in line with and new Department of Education Guidelines /Reports and in with keeping with any additional practices and procedures.

## Step 1 – Preparation

The following points require to be taken into account when preparing a plan to deal with a possible exceptional closure due to severe weather.

KEY ACTION	SUPPLEMENTARY ACTIONS
Does the school have contact details for all parents/guardians, pupils and staff?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All contact details are updated annually and when parents/guardians inform of any change. This includes mobile numbers to use for text service.</li> <li>See step 4 of this document.</li> </ul>
Does the school have contact details for the relevant EA emergency on-call officers?	
Where renewable fuel is required ensure that fuel level is checked regularly and appropriate levels maintained.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Set a minimum fuel level for re-order of supply.</li> <li>Check fuel level frequently during severe weather periods.</li> <li>Back-up gas boilers are also in place.</li> </ul>
Ensure that heating, lighting and water services are regularly maintained.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Regularly report maintenance issues to the Board Maintenance Help Desk.</li> <li>Boards Help Desk/emergency on-call officer telephone numbers are available in the school's phone directory.</li> </ul>
Maintain sufficient supplies of salt for application to footpaths and driveways.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Order supplies before the onset of winter.</li> <li>Salt is reordered through EA and the number in kept in the school's directory.</li> <li>The school's Building Supervisor ensures both gritters are in working order.</li> </ul>
Where mechanical salt spreaders are utilized, are they functioning and available?	
Maintain stocks of Hazard Warning Tapes for cordoning off hazardous areas.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Building Supervisor will maintain supplies of Hazard tape (yellow/black or red/white).</li> </ul>
Purchase warning signs that can be set out in slippery conditions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Building Supervisor is to set these signs out on the appropriate occasions.</li> </ul>
Maintain a system of communicating with Teachers, Building Supervisor, Maintenance Help Desk, Catering staff and other Supervisory Staff.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Principal and staff have an effective means of two-way communication to determine the level of attendance. This will be done through text service and school website. Staff can also contact school or Principal on his mobile.</li> </ul>
Prepare a risk assessment which considers the foreseeable risks at times of severe weather.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Risk assessment has been prepared and reviewed as necessary.</li> </ul>
Avoid slips, trips and falls at access points into the school building.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Maintain adequate supplies of mops and wet trip mats.</li> </ul>

<p>Prepare and maintain local contact details for the following services:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meteorological Service;</li> <li>• NI Water;</li> <li>• Road Service;</li> <li>• Rivers Agency;</li> <li>• Education Authority;</li> <li>• Department of Education;</li> <li>• PSNI;</li> <li>• NI Fire and Rescue.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased vigilance from Building Supervisor/staff to ensure points of access are kept in safe condition.</li> <li>• Use of warning cones/signs.</li> <li>• A record of contact details is kept in step 4 of this document.</li> <li>• Access the sites and become familiar with the layout and where to look for the appropriate information.</li> </ul>
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## Step 2 – Points to consider when deciding to open the school

The decision to open the school or to continue to operate the school is dependent upon the Principal carrying out a risk assessment. The risk assessment needs to be reviewed and updated in the light of changes in the weather and circumstances.

The following points are key considerations when determining whether to open or close the school. They also form an integral part of the risk assessment process and will allow the Principal to prepare a school specific risk assessment.

First Consideration	Other consideration(s)
Is the school building accessible?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the forecasted long-term weather conditions?</li> <li>• Are there any NI Met Office warnings available?</li> </ul>
Are there any areas within the school locality especially impassable or dangerous in times of extreme bad weather?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consideration should be given to getting to and from school. In the case of one-way traffic systems, the route into school may be a lesser gradient than the route away.</li> <li>• There may be locations on the journey where snow/ice is known to cause early closure of roads or rail.</li> <li>• Alternative routes where possible should be identified prior to extreme bad weather to help the traveller to decide their route.</li> </ul>
Are vehicle routes into the school grounds passable?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is there a means to improve access prior to teachers' attendance or attendance of school buses, parent/carers' vehicles etc?</li> <li>• Is parking possible outside the school grounds until remedial action has been taken to make the area passable? If a main pedestrian route, inside the school grounds, is through a vehicle parking area then vehicles should be excluded. There may be a need for signage to this effect.</li> </ul>
Are pedestrian routes on the school grounds passable?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is there means to clear these routes, eg salt/grit?</li> <li>• If required, can movement to various parts of the school be limited without disruption – ensuring maintenance is concerted to general access routes?</li> <li>• Can priority be made in respect to slopes, steps or ramps, or can these areas be restricted from use? Outside metal staircases should also be avoided unless appropriately treated.</li> <li>• If open, vehicle parking areas should have a passable pedestrian route to access the school.</li> </ul>
Can the Principal gain enough teaching and/or supervisory staff to operate safely?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The emphasis would be to operate safely.</li> <li>• What would be the threshold of staff numbers in respect to expected pupils?</li> <li>• Pupils are mostly local, with a greater expectancy of attendance.</li> </ul>
Is the school appropriately heated?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are fuel supplies adequate?</li> <li>• Have there been previous failures of the heating system in autumn/winter months?</li> <li>• Is the means for remedial action readily available?</li> </ul>
Are water systems working appropriately? (Welfare)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are there known faults in times of severe weather?</li> <li>• Are there written records – ensuring methodical checks are made?</li> </ul>

Can the level of heating be maintained throughout the school day/week?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• At times of severe weather consider running the heating system during periods of closure or holidays.</li> <li>• Is frost protection installed and utilised?</li> </ul>
Restriction of outside play would limit the snow/ice from becoming compacted and therefore more dangerous.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If conditions are not dangerous outside play may be possible. However supervision may have to be higher.</li> <li>• Could play or breaks be staggered to ensure appropriate supervisory levels?</li> <li>• If any snow or ice is present prohibit running.</li> </ul>
Can the school grounds be maintained to effect opening the following day?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pedestrian walkways should be a priority, over vehicle parking, but in the long term parking areas inside the school should be treated, or cleared of snow. Persons who have parked in the school grounds should be aware of the priority and told to take care in this area. Signs could be placed to remind these persons.</li> <li>• Maintenance should be a priority where pedestrian walkways also coincide with vehicle areas. Alternatively, restrictions could be made on pedestrians or cars stopped from entering that area.</li> </ul>
Monitor the weather situation locally and through the media (Met Office)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Government Agencies such as the Roads Service may be able to provide information regarding road clearance, providing assurance of home journeys, or return journeys the following day.</li> <li>• Met Office provide flash weather warnings (see Met Office website)</li> </ul>
Are maintenance materials and personnel available to ensure the school can eliminate, reduce or isolate risk throughout the school day?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can similar provision be assured for the following day(s)?</li> <li>• Salt/grit spread on walkways or other areas at the end of the day could limit icing. This could also prevent a further snowfall from taking a foothold and re-icing.</li> <li>• Slush or water from thawed snow/ice should be cleared as much as possible to prevent re-icing. Iced slush could be more dangerous than the initial fall as surfaces may be uneven and more slippery.</li> </ul>

Step 3 Risk Assessment for St. Mary's P.S. Rathfriland Severe Weather

ACTIVITY	HAZARD	PERSONS WHO MAY BE AT RISK	CONTROLS REQUIRED	FURTHER CONSIDERATIONS
Getting to school.	Dangerous travel in extreme bad weather conditions.	Principal, teachers, Building Supervisor(s) and/or maintenance staff, pupils.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Principal monitors weather conditions/warnings. <a href="http://www.metoffice.gov.uk">www.metoffice.gov.uk</a></li> <li>No travel should be considered if extreme bad weather warning and advice given for only essential journeys to be undertaken.</li> </ul>	The majority of teaching staff live in urban area so high proportion of travel on treated roads. Regional warnings may not be accurate at local level so local media broadcasts may also help.
Informing parents/staff of closure/restricted entry points:	Maya try to make a needless journey.	Principal, teachers, Building Supervisor(s) and/or maintenance staff, pupils.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Early decision-making on whether school will remain open.</li> <li>If school remains open what are the access arrangements?</li> </ul>	Parents/staff will be informed through the text service. They can also check the local BBC media as they will be informed by school of any closure.

Travel via known areas of steep gradient (Hill on Downpatrick Street)	Dangerous travel in extreme bad weather conditions.	Principal, teachers, Building Supervisor(s) and/or maintenance staff.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Parking car at the top/bottom of Downpatrick Street and walking.</li> </ul>	Walking may be reasonably expected when cars or other vehicles cannot make it all the way into school. On days when Downpatrick Street has not been treated sufficiently, staff may be able to park in Rathfriland Square.
Main entrance into school grounds.	Entrance not possible.	Principal, teachers, Building Supervisor(s) and/or maintenance staff.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Park car outside school until clearance can be made.</li> </ul>	A note prior to bad weather conditions will go out to explain school procedures during severe snow/ice/wind.
Main entrance into school grounds.	Entrance an immediate slip hazard.	Principal, teachers, Building Supervisor(s) and/or maintenance staff, pupils, parents/carers and visitors.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Clearance of slip hazard, unless alternative route found.</li> <li>Salt may be adequate but manual work may also be required to clear snow/ice.</li> </ul>	Ensure salt is available throughout the day in case ground begins to freeze again.

Getting appropriate members of staff to open school.	Inadequate supervision.	Teachers and pupils.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A structure of sending and receiving text messages to ensure Principal knows what staff will be present in school.</li> <li>• Principal to establish what would constitute appropriate supervision – through dynamic assessment on the day of extreme bad weather.</li> </ul>	The emphasis will be on how to operate safely, not whether a full and normal curriculum could be followed. The majority of our pupils live locally and would most likely be able to walk to school.
Access to school buildings.	Slips, trips or falls	Principal, teachers, Building Supervisor(s) and/or maintenance staff, contractors, parents/carers and pupils.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Salting could be undertaken when snow or ice is foreseeable.</li> <li>• Salt spreading on pedestrian walkways and snow clearance where reasonable.</li> </ul>	<p>Extreme bad weather is generally forecast, although snow/ice can be worse or less than expected, depending on local geography. If school's salt stock is low, then only main walkways may be treated. Treatment of inner areas such as</p>

Heating and Welfare facilities.	Cold – below permitted work level (18°/60.8°F). No sanitary or drinking water.	Principal, teachers, Building Supervisor(s) and/or maintenance staff, contractors and pupils.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Constant heating throughout periods of known cold snaps to prevent frozen pipes.</li> <li>• Maintenance of water systems, for example prompt repair of leaks and drips.</li> <li>• Regular maintenance staff checks to ensure heating and water systems are working well.</li> </ul>	playground or some walkways around the building may be less of a priority, children may enter through entrance near outside notice board. If the school premises cannot be heated or provision of water for sanitary use or drinking cannot be made within school hours, then the school will have to close.
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Keeping the school open.	Slips, trips or falls of pupils at break time.	Pupils and Supervisory Assistants.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No use of playground and/or other external areas, when snow/ice cannot be easily removed or reduced.</li> <li>If there are external areas free or generally free of snow/ice, supervised play/break can be undertaken.</li> <li>The supervision level should be higher and running prohibited.</li> <li>Any areas of snow/ice remaining should be avoided and managed.</li> <li>Pupils should be informed of restrictions.</li> </ul>	<p>If playground space is restricted, then children will not get out to play until snow/ice has been cleared.</p>
Keeping the school open.	Further snow or ice, icing of previous fall. High wind.	Principal, teachers, Building Supervisor(s) and/or maintenance staff, and pupils.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Principal to monitor the weather conditions through the Met Office and local media.</li> </ul>	<p>Further stock of salt could be organised and/or maintenance undertaken on water or heating systems to ensure they continue to work effectively.</p>

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Information may also be gained from the EA.</li> <li>• Further salt could be used on walkways and other areas to minimise risk for the next day.</li> <li>• Surface water could be brushed to drains to avoid icing up overnight.</li> <li>• Maintain walkways.</li> </ul>	
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#### STEP 4 – KEY WEBSITES AND CONTACTS

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| 1. NI Met Office      |               | <a href="http://www.metooffice.gov.uk">www.metooffice.gov.uk</a>  |
| 2. DFI Roads          |               | <a href="http://www.infastructure-ni.gov.uk/topics/roads">www.infastructure-ni.gov.uk/topics/roads</a>  |
| 3. NI Water           |               | <a href="http://www.niwater.com">www.niwater.com</a>  |
| 4. PSNI               | 0845 600 8000 | <a href="http://www.psnipolice.uk">www.psnipolice.uk</a>  |
| 5. NI Fire and Rescue | 028 9266 4221 | <a href="http://www.nifrs.org">www.nifrs.org</a>  |
| 6. EA South           | 028 3751 2551 | <a href="mailto:jeffery.taylor@eani.org.uk">jeffery.taylor@eani.org.uk</a>  |
| 7. Dept. of Education | 028 9127 9543 | <a href="http://attendance@education-ni.gov.uk">attendance@education-ni.gov.uk</a> <a href="http://www.education-ni.gov.uk">www.education-ni.gov.uk</a>   |
| 8. DFI Rivers         |               | <a href="mailto:rivers.registry@Infastructure-ni.gov.uk">rivers.registry@Infastructure-ni.gov.uk</a> <a href="http://www.infastructure-ni.gov.uk/topics/rivers-and-flooding">www.infastructure-ni.gov.uk/topics/rivers-and-flooding</a> |