

BLESSINGTON EDUCATE
TOGETHER NATIONAL
SCHOOL

EMERGENCY SCHOOL CLOSURE POLICY

Ratified by Board of Management on:	
Signed:	
Date:	
Chairperson, Board of Management	

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1.0 RATIONALE

The Board of Management of Blessington Educate Together National School (BETNS) has the safety of children and staff as the prime consideration in relation to any decision to close the school. This may be due to emergency measures such as adverse weather conditions, serious interruption to the water supply or other utility services or the occurrence of a critical incident. There may also be cause to close the school due to planned closures such as disconnection of services by the local authority or staff meetings/in-service closures.

Adverse weather conditions can be defined as snow, ice, flooding and fog, which render journeys extremely hazardous.

The decision to close the school unexpectedly is not taken lightly; in all cases the Board of Management will seek to avoid a school closure unless it is absolutely necessary.

The School will endeavour to maintain a service to parents and pupils for as long as is reasonably practical. However, the interest and safety of children and staff are paramount under these circumstances. It is vital therefore that any emergency contacts for families are kept up to date so that in the event of a child(ren) having to be sent home for any reason that this can be done easily. Parents/Guardians are requested to notify the school immediately if there is a change in circumstances.

2.0 AIMS

- Ensure the safety and wellbeing of all children and employees should the school have to deal with an adverse weather event or unforeseen circumstance.
- Ensure that all employees and parents are clear about their roles and responsibilities in the event of adverse weather event and/or school closure.

3.0 RESPONSIBILITIES

3.1 BOARD OF MANAGEMENT

- The Chairperson (or designate) must assess all relevant information and make the decision whether to close the school (in conjunction with the principal or designate).

3.2 PRINCIPAL

- Ensures an annual review of parent contact details is performed.
- The Principal (or designate) must assess all relevant information and make the decision whether to close the school (in conjunction with the chairperson of the Board of Management or designate).
- Notifies staff of unplanned closures.
- Notifies bus operators of school closures.

3.3 PARENTS/GUARDIANS

- Keep the school informed of any changes in emergency contact details.
- Check the school websites and local information daily.

4.0 EMERGENCY SCHOOL CLOSURE PROCEDURE

4.1 AT THE START OF THE DAY

- During adverse weather conditions the local /road conditions will be assessed. This may occur through the use of a contact on Red Lane or the local authority weather and travel updates.
- This will be communicated to the Chairperson (or designate) at home or by mobile phone.
- Based on the information provided, the Chairperson (or designate) and Principal will make the decision whether or not to close the school.
- This will then be communicated to the school secretary who will ensure all parents/guardians and staff, are collectively informed by the school text.
- To enable the school to open, it may be necessary to delay the start time and again these details would be given to parents via the school text.
- All bus operators servicing the school will be contacted by the principal (or designate) confirming the school will not be open.
- Notices will be posted on the www.schooldays.ie website (which informs the local radio stations, RTÉ and other school based websites), the schools Facebook page and where possible on the school website.
- Parents are asked to note that it may not be possible for staff to answer the telephone and we would ask that you do not call before 8.45 am. Listening to the local radio for details of any closure or checking the various websites are the preferred methods of communication.

4.2 DURING THE SCHOOL DAY

- If the weather deteriorates during the day and the Principal feels safety may be compromised they will contact the Chairperson (or designate) and a decision will be made whether to close the school.
- This will then be communicated to the school secretary who will ensure all parents/guardians and staff, are collectively informed by the school text.
- Parents may also contact the school if they feel that they would like to collect their child early for safety reasons (i.e. travelling/walking long distances or collecting other children from local schools).
- The school will remain open until all children are collected, however, if parents are delayed due to adverse weather conditions then they should contact the school, if possible, to give an anticipated arrival time.
- Children will be supervised until a parent/guardian is able to collect them.

- Parents must consider their own safety, traffic congestion and safety of others in these circumstances and understand that children at BETNS will be cared for until it is possible for them to be collected.

4.3 FULL OR PARTIAL RE- OPENING PROCEDURE

- The Principal in conjunction with the Chairperson (or designate) of the Board of Management will perform a risk assessment to ascertain whether it is safe for staff and pupils to return to school. This would include the following checks:
 - Is the heating system working?
 - Is there electricity?
 - Is there water available for bathrooms?
 - Have the pathways been cleared?
 - Is there a risk of slipping on floors inside the school?
 - Are the staffing levels appropriate for the number of children?
 - Identify which members staff live close enough to the school and should be able to make it in.
 - Identify/prioritise which classes will be kept operational if a full return is not possible.
 - Consider the possibility of opening later and closing earlier.
 - Consider advising staff/pupils to wear sensible clothing and footwear by text message.
- If the outcome of the risk assessment is that it is safe for staff and pupils to return to the school this will be communicated to the school secretary who will ensure all parents/guardians and staff are collectively informed by the school text.

5.0 PLANNED SCHOOL CLOSURE PROCEDURE

5.1 DISCONNECTION OF SERVICES

Where water or electricity services to the school are to be disconnected, a week's notification is normally given to the school authorities. This enables the school to furnish the parent body with the relevant advance warning of such closures via circular or text.

5.2 STAFF MEETINGS / IN-SERVICE CLOSURES

All half days and in-service closures are notified to parents at least one week in advance. Reminder notices are issued closer to the date. Planning day closures always occur on a Friday and similar notification procedures apply. All bus operators servicing the school are kept informed regarding any such closures.

6.0 SCHOOL CLOSURE THROUGH ILLNESS

In exceptional circumstances it may be required to close the school. This may occur when either a significant number of pupils and/or staff are absent through illness, for example where a pandemic has been declared by the appropriate health authorities.

- Advice will be sought from the Department of Public Health who will recommend to the school on whether to close.
- When a decision is made, the school will inform all parents/guardians and staff collectively by the school text.
- The Principal will then contact the Department of Education and Skills without delay.
- The school will inform all parents/guardians and staff when the Department of Public Health declares the school safe to reopen.

7.0 CRITICAL INCIDENT / DEATH

In some instances the school might remain closed for pupils in the event of a critical incident or death of a staff member, Board of Management member or pupil. Parents are informed of such closures either by phone or circular, whichever is deemed appropriate. In this particular instance, the school may remain open to staff, Board of Management or Parents Association if issues such as funeral services, liaison with media or counseling need to be addressed.