

Policy on Exceptional Closures

Brackenagh West Primary School is committed to safeguarding the health and safety of its pupils, parents and employees, and as such, may have to close the school during exceptional circumstances. In doing so, we will ensure that any disruption to the normal functioning of the school will remain minimal, whilst not compromising the safety and well-being of all who enter the premises.

What is an Exceptional Closure?

“An Exceptional Closure is unplanned and is due to unforeseen circumstances such as adverse weather conditions, power failure or situations which affect the safety of pupils and staff. Exceptional Closures require approval from the Department of Education to allow a school to reduce its operational days below the 200 required by legislation.”

How will Brackenagh West Primary School decide if we need to close?

Although it may not always be possible to make such a decision, where feasible, and in order to facilitate early communication with parents and staff, the Principal will endeavour to plan for an exceptional closure as far in advance of the actual closure as possible i.e. the afternoon/ night before the closure if circumstances allow.

Decisions the afternoon/ night before can only be taken when all the indications are that the conditions affecting the school will continue overnight. If there are doubts, the Principal will defer decisions until early morning.

Criteria to be considered for Closure

Extreme Weather conditions such as snow, wind and rain.

1. We will take in to account local conditions and, in consultation with the Building Supervisor (Mrs E Annett), will conduct a risk assessment of the grounds and premises of Brackenagh West Primary School.
2. Is the area designated for disembarkation from transport safe for pupils?
3. Can parents, pupils and staff access the school building safely?
4. Are pedestrian routes in to school safe and accessible. Has grit been applied?
5. Can pupils and staff be evacuated in an emergency?
6. Is sufficient parking available and possible within the vicinity of the school grounds, until remedial action has been taken to make the area passable?
7. In an emergency, could the Emergency Services access the school?
8. Have local weather forecasts and road conditions, including those for areas from which staff will be travelling, been considered?

9. Are there any areas within the school locality particularly impassable or dangerous in times of extreme bad weather?
10. Are there any N. Ireland Met Office warnings available?
11. Can the school premises be heated?
12. Is there provision of water for sanitary use or drinking?

Any decisions made will be applicable to our own school and not based on neighbouring schools whose conditions may be different to ours.

Other considerations

1. Can enough Teaching Staff and Classroom Assistants attend school to ensure the adequate supervision of pupils?
2. Is the severe weather likely to clear quickly and allow safe access to the school building? The above questions will form part of our Risk Assessment.

Travel To & 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 when travelling to and from the school.

Services

There may be reasons, other than severe weather, for considering closure of the school. These are mainly related to heat, light and water supplies.

1. Is the school's power supply working?
2. Can the premises be adequately heated?
3. Is there provision of water for sanitary use or drinking?

Closure Before Brackenagh West Primary School Opens

Brackenagh West Primary School has telephone contact details for all parents/guardians and staff. We also make use of our text messaging service to contact parents. Parents are requested to update the school of any changes to their contact details.

* Brackenagh West Primary School Building Supervisor (Mrs E Annett) will have visited the school site prior to 7:45am to assess the viability of the school opening, taking account of the factors as detailed previously in this policy.

* The Building Supervisor will then contact the Principal immediately in order that he may make an informed decision.

- * If the school has to close, the Principal will then inform the staff and parents of the school as a matter of urgency.
- * Parents will normally be informed of an exceptional closure through the school's text messaging service.
- * The school website and Facebook page will both be updated with information about the school closure.
- * BBC NI will also be contacted. The details will then be shared on the Northern Ireland news website.
- * If possible, parents/staff will also be updated at a later time in the day with a view to the "next day" so that all have time to make suitable family arrangements.

CLOSURE DURING SCHOOL HOURS

- * Parents will normally be informed through the school's text messaging service.
- * Should the internet not be working, all parents will be contacted by mobile phone using the home contact details provided to the school.
- * Should a parent not be able to be contacted, or a child cannot be picked up by a parent/carer, additional contacts provided by parents will be used as the next means of communication.
- * The Principal & class teacher will not leave the premises for home until all children have been collected by a person nominated by the parent.
- * If possible, parents/staff will be updated at a later time in the day with a view to the "next day" so that all have time to make suitable family arrangements.

Responsibility

The outworking of this policy is the responsibility of the Principal. In the absence of the Principal the Vice-Principal will assume responsibility.

Children's Playtimes

If there is any question of children's safety being at risk during break time and lunchtime, where the playground area is deemed unsafe, the school will keep the children indoors.

Practical Considerations

- * Heating, lighting and water services will be regularly maintained.
- * During severe weather conditions or when they are predicted, the heating system will run for periods of time during the night and during periods of closure or holidays.
- * The Building Supervisor will be responsible for the laying down of salt at the beginning/ end of the school day, should conditions require this approach to be taken. Sufficient supplies of salt for application to footpaths and the car park area will be maintained by the Building Supervisor.
- * Safety Signs will be available in school for cordoning off hazardous areas. This is the the responsibility of the Building Supervisor.
- * The Building Supervisor will make regular checks of the premises, both inside and out to ensure that the school is safe and fit for purpose at all times. Any perceived hazards will be removed by the Building Supervisor, where physically practicable.
- * Any such incidents and those of a more serious matter, will be reported by the Building Supervisor to the Principal, who may then make a decision on any possible further course of action required e.g. reporting to Education Authority (Southern Region) for response/ support/ guidance.