

Pembrokeshire County Council



Children and Schools Directorate

Severe Weather Procedures - Policy and Guidance for Schools 2015-16

The purpose of this document is

- to outline the support available to schools to reduce the likelihood of closure in the event of severe weather
- to describe the procedures schools should follow in the event of closure being necessary

Index (Control + Click to follow link)

Page 1	<u>Introduction</u>
Page 2	<u>Support for schools</u>
Page 3	<u>Considerations</u>
Page 4	<u>Catering</u>
Page 4	<u>School Procedures</u>
Page 5	<u>Instructions to the headteacher in the event of closure of a school</u>
Page 6	<u>Communicating information to parents and the public</u>
Page 7	<u>Transport</u>
Page 7	<u>Staffing</u>
Page 8	<u>Summary of severe weather guidance and procedures</u>
Page 9	<u>Contact details</u>
Page 10	<u>Appendix 1 – Checklist for schools in preparation for adverse weather conditions</u>
Page 11	<u>Appendix 2 – PCC policy statement on dealing with severe weather</u>
Page 13	<u>Extract from 'Managing Staff in Schools'</u>

Staff should read this guidance in association with Pembrokeshire County Council's Policy Statement on Dealing with Severe Weather, which is included as **Appendix 2**.

Introduction

The staff of a school should recognise the importance of taking all reasonable measures to prevent closure. Closure of a school results in the school being open for fewer than the minimum number of sessions and has a potential impact beyond the school when services and businesses are affected by parents staying at home to care for their children. The local authority has implemented measures to support schools in remaining open during adverse

weather and to deal with the emergency closures which will, on occasions, be inevitable.

Support for schools

1. Most schools are now on or near to primary or secondary gritting routes. Although gritting to the school entrance will not be done routinely, in the event of road or pavement conditions causing problems of access during severe weather, headteachers should call the PCC Contact Centre (01437 764551) to request gritting of the highway adjacent to the school. These requests will be referred to the Highway Maintenance Section who will be prioritising **all** gritting requests. Please make it clear that your request is for a school and inform Amanda Ryan by email that you have made a request.

Gritting routes will not be changed routinely at the request of individual schools as the selected routes are those prioritised by the County Council. However, requests made by schools for reactive gritting will be considered as part of the Council's response to requests being made according to local circumstances. These requests should be made as above.

2. Salt bins and spreaders have been provided to all schools to allow key walking routes to be made safer. There is no expectation that the salt will be used to clear the entire school site. Salt supplies can be ordered from the Highways Maintenance Section. Those schools not in the SLA for Grounds Maintenance will be charged for this. School staff who take actions to reduce the likelihood of an accident occurring are covered by PCC's insurance policy.

3. Detailed, short term local weather forecasts and reports on local road conditions will be updated frequently on the Pembrokeshire Portal and PCC website www.pembrokeshire.gov.uk and by email to Heads and school administrative staff. This will provide headteachers with the best available information which will inform their decision making on whether their school can remain open or whether some staff may need to leave early to travel home.

4. You will have received separate guidance from the Web Team on how to update the PCC website. It is recommended that headteachers update their own school's information by arranging access to the website in advance. This will avoid unnecessary delays. Local media will be directed to the PCC site for their information on school closures. In the event that you need to ring the Contact Centre, for example if you have no internet access, then information supplied to the Contact Centre by headteachers will be posted on the PCC website. If severe weather is forecast, or occurring, PCC's Contact Centre may open earlier than its usual time of 8.00am. Where possible, schools will be informed in advance if this is the case.

5. To ease travel difficulties for staff and pupils, and as an alternative to closure, a headteacher may decide to start the school day later than usual. If appropriate, the Transport Section should be consulted before this decision is made.

6. Transport operators have been briefed on the protocol that they should not collect pupils early from schools without first contacting the local authority for the latest weather/road conditions.

In addition to providing this support, the local authority is asking headteachers to remind school staff that, if they cannot get to their place of work, they should contact the nearest school and make themselves available to support that school, leaving their contact details if the school is closed. This may prevent a school from closing, or remaining closed, because its staff cannot get to work because of adverse road conditions near to their homes. Headteachers should keep a record of which staff from other schools report to them so that these staff can be called in if doing so prevents prolonged closure of the school. They should subsequently inform other relevant headteachers which staff reported to them.

School staff are also required to consider taking measures that will enable them to travel to school even if there are adverse road conditions close to their home that may affect their travel before they reach a gritted route, e.g. parking near to the gritted route or using public transport where this is feasible.

[back to the top](#)

Considerations

The decision to close a school should not be taken lightly but, in some circumstances, the closure of a school may be inevitable. The responsibility for deciding to close a school because of severe weather lies with the Headteacher as the decision can only be made in the light of local circumstances. The safety of individual staff who may need to travel further distances than pupils should also be considered when decisions are made. Such decisions should be made after accessing information on weather and travel conditions from the Pembrokeshire Portal or the PCC website. It is good practice to inform the Chair of the Governing Body when a decision to close has been made, but it is the Headteacher who makes the decision.

Children have an entitlement to 190 days schooling annually and may also have an entitlement to a free midday meal. Headteachers should consider alternatives to closure before sending all pupils home. This is particularly so for schools where many of the pupils live in the same town as the school. It may be the case that only those pupils travelling by bus or those living in rural areas and areas more seriously affected by adverse weather, need be sent home early or, in the event of staff absence, those pupils whose parents can collect them. There may be no safety benefits in sending home early those pupils who walk. Indeed, this may cause further problems and may impact on other services if parents need to leave their place of work early in order to look after their children. Schools should allow parents to take their children home early if they request to do so.

Every reasonable effort should be made to contact parents, or other named emergency contacts of pupils, to inform them that the school is closing early and to ensure the safety of pupils after they leave the school. Headteachers

should consider whether it is preferable to keep children at school until they are collected.

Advance planning is needed inform parents of how closure will be communicated to them. It is good practice for schools to ask parents to update their emergency contact details and to identify a responsible adult to whom the child could be sent in the event of an unexpected closure.

[back to the top](#)

Catering

If it is decided to close the school late in the morning, where possible schools are asked to try to delay this until after pupils have had lunch. This is in the interests of pupils' well-being and to avoid waste of food. However, safety must not be compromised. If requested, catering staff will endeavour to have food ready earlier than usual.

Catering Services staff must be given access to their place of work in the school, even if the school is closed to pupils. In some cases they will be preparing food for other schools and the Meals on wheels service. Although the school site may be judged as unsafe for pupils, the risks are less for a small number of catering staff arriving at the school.

[back to the top](#)

School procedures

It is essential that headteachers and governing bodies determine their own procedures within these guidelines in order to:

- (i) ensure that all employees are clear about their roles and responsibilities in the event of severe weather
- (ii) ensure that all appropriate measures are taken to reduce the prospect of closure
- (iii) reduce the disruption caused by a sudden and/or prolonged closure by having robust mechanisms for communicating with parents and providing work for pupils
- (iv) ensure the safety and well-being of all pupils and staff should a school have to deal with severe, inclement weather

The following principles should underpin all procedures:

- a service to parents and pupils should be maintained for as long as is reasonably practical, or should be restored as soon as possible in the event of prolonged closure e.g. by providing work on the Pembrokeshire Portal
- partial closure of a school, or a change to the time of opening, should be considered before complete closure
- the interests and safety of children is paramount. Allowing children to walk home unsupervised in potentially dangerous conditions, or them returning home to an empty house, may not be in their best interests
- staff should only be allowed to go home early if there is a genuine need on the basis of their personal safety, but decisions must be made on an individual basis and after making use of up-to-date reports on localised road and weather conditions.

Appendix 1 provides a checklist for headteachers to guide them with planning.

[back to the top](#)

Instructions to Headteachers - In the event of closure of a school

Schools must inform PCC immediately the decision is made to close a school. Procedures differ depending on whether the decision is made during or out of working hours.

[back to the top](#)

Decision made out-of-office/school hours

- First contact Hubert Mathias (07770 573069) or Matthew Johns (07880 873952) to cancel transport. Their only role is dealing with transport; they will not inform others of the decision to close.
- Next, inform PCC of the decision to close (or to re-open after prolonged closure). This may be done by: updating the PCC website, or informing the PCC Contact Centre (if it is open), or Amanda Ryan (07799 656662), of the decision. If these are not available, inform Len Mullins, Press Officer. Those headteachers who have requested access to the PCC website can place their own announcements on here and officers will access this information. However, the Transport Section must be informed directly so that there is no delay in them receiving the information and acting on it.

Please note: PCC will **not** directly inform Radio Pembrokeshire or the BBC of individual school closures; instead, the media will be directed to get their information from the PCC website.

Decision made during office/school hours

Inform Amanda Ryan or another officer named in the contact details section.

These officers will then update the PCC website, if the school has not done so and will notify School Transport Section, School Meals providers and BBC Wales, so that the media can be used to relay information to parents who may not have internet access at the time. The Transport Section will request transport for the school and inform any other schools served by the same contractor. There is no need for a school to contact the Transport Section directly.

All headteachers are asked to follow the above procedure. Those who have requested access to the PCC website to update their own school's information should do so but are asked to also inform one of the contacts in the Children and Schools Directorate, so that the changing picture can be monitored and Transport and Catering informed as soon as possible.

Every effort must be made to inform parents of the school's early closure and to ensure appropriate supervision will be provided for pupils who leave school before the normal end of the school day.

[back to the top](#)

Communicating information to parents and the public

It is important that parents are kept informed of whether the school is open or closed during periods of severe weather. Schools should regard Pembrokeshire County Council, through their website, social networking sites or Contact Centre, or through the school's own website, as the main source of information for parents and inform parents of this.

Website addresses

www.pembrokeshire.gov.uk

www.facebook.com/PembrokeshireCountyCouncil

www.twitter.com/Pembrokeshire

Consequently, the Local Authority must be informed as soon as possible of any changes to the school's status. Schools should not rely on Radio Pembrokeshire due to its limited capacity to deal with information at busy periods, though it can be a valuable additional resource. Information can also be provided to parents via the school's answerphone message.

The PCC website will have up-to-date information on the status of schools and Radio Pembrokeshire (102.5 fm) and other media outlets have been advised to get their information from this site. Schools are encouraged to also update their school's own portal site, which will also have a link to the PCC website and should advise parents to monitor these websites. Radio Pembrokeshire (102.5 fm) will be asked to announce any school closures during the working day, so parents should be advised to listen to this if weather condition suggest early closure may be possible.

Because of the way schools' closure status is updated – through the 'My Account' facility on the PCC website, at www.pembrokeshire.gov.uk/alerts – parents who register for a 'My Account' will be able to subscribe to email alerts about changes to a school's status.

Schools are also reminded of the potential of the Pembrokeshire Portal to allow rapid communication between staff, and between the school and parents to keep everyone updated on whether or not the school is open. The portal can also be used as a means of providing work for pupils in the event of a prolonged closure.

If severe weather is forecast, PCC's Contact Centre may have extended opening hours. Any information supplied directly to the Contact Centre by headteachers can be posted on the PCC website and relayed to members of the public enquiring on whether a school is open. The emergency contacts in the Children and School Directorate will inform the Contact Centre of school closures.

[back to the top](#)

Transport

Headteachers must comply with any request from a transport provider that they wish to transport certain pupils early as the operators may be responding to weather warnings, and reports on local road conditions. This does not necessarily mean, however, that all pupils should be sent home early.

Where a transport contractor or provider is unable to provide transport in the morning because of severe weather conditions, no contract transport will be provided in the afternoon. Parents who are able to convey their children to school in the morning in lieu of the normal transport arrangements should be advised that they must take responsibility for getting their children home in the afternoon as no contract transport will be available.

If a school is closed for a whole day, transport contractors are still entitled to claim 60% of the daily transport cost for each day the school is closed. Early notification of next day closure is essential to prevent 100% of costs being claimed. In the event of the Transport Section of Children and Schools Directorate not being informed of a school's closure, the school could be liable to charges made against the school's budget share as indicated in the Scheme for Financing Schools, paragraph 6.2.10.

[back to the top](#)

Staffing

In the event of a school being closed, or staff being unable to reach their normal place of work, staff should report to their nearest school or, failing that, their nearest County Council Offices. An acceptable alternative is that they can be doing agreed work at home. In this event, validation is necessary. Staff should only remain at home if severe weather conditions prevent them from reporting for duty. All Headteachers should keep a record of staff who report for work at their school. **Appendix 3** has the relevant extract from the County Council's Leave of Absence policy for schools.

[back to the top](#)

Summary of severe weather guidance and procedures

The decision on whether to close or partially close a school is the responsibility of the Head, made with knowledge of local circumstances.

Decisions on opening and closing should be conveyed to the Local Authority as soon as possible so that the public can access this information.

The procedures for informing the LA differ slightly depending on whether the decision is made during working hours or outside of working hours.

The health and safety of pupils and staff is of paramount importance. However, staff should take measures to ease their travel to and from work.

Partial closure, or a change to the start and finish of the school day, is preferable to complete closure.

Effective communication with parents is essential and must be planned in advance with parents being informed of where they will find information.

Effective communication with all areas of the LA e.g. Transport and Catering, can ease administration and reduce costs

Further information relating to this guidance may be obtained from:

Amanda Ryan 01437 776545
amanda.ryan@pembrokeshire.gov.uk

[back to the top](#)

Contact details

To inform PCC that you are closing your school please phone one of these officers:

Amanda Ryan (AR) 01437 776545 (office hours) or 07799 656662 (out of hours)
email: amanda.ryan@pembrokeshire.gov.uk

Charlotte Blythe 01437 775103
email: charlotte.blythe@pembrokeshire.gov.uk

Joanne Taylor 01437 775041
email: joanne.taylor@pembrokeshire.gov.uk

Lisa Jenkins 01437 775060
email: lisa.jenkins@pembrokeshire.gov.uk

Out of hours, to report a decision to close please inform Amanda Ryan or the:

- **County Council Contact Centre** – 01437 764551 (may be open for extended hours during severe weather)
- County Council's Press and Public Relations Manager, **Len Mullins**, on:

01437 764966 (home)
07901 577454 (mobile)
01437 775387 (office)

- or the Assistant Press and Public Relations Officers:

Anna Wilson on:

01437 890647 (home)
07790 739552 (mobile)

Ceri Jones on:

01348 873277 (home)
07854 029054 (mobile)

Contact details for School Transport Section

First point of contact -	Matthew Johns	01437 775222
Second point of contact -	Hubert Mathias	01437 775220
Out-of-hours transport	Hubert Mathias	07770 573069
cancellations –	Matthew Johns	07880 873952

PCC 24 out-of-hours emergency number – 0845 601 55 22

[back to the top](#)

Appendix 1

Checklist for schools in preparation for adverse weather conditions

- Ask parents to update emergency contact details and to identify a responsible adult to whom a pupil can be sent in the event of an emergency closure.
- Register for a 'My Account' via the PCC website for any staff who will be updating the school's status, and notify the web team that access to update the school's status is required.
- Remind parents of sources of information on school closures e.g. email alerts through PCC 'My Account', PCC website, school website, Radio Pembrokeshire, texts(if the school has arrangements in place to do this), school answerphone.
- Ensure salt bins and spreaders are fully stocked.
- Ensure there is a member of staff trained to use the spreader.
- Encourage staff to take no unacceptable risks but also to take reasonable measures to increase their chances of getting to work e.g. using public transport, parking a short distance away from home, nearer to a gritted route, so that conditions in the close vicinity of their home do not prevent them travelling to work.
- Inform all staff that the portal will be used to communicate with them regarding changing circumstances (if this is the case).
- Ensure all teaching staff are able to use the portal to provide work to pupils in the event of prolonged closure.
- Advise pupils that if the school is closed for some time, work will be provided for them on the portal.
- Advise staff to have the contact details of their nearest school at home and to contact this school to make themselves available for work if they cannot get to their own school.
- Have all PCC severe weather guidance and emergency contact numbers readily available at home as well as at school (should include Area Maintenance Manager).
- Remind staff of the relevant section from Leave of Absence Policy.
- Remind pupils of sensible behaviour when attending school if there is snow / ice on the ground e.g. not straying off gritted areas. Consider using cones or another means to highlight these areas.
- If an untreated road in the immediate vicinity of the school is the cause of its continued closure, or is causing concern, contact the PCC Contact Centre to request that it be gritted, bearing in mind that gritting routes will not be changed routinely at the request of individual schools as the selected routes are those prioritised by the County Council. [*back to the top*](#)

Appendix 2

Dealing with Severe Weather

PCC Policy Statement

It is important to remember that during a period of inclement weather all our services continue to operate, but we also have particular responsibilities to act as another emergency service. The public and other organisations are reliant on local government staff to assist, in any way they can, in dealing with the difficulties.

The Authority recognises that there are occasions when employees may have difficulty in travelling to work due to severe conditions.

While the organisation expects employees to make every effort to come to work, employees should not travel if it is dangerous to do so and should have due regard to health and safety.

Procedure

1. Severe Weather may make travelling to work slower or more difficult. Where employees find that their journey to work is delayed they should, where possible, contact their line manager at the earliest opportunity.
2. Your line manager, in some limited circumstances, may be able to approve your attendance at another County Council building which is open.
3. Employees are expected to make every effort to arrive to work on time. Where poor weather conditions result in employees arriving to work late, they are expected to make up the time lost.
4. On occasions, for example in the event of road closures due to severe weather, it may be impossible for employees to attend work. On such occasions, employees will normally be required to take annual leave or flexi leave in respect of that day. Where employees have exhausted their annual leave entitlement, the time away from work will be unpaid.
5. If unexpected weather conditions which will make travel difficult occur during the working day, employees will, at management discretion, be allowed to leave work early in order to travel home. Employees are required to record this absence by "clocking out" or cover the absence by a flexi-day or annual leave.
6. Certain employees may be able to work from home where travel to work is impossible or impracticable due to severe weather. This will only apply in very limited cases where the nature of the employee's work allows and such necessary facilities as IT are available. Employees may only work from home if authorised to do so beforehand by their line manager.

7. Arrangements have been made recently to reduce the likelihood of any of the County Council's premises not opening at all on a working day due to weather conditions. The public expects schools and other services to be operational unless there are very exceptional circumstances. If your normal place of work does not open, you are still expected to contact your line manager to determine what reasonable expectations there might be in relation to the County Council's services on that day.
8. In the event of any line managers being unavailable, Directorates/Corporate Divisions/Schools will designate duty senior staff to cover.
9. The above policy is non-contractual and the organisation reserves the right to amend or withdraw it at anytime.

[back to the top](#)

Appendix 3

Extract from: MANAGING STAFF IN SCHOOLS

5. Policy on Leave of Absence for reasons other than personal illness

NON-ATTENDANCE DUE TO INCLEMENT WEATHER

It is the responsibility of all employees to attend their place of work and only when this is not possible should they report to the nearest educational establishment. All employees are, as a matter of course and regardless of conditions, required to demonstrate their availability for duty. Payment of salary is normally dependent on attendance and availability at a specified location. It is within the discretion of the Governing Body, after consultation with the Authority to withhold payment for non-attendance in such circumstances.

The following notes are given as guidance: -

- i) After making every effort to reach the normal place of work and failing to do so, the employee will report for duty to the nearest educational establishment within the Pembrokeshire area.
- ii) The employee should report his/her location to his/her Head Teacher by telephone/email/fax who will record the information for pay purposes.
- iii) Should the conditions be such as to make this attendance not possible, the Governing Body reserves the right to use its discretion to withhold payment, except in those cases where specific circumstances are proven to be not possible for travelling. Such representations must be made personally or through the respective Teachers Associations.

[back to the top](#)

