

Kilchreest National School

Emergency Closures Policy

Introduction:

The school policy on emergency closures was drafted as a whole school exercise involving parents, staff and Board of Management. It will be circulated to the entire school community in Kilchreest via the school website in due course. It has been formulated with circulars 11/95 and 34/2011 in mind as well as Rule 60 of National Rules for Schools. Rule 60 states that "Should some exceptional circumstances arise (for example, inclement weather, failure of heating system or damage caused by vandalism, Death of a teacher in the school, Death of a President/Bishop, Essential repairs) the Board of Management may close the school even if the school cannot be kept open for 183 days.

Rationale

The need for the school to devise a policy on emergency closures in recent years is primarily due to:

- a. Inclement weather, such as heavy snowfalls, high winds, extreme frost etc.
- b. Possibility of a heating break down.
- c. Possibility of a water leak which may cause a health and safety issue with regard to toilet access.
- d. Possibility of a critical incident.
- e. The instruction of the DES to make up days lost, due to exceptional closing, during the February or Easter breaks.
- f. To act in accordance with circulars 11/95 on Exceptional closures and circular 34/2011, section 4 with regard to contingency arrangements in the event of unforeseen school closures.

Relationship to School Ethos

Kilchreest National School strives to provide a child friendly, secure environment catering for all the needs of all students as far as is practicable and where respect is fostered in a culture which values diversity and difference.

Aims and Objectives

- To provide for the welfare of all pupils while on the school premises.
- To ensure a safe, child friendly school environment is available to all children.
- To conform with Health and Safety legislation.
- To conform with DES circulars
- To have clear guidelines on the practice and procedures necessary for emergency closures.

School closures will be the last resort. Every effort will be made to keep the school open at all times but the safety and welfare of pupils, staff and parents will be paramount in making any decisions.

Procedures

Heavy Snowfall/Dangerous Roads.

To help prevent closures and to ensure that the school environment is safe, the following preparation will happen:

- Ensure that there is sufficient ice-melt in October of each year. If there is not enough, the Principal is responsible for ordering more. The Principal will be responsible for spreading ice-melt in the mornings when necessary.
- Send a letter to parents in November reminding them of safety precautions and informing them of procedures in the event of emergency closures.
- Ensure there is sufficient phone credit in the Text-a-Parent system to provide service for at least five messages per family. Update this list early September and whenever new families or staff come to the school.
- Ensure that the Principal, Deputy Principal and secretary have the requisite passwords and know how to operate Text-a-Parent.

However, in the event of a heavy snowfall or treacherous roads the Principal shall consult with the Chairperson of the B.O.M. as soon as is feasible, and preferably before 8a.m. on the day of closure, and a decision is made as to whether it is in the interests of all parties to close the school

If it is decided to close the school, the school authorities will contact all parents and staff using Text-a-Parent and posting an alert to our school website. It is the responsibility of all parents to make sure their mobile numbers are correct and available to the school. If the snowfall is prolonged over a number of days and the school is closed indefinitely, parents will be informed of re-opening dates through Text-a-Parent and the website. Every effort will be made to contact parents and staff prior to 8 a.m.

In the event of an emergency closure during the school day, parents will be contacted through the Text-a-Parent service and staff members will remain with children until all are collected.

Disconnection of Services.

Where 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 note or text.

Elections.

In the case of Kilchreest National School being used as a polling station, closure on Polling Day alone is reckoned as part of the minimum number of days. As very advance notice is given to the school, parents will be notified by note.

High Winds/Thunderstorms

The procedure in place for heavy snowfall are generally in the event of Storms/lightning i.e. parents are contacted via text and informed that the school will remain closed. If the school has already opened and is in operation when high winds etc. occur and remaining on the premises is a risk to all, parents and guardians will be contacted in order to collect children as soon as possible. If there is a status Red Weather Warning from Met Eireann, the school, on advice from DES, will be closed for the duration of the warning.

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, B.O.M. member of pupil. Parents are informed of such closures either by Circular or Text whichever is appropriate. In this particular instance the school may remain open to staff and B.O.M. or Parents Association if issues such as church services, Guards of Honour, readings or counselling is required (see Critical Incident Policy).

Closing of the school in the interest of Public Health.

Circular 28/94 advises that the Director of Community Care/Medical Officer of Health is the appropriate person to decide on matters in relation to public health, the written recommendation of the Medical Officer should be obtained by the Chairperson of the Board of Management and forwarded to the Department. The responsibility for closing the school lies with the Board of Management. Parents will be notified by note.

Essential Maintenance Repairs,

Rule 52 of the Rules for Schools states that "Works of maintenance should be carried out, as far as possible, during vacation periods". However, should the Board of Management deem it necessary to close the school in such a context to comply with health and safety, the parents will be notified by note.

Please note:

All early closures and In-Service closures are notified to parents at least one week in advance.

Roles and Responsibilities.

Emergency closures in the school place particular responsibilities on various personnel within the school chain of command:

- The staff are responsible for supplying their mobile numbers to the school secretary.
- The Principal and Chairperson must act in compliance with health and safety legislation.
- The Principal, and staff must provide a safe environment for all children and parents.

School closures will be the last resort. Every effort will be made to keep the school open at all times but the safety and welfare of the pupils, staff and parents will be paramount in making any decision. In the case of burst pipes or leaks, unless more than two classrooms are deemed unsuitable for work, school will remain open and classes will take place in the hall.

Contingency Arrangements in the Event of Unforeseen School Closures.

According to circular 34/2011, there is a need to provide for contingency arrangements within the standardised school year to deal with exceptional closures. Appendix B of the named circular (see attached to this policy) gives guidelines in relation to making up for time lost due to unforeseen closures. Kilchreest National School will abide by such guidance.

Ratification and Communication.

This policy was formulated in January 2018 and ratified by the Board of Management.

It will be forwarded to the Parents Council following ratification at the school B.O.M.

Implementation and Review.

This policy will be implemented from April 2018 and be reviewed in the light of unplanned events that lead to unscheduled school closures, but not later than 2021.