

EMERGENCY SCHOOL CLOSURE PROCEDURE



To: Headteachers of all Schools, Academies and Free Schools November 2016

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EMERGENCY SCHOOL CLOSURE PROCEDURE 16/17

This guidance is for Headteachers and Principals of all Maintained Schools in Oxfordshire. In addition this is sent to Academies and Free Schools with a request that information about school closures is provided to the County Council both to ensure it can be communicated via the Council website and also to ensure that the Council can provide the Department for Education (DfE) statistical data in the event of multiple closures.

1 INTRODUCTION

The decision to close or partially close a school can only be made by headteachers who have knowledge 'on the ground' of their schools, in consultation with their Chair of Governors wherever possible. The decision should be based on access to essential services (heating, water etc), staffing levels, transport safety, and site safety. In particular the decision making process should take account of:

- The health and safety of pupils, staff and volunteers which should always be paramount
- The basic entitlement of 190 'pupil days' which should be offered if at all possible
- Consideration should be given to closing the school to just some year groups and/or changing the opening and closing time if either will avoid complete closure
- Consideration should be given to offering a reduced curriculum (or even non-curriculum) provision as an alternative to closure

Information about emergency and planned school closures is published on the County Council website <http://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/schoolclosures> . This is the main source of up to date countywide information about school closures and is a key resource especially in times of widespread closures, for example, as a result of severe weather. Information on the website is also circulated to key staff within the County Council. **It is therefore critical that the County Council is notified as soon as the decision to close a school has been taken. It is also important to confirm the date of reopening when known.**

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2 INFORMING THE COUNTY COUNCIL

There are two alternative ways schools to notify the Council of a school closure.

- a) **Electronically via Schools Closure System** – This is the preferred way for schools to communicate school closure information. It enables schools to enter their own closure information, including the date of re-opening, directly on to the County Council's web site. By using this system there is no requirement to separately telephone/email the County Council. Use the following link for further details about the School Closure System; <http://schools.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/content/school-emergency-closure-procedure>
- b) **Telephone or Email** - If you are unable to use the School Closures System you should contact the School Organisation & Planning team (SO&P) as soon as possible with full details of the closure, or proposal to close. Please telephone or email using the contact details below. The telephone number has an answerphone facility.

Telephone	01865 894811
Email	schoolclosure@oxfordshire.gov.uk

SO&P staff will inform other County Council staff about the closure and arrange for the information to be placed on the County Council public website. You can also use the website to check the details held by the County Council about your school closure. Any inaccuracies should immediately be reported using the above contact details.

Closures of more than 1-day duration: Unless advised otherwise it will be assumed that the school is reopening the next school day. This is particularly important during periods of severe weather or multiple closures. Unless SO&P are advised that the school remains closed the County Council website will show the school has reopened the next day.

3. COMMUNICATING THE CLOSURE

Local radio plays a key role in transmitting school closure information rapidly to parents. In the event of a closure you should contact the countywide radio stations; Radio Oxford, Heart (Thames Valley) and Jack FM. You may also choose to contact further local radio stations (see attached radio station contact details). If there are a large number of school closures the local radio stations will often refer listeners to the County Council web site as the main public source of school closure information.

In passing information to the radio stations be brief and keep the message simple. Quote the school name, location, type of school, and **CODE WORD**. The current code word is **CUCUMBER**. Always use this, even when leaving a message, as it reduces the chances of a hoax call being successful. Try to listen to the information being broadcast and contact the radio station immediately to correct any inaccuracies.

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Ensure that all pupils and parents are advised to listen to local radio stations and check the Oxfordshire County council Website. Advise parents not to ring the radio station but to stay tuned for further details.

Ensure that local radio stations are informed if the school remains closed - give details of the proposed reopening date (if known).

Consider methods of communicating the school closure at a local level, particularly during severe weather, for example updating the school website or providing a recorded message on the telephone system.

4. TRANSPORT OPERATORS

Schools must make sure all coach, minibus and car operators are informed of the decision to close.

Transport operators are responsible for deciding if transport can be provided according to weather conditions etc. The Council is unable to accept any responsibility for unauthorised use or hire of alternative transport.

5. GENERAL PROCEDURES

Make arrangements to receive pupils who are unaware of the closure and ensure that during office hours the school telephone is staffed as far as possible even if the school is closed. This is especially important with regard to dealing with enquiries from parents.

Headteachers should ensure that governors are kept informed of school closures so that measures can be taken to suit local needs.

Contact the County Council's Procurement Team, if there is any difficulty about oil supplies which cannot be resolved with the supplier email corporateprocurement@oxfordshire.gov.uk

If your school subscribes to the Carillion Schools Compliance Offer you can obtain advice and support for property related problems or emergencies by calling the Property & Facilities 24 hour helpdesk; 0808 156 6659. Schools that have chosen not to use Carillion for their repair and maintenance needs will have to make their own arrangements for remedial work to be undertaken/coordinated. Non-subscribing schools can still use Carillion to act on their behalf, in which case a management fee/uplift to costs will be payable by the school for this service.

If you require **urgent** County Council assistance out of office hours please telephone Oxfordshire Fire Service Control (01183) 589333 and ask for the Duty Emergency Planning Officer (DEPO). The DEPO will telephone you to assess the support required and then contact the appropriate County Council Directorate.

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Copies of this guidance document, the contact details for radio stations and further information about using the Oxfordshire Schools Gateway system to notify school closure information can be found in section of the County Council intranet. <http://schools.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/content/school-emergency-closure-procedure>

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