



Ormiston Academies Trust

School closure policy

Policy version control

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Author	James Miller, National Director of Estates and Technology
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1. Introduction

- 1.1 The aim of this document is to detail how academies within Ormiston Academies Trust (OAT) will respond to unplanned events that result in the unavoidable need to temporarily close a school in full or part.
- 1.2 This document also details the process and decision-making authority to deal with a closure during a school day and closure in advance of a school day.
- 1.3 The most likely causes of temporary school closures are severe weather, or problems with the heating, power supply, water supply or sewage systems in the school building. There may be other unexpected circumstance such as fire and/or explosion, security breach, IT systems failure, or a national pandemic could also mean the school may need to close in full or part at short notice.
- 1.4 Academy staff supported by OAT head office will always work diligently to keep schools open and will only announce a temporary closure as a last resort if the health, safety and well-being of staff, pupils and their families are compromised by unexpected circumstances.
- 1.5 Information about managing a school during adverse weather can be found in the Adverse Weather guidance on OATnet.

2. Closure during a school day

- 2.1 In the event of severe weather or other emergency it may be necessary to close the school during a school day. This decision should not be made lightly as it will disrupt pupils' education and may cause care difficulties for families.
- 2.2 Decisions are made on the basis of pupil and staff safety – both from the perspective of physical site safety and on the basis of sufficient staff being available to ensure safe supervision of pupils. For example:
 - if the weather is deteriorating and there is doubt as to whether pupils and staff can be safely returned home later in the day.
 - The school building has issues with heat, light, power and water affecting most of the school
 - Significant amount of staff are unwell and/or unable to reach or stay in school
- 2.3 The **academy principal has authority to make a decision to close all or part* of school during a school day**, once they have considered the risks to pupils and staff.

2.4 Scenario examples:

- Example one: * partial close could be the need to send a year group home as the heating/lighting has failed in part of the school building affecting a small number of classrooms. Note can pupils be accommodated elsewhere – such as hall / gym in the first instance.
- Example two: closing the whole school early due to loss of water supply to the building resulting in no functioning toilets, kitchens, or wash / hygiene facilities. Note that it is important to check with estates team first as you may be able to keep the school open with minimal services.

2.5 Ideally decisions will be discussed with an education director (ED), however it is understood that often this type of decision needs to be made swiftly to ensure safety of pupils and staff.

3. Closure in advance of a school day

- 3.1 The decision to close will be an agreement between the **academy principal** and the **education director** using the risk analysis guidance below. A decision for closure should be made as early as possible to give sufficient time to alert parents and staff.
- 3.2 There may be a need to consult with a relevant head office support team in making the decision. *E.g., consulting with estates regarding failure of heating or electrical supply to understand severity of situation and time to remedy.*

3.3 Scenario examples:

- Example one: school heating/electrical system fails on a Friday afternoon. A judgement call will need to be made if the system can be repaired over the weekend for operation on Monday. Closure of school on Monday may be needed to allow for completing repairs due to availability of parts.
- Example two: high winds and severe storms over a weekend. A judgement call will need to be made on Monday opening; using local knowledge of what other schools are doing, Met Office weather information / travel warnings and what local shops/businesses/transport are doing.
- Example three: large number of staff and/or pupils become unwell due to an infectious disease or virus. School may will need to be closed in full/part due to low staff numbers, risk of spreading infection and need to sanitise school building spaces.

3.4 There may be need to close a school in part or full for more than a day depending upon the severe weather, building issue or other emergency. Such as: closing the school to just some year groups and/or changing the opening and closing time if either will avoid complete closure. Potential option of offering a reduced provision as an alternative to closure.

3.5 Risk analysis guidance to aid decision making

3.5.1 The following is a guide and will need to be adapted to meet the given circumstances.

3.5.2 Health and Safety Requirements (including adverse weather conditions), key questions for consideration include:

- Breakdown of school building essential services (heating, electrical services, water, storm damage etc.).
- Can enough staff attend the school to ensure the safe and efficient running of the school?
- Have local weather forecasts and road conditions, including those for areas from which staff/pupils will be travelling, been reviewed to assist in planning for potential staff absence?
- Can pupils and staff access the school building safely?
- Can pupils and staff be evacuated in an emergency?
- In an emergency, can the emergency services access the school?
- Is the area designated for disembarkation from transport safe for pupils?
- Red warnings are issued by the Met Office where exceptionally severe weather is forecast and a danger to life exists. Where a red warning is issued, it will be difficult to justify opening a school and careful thought will go into any decisions.
- Break out of an infectious disease that is spreading across staff and pupils.

3.5.3 Pupil/Teacher/Support Staff Ratios, key questions for consideration include:

- If a number of staff cannot attend, is the number of staff available for work acceptable to run the school efficiently and safely given the needs of pupils?
- Does the pupil staff ratio indicate that there could be a partial school closure or a full school closure?

4. Staff attendance

4.1 Although it is recognised that severe weather conditions make it difficult for staff to get to and from work, unless advised to the contrary by the principal, then the expectation is that staff will present themselves for work. Effort should be made to get to work unless it is known that the academy has closed, or it is considered unsafe to travel.

5. Clearance of snow within the school site

5.1 The academy is responsible for snow clearance and the clearing of approach paths is the responsibility of the academy site team. The clearance of public roads and footpaths is the responsibility of the Highways Department.

6. In the event of academy being closed

6.1 If an academy is closed in full/part, it is the responsibility of the principal to ensure that as a minimum the following events happen:

- The academy education director* (ED) is informed (when not part of the decision-making processes)
 - The OAT media and communication team is informed.
 - The chair of governors will be informed.
 - The academy website has been updated with closure information.
 - Parents are informed using normal parent communication routes.
 - The information is passed to the Local Authority and neighboring schools where needed.
 - The academy office answer phone is amended to a short closure message.
 - Where possible/needed, notices are placed on both school entrances advising visitors, parents, and pupils that school is closed.
 - Where needed/possible – school is appropriately staffed by teachers/teaching assistants to deal with any pupils who arrive at school unescorted until parents or emergency contacts can collect the pupils.
 - The site team secure the building and ensure that heating/electrical systems are made safe and in frost protection mode if needed.
- 6.2 These tasks do not all have to be completed by the principal, although they have the overall responsibility for ensuring each has been carried out.

*The education director will be responsible for informing the OAT executive and other support teams within head office depending upon the nature of the event that is affecting school operation. *E.g., alerting the estates team if there is an issue with the building.*