

MULLAVILLY PRIMARY SCHOOL

'Inspiring, Believing Achieving'

Emergency School Closure Policy

January 2026

Review Date
January 2029

INTRODUCTION

Within the limitations set out by statutory guidance and health and safety legislation and wherever possible, Mullavilly Primary School will remain open during the school day to deliver education to its pupils. This statement supports the schools' aspiration to deliver the highest quality educational provision to its pupils. However, the Principal is authorised to make an emergency closure when exceptional circumstances make it absolutely necessary and in the best interests of the pupils.

CLOSURE OF THE SCHOOL

The following will be considered in coming to any decision to close Mullavilly Primary School for exceptional reasons (Appendix 1). These include:

- Health and safety requirements
 - ✓ Can pupils and staff access the school building safely?
 - ✓ Can pupils and staff be evacuated in an emergency?
 - ✓ In an emergency, could the Emergency Services access the school?
 - ✓ Is the area designated for disembarkation from transport safe for pupils?
- Pupil/ Teacher ratios
 - ✓ If a limited number of staff and pupils can attend, is the PTR acceptable? (1 teacher: 30 pupils)
- Weather and road conditions
 - ✓ Have local weather forecasts and road conditions, including those for areas from which staff will be travelling, been considered?

The Principal will carry out a risk assessment (Appendix 2) in consultation with the Chair of Governors or if he is unavailable the Vice Chair and members of staff. The decision will be made where possible before 7.00 am and on the basis of information received from the media about weather, supplemented by on the spot observation, either personally or from staff members better placed to make such observations and through appropriate external agencies such as the Met Office and PSNI (Appendix 3).

CLOSURE DURING THE SCHOOL DAY

On occasions it may be necessary for school to close during the school day i.e. if the weather is deteriorating and there is doubt as to whether children can return home safely later in the day or due to health and safety considerations. In such cases the school will ensure that children are collected from school.

IN THE EVENT OF SCHOOL BEING CLOSED

If school is closed it is the responsibility of the Principal to ensure that the following events happen:

- The decision is ratified with the Chair or Vice Chair of Governors.
- Parents are contacted using the school's text messaging service and App service.
- The school website and Facebook page are updated.
- The information is passed to relevant media agencies as soon as possible i.e. Downtown Radio, Cool FM, BBC NI.
- Staff and/or a notice will be posted at the school gates to help prevent pupils from being left by parents at the start of the school day if possible. In instances of severe weather, parents should monitor the nominated phone for text contact.
- School is appropriately staffed by teachers/classroom assistants to deal with any pupils who arrive at school unescorted until parents or emergency contacts can collect the pupils.
- The EA and the Department of Education will be informed as soon as possible of the closure.

These tasks do not all have to be completed by the Principal, although she has the overall responsibility for ensuring each has been carried out.

SAFEGUARDING PRECAUTIONS ON CLOSURE

No pupil will be allowed to leave school unless the school is aware that an identified adult will be available to supervise him/her at their destination. It may be that a parent who collects his/her children offers to give shelter to other children. The agreement of the parents of these children must be given before pupils are released in this way. We will ensure that adequate supervision by members of teaching staff will be made of those pupils who cannot go home or to their emergency destination immediately and have therefore to remain at school.

TRAVEL TO AND 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 to and from the school.

EMERGENCY CONTACTS

Parents must give the schools an emergency contact point. Data Collection forms are sent out annually in September to all parents. Parents are required to complete and return the forms promptly. If the forms are not returned the previous year's form will be annotated as such and kept on file. Information on emergency contacts & instructions in respect of each pupil will be held centrally in the emergency contacts folder held in the school office.

It is essential that parents to keep the school up to date with any change in their contact details.

STAFF ATTENDANCE

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. EA Contract Staff (Catering and Cleaning Services) also need to be advised of any emergency requirements.

CLEARANCE OF SNOW

Within the school site, the school is responsible for snow clearance and the clearing of approach paths is the specific task of the caretaker. When severe weather is forecast, the caretaker should be tasked to lay salt and grit on arrival. The clearance of public roads is the responsibility of the Roads Service.

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, school has a responsibility in inclement weather to keep the children indoors.

SERVICES

All of the service providers who will be affected by the closure will be informed as soon as possible, once families and staff have contacted.

MONITORING AND REVIEW

The Principal will monitor implementation of this policy. Mullavilly Primary Emergency School Closure Policy will be evaluated and reviewed in line with any new Department of Education Guidelines / Reports and in keeping with any additional practices and procedures.

APPENDIX 1: FACTORS THAT WILL BE CONSIDERED WHEN DECIDING TO OPEN THE SCHOOL

First Consideration

Other Consideration(s)

Is the school building accessible?

Are there any areas within the school locality especially impassable or dangerous in times of extreme bad weather?

Are vehicle routes into the school grounds passable?

Are pedestrian routes on the school grounds passable?

Can the Principal gain enough teaching and/or supervisory staff to operate safely?

Is the school appropriately heated?

Are water systems working appropriately? (Welfare)

- What are the forecasted long-term weather conditions?
 - Are there any Northern Ireland Met Office warnings available?
 - Consideration will be given to getting to and from the school.
 - There may be locations on the journey where snow/ice is known to cause early closure of roads.
 - Is there means to improve access prior to teachers' attendance, or attendance of, parent/carers' vehicles, etc?
 - Is parking possible outside the school grounds until remedial action has been taken to make the area passable?
 - Is there means to clear these routes, e.g. salt/grit?
 - If required, can movement to various parts of the school be limited without disruption – ensuring maintenance is concerted to general access routes?
 - Can priority be made in respect to slopes, steps or ramps, or can these areas be restricted from use? Outside metal staircases will also be avoided unless appropriately treated.
 - Vehicle parking areas should have a passable pedestrian route to access the school.
 - The emphasis would be to operate safely.
 - What would be the threshold of staff numbers in respect to expected pupils? (Mullavilly Primary School pupils are mostly local, with a greater expectancy of attendance.)
 - Are fuel supplies adequate?
 - Have there been previous failures of the heating system in autumn/winter months?
 - Is the means for remedial action readily available?
 - Are there known faults in times of severe weather?
 - Are there written records – ensuring methodical checks are made?
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First Consideration

Can the level of heating be maintained throughout the school day/week?

Can people movement be minimised between school buildings, if access and egress is made externally?

Restriction of outside play would limit the snow/ice from becoming compacted, and therefore more dangerous.

Can the school grounds be maintained to effect opening the following day?

Monitor the weather situation locally and through the media (Met Office).

Are maintenance materials and personnel available to ensure the school can eliminate, reduce or isolate risk throughout the school day?

Other Consideration(s)

- At times of severe weather consider running the heating system during periods of closure or holidays.
 - Is frost protection installed and utilised?
 - If pupil numbers are low, can classes be grouped together?
 - Can these areas be cleared and maintained to limit the restriction?
 - If conditions are not dangerous outside play may be possible. However supervision may have to be higher.
 - Could play or breaks be staggered to ensure appropriate supervisory levels?
 - If any snow or ice is present prohibit running.
 - Pedestrian walkways should be a priority, over vehicle parking, but in the long term parking areas inside the school should be treated, or cleared of snow. Persons who have parked in the school grounds should be aware of the priority and told to take care in this area.
 - Maintenance should be a priority where pedestrian walkways also coincide with vehicle areas. Alternatively, restrictions could be made on pedestrians, or cars stopped from entering that area.
 - Government Agencies such as the Roads Service may be able to provide information regarding road clearance, providing assurance of home journeys, or return journeys the following day.
 - Met Office provide flash weather warnings (see Met Office website).
 - Can similar provision be assured for the following day(s)?
 - Salt/grit spread on walkways or other areas at the end of the day could limit icing. This could also prevent a further snowfall from taking a foothold and re-icing.
 - Slush or water from thawed snow/ice should be cleared as much as possible to prevent re-icing. Iced slush could be more dangerous than the initial fall as surfaces may be uneven and more slippery.
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APPENDIX 2: RISK ASSESSMENTS

Activity	Hazard	Persons who may be at risk	Controls required	Further considerations
Getting to the school.	Dangerous travel in extreme bad weather conditions.	Principal, teachers, Building Supervisor and/or maintenance staff, pupils.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Principal monitors Weather conditions/ warnings www.metoffice.gov.uk No travel should be considered if extreme bad weather warning and advice given for only essential journeys to be undertaken. 	<p>Rural location of school and/ or majority of school personnel.</p> <p>Regional warnings may not be accurate at local level, so local media broadcasts may also help.</p>
Known areas of expected road closure or steep gradients.	Dangerous travel in extreme bad weather conditions.	Principal, teachers, Building Supervisor and/or maintenance staff.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prior planning by staff regarding alternative 'main road' routes to school location. 	<p>Walking may be reasonably expected, when cars or other vehicles cannot make it all the way into the school. Principal to consider what is reasonable based on locality and staff.</p>
Main entrance into school grounds.	Entrance not possible.	Principal, teachers, Building Supervisor and/or maintenance staff.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Park car outside school until clearance can be made. If not passable by foot, access other reasonable means into the school. 	<p>Signage on main entrance</p>
Main entrance into school grounds.	Entrance an immediate slip hazard.	Principal, teachers, Building Supervisor and/or maintenance staff, pupils, parents/ carers and visitors.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clearance of slip hazard, unless alternative route found. Other routes may be prioritised and cause closure of the main entrance. Salt/grit may be adequate but manual work may also be required to clear snow/ice if this is the main and only entrance. 	<p>If entrance is used by both vehicles and pedestrians, salting/gritting may be a priority. Cars may be stopped from entry to give priority to pedestrians and avoid risk.</p>
Getting appropriate members of staff to open school.	Inadequate supervision	Teachers and pupils	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A means of communicating with school staff in order to establish their attendance on the day of extreme bad weather. Principal to establish what would constitute appropriate supervision – through dynamic assessment on the day of extreme bad weather. 	<p>The emphasis should be on how to operate safely, not whether a full and normal curriculum could be followed. Mullavilly Primary School pupils are mostly local, with a greater expectancy of attendance.</p>

Activity	Hazard	Persons who may be at risk	Controls required	Further considerations
Access to school buildings.	Slips, trips or falls.	Principal, teachers, Building Supervisor and/or maintenance staff, contractors, parents/carers and pupils	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Salting/gritting could be undertaken when snow or ice is foreseeable. • Salt/grit spreading on pedestrian walkways and snow clearance where reasonable. • Whenever possible, slopes, steps, ramps etc. should not be used. However if appropriately treated, these pedestrian walkways should be no different from a treated path. • The Principal to determine which walkways should be used and treated first. 	<p>Extreme bad weather is generally forecast, although snow/ice can be worse or less than expected, depending on local geography. If a school's salt/grit stock is low then only main walkways could be treated. Other routes could be signed to prevent use.</p> <p>Treatment of inner areas such as playgrounds, or some walkways between buildings may be less of a priority.</p>
Heating and Welfare facilities.	Cold – below Permitted work level (16° C / 60.8° F). No sanitary or drinking water.	Principal, teachers, Building Supervisor and/or maintenance staff, contractors and pupils.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Constant heating throughout periods of known cold snaps to prevent frozen pipes. • Maintenance of water systems, for example prompt repair of leaks and drips. • Regular maintenance staff checks to ensure heating and water systems are working well. 	<p>If the school premises cannot be heated or provision of water for sanitary use or drinking cannot be made within school hours then the school may have to close.</p>
Keeping the school open.	Slips, trips or falls of pupils at break-time.	Pupils. teachers and Supervisory Assistants.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No use of playgrounds and other external areas, when snow/ice cannot be easily removed or reduced. • If there are external areas free or generally free of snow/ice, supervised play/break can be undertaken. • The supervision level should be higher and running prohibited. • Any areas of snow/ice remaining should be avoided and managed. • Pupils should be informed of restrictions. 	<p>Certain areas could be cordoned off and managed through salting/gritting prior to releasing for use. Melted snow/ice can refreeze so continued attention may be needed. If yard space is restricted then staggered breaks could be undertaken. However could this system be appropriately supervised?</p>
Keeping the school open	Further snow or ice, or icing of previous fall.	Principal, teachers, Building Supervisor and/or maintenance staff, and pupils.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Principal to monitor the weather conditions through the Met Office and local media. • Information may also be gained from the Board. • Further salt/grit could be used on walkways and other areas to minimise for the next day. • Surface water could be brushed to drains to avoid icing up over night. • Maintain walkways 	<p>Further stock of salt/grit could be organised and/or maintenance undertaken on water or heating systems to ensure they continue to work effectively.</p>

RISK ASSESSMENT TEMPLATE

ACTIVITY	HAZARD	PERSONS WHO MAY BE AT RISK	CONTROLS IN PLACE	FURTHER CONSIDERATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION
Travel / transport to and from school				
Access within the school				
Supervision of activities				
Heating and welfare facilities				
Maintenance of school premises				

APPENDIX 3: KEY WEBSITES AND CONTACTS

ORGANISATION	NAME OF CONTACT	CONTACT DETAILS	WEBSITE
NI Met Office			www.metoffice.gov.uk
NI Roads Service			www.roadsni.gov.uk
NI Water Service			www.niwater.com
Police Service for Northern Ireland		0845 600 8000	www.psni.police.uk
NI Fire and Rescue Service		028 3839 4690	www.nifrs.org
EA Southern Region	Michelle Mullan	028 3751 2492	michelle.mullan@eani.org.uk
Department of Education	Curriculum Support Team	curriculum.supportteam@deni.gov.uk 02891 279533	www.deni.gov.uk
NI Rivers Agency			www.riversagencyni.gov.uk