

St. Joseph's N.S., Leitrim Village, Roll No: 01125B

Emergency Closures Policy

1.Introduction

The school policy on emergency closures was drafted as a whole school exercise from September to November 2011. This policy was reviewed between October and November 2016. Parents, staff and Board of Management were involved in the formulation of this policy. This policy formally puts in writing existing practices regarding the closing of the school in the case of an emergency.

2.Rationale

School staff, Board of Management and parents of St. Joseph's N.S. felt it necessary to develop this policy as the school had to be closed due to various emergencies in 2009 and 2010 including the following: -

- Inclement weather, such as heavy snowfalls and dangerous road conditions.
- Building programmes and alterations to the design of the school, which have necessitated unscheduled closures on Health and Safety grounds in recent years

3.Relationship to School Ethos

St. Joseph's N.S. 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.

4.Aims and Objectives

This policy aims: -

- To provide for the safety and welfare of all pupils and staff while on the school premises
- To ensure a safe, child friendly school environment is available to all children
- To comply with Health and Safety legislation, DES circulars and Rules for National Schools

5.Policy Content

5.1 Definition of Emergency Closure

Emergency closures occur in the case of exceptional circumstances such as: -

- Inclement weather
- Loss of services (Heating breakdown or no electricity)
- Damage to the school building
- Death of a pupil/ teacher in the school
- Critical Incident
- Death of a President/ Bishop
- Essential repairs to the school building
- Insufficient staff/ Strike
- School premises required for voting in a state or general election
- In the interest of public health.

5.2 Procedures

Schools may close under Rule 60, 61, 62 of the Rules for National Schools and in accordance with circular 11/95. Most of these closures have been detailed above in 5.1

At present the Department of Education and Skills leaves the final decision regarding the need for and duration of exceptional closing of schools to each individual Board of Management, in line with Department Circulars and the Rules for National Schools. The decision to close the school will never be taken lightly and the interests of all parties will be discussed including: pupils, staff and parents. Every effort will be made to keep the school open. See point 6 below.

The following steps will be taken in the event of all emergency closure: -

1. The principal will contact the Chairperson of the Board of Management. In the principals absence the Deputy Principal shall contact the Chairperson.
2. A decision will be made as to whether or not the school should be closed.
3. Parents, staff and bus drivers will be informed by text message that the school is closed.
4. When possible the reopening date of the school will be given to parents, staff and bus operators.

5.2.1 Inclement Weather (such as Heavy Snowfall, dangerous road conditions, severe flooding, storms etc)

Heavy Snowfall

In the event of a heavy snowfall, the Principal shall consult with the Chairperson of the BOM as soon as is feasible, and a decision will be 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 principal (or Deputy Principal) will contact all parents, staff and bus operators servicing the school via text message, as soon as possible after the decision to close the school has been reached. On the first day of snowfall this could be the morning of the school closure.

If snowfall is prolonged over a number of days and road conditions become dangerous a decision will be made every evening taking into account local conditions and future weather forecasts. It may be necessary to close the school indefinitely. If this should arise, parents, staff and bus operators will be informed of re-opening dates via text message.

Storms/ severe flooding

The procedures in place for heavy snowfall are generally replicated in the event of storms/ severe flooding etc. Parents, staff and bus operators are contacted via text message and informed that the school will remain closed.

If the school has already opened and is in operation when snowfall/ storm/ severe flooding etc occur and remaining on the premises is a risk to all, the principal will contact the Chairperson of the Board of Management to discuss the matter with a view to getting permission to close the school. Parents and bus operators will be contacted and informed that a decision has been made to close the school. Teachers will remain on the premises until all the children have been collected by parents, guardians or bus operators.

5.2.2 Disconnection or loss of Services

Where water or electricity services to the school are to be disconnected, a week's notification is normally given to the school authorities. The principal and Chairperson of the Board of Management will discuss the matter and estimate the impact the lack of services will have on pupils and staff. If it is decided to close the school parents will be given as much advance warning as possible either by letter or text message.

5.2.3 Damage to school building

The procedures in place for heavy snowfall are generally replicated in the event of severe damage to the school building such as burst pipes, collapsed ceilings, fire damage, etc. Parents are contacted via text message and informed that the school will remain closed. If the school has already opened and is in operation when damage occurs and remaining on the premises is a risk to all teachers will remain on the premises until all the children have been collected by either parents/guardians.

5.2.4 Critical Incident/ Death

After consultation with the Chairperson of the Board of Management it may be decided to close the school for pupils in the event of a critical incident or death of a pupil, staff member or BOM member. Parents will be informed of such a closure either by letter or text message. The school may remain open to pupils, staff, BOM or Parents Association, if issues such as a church service, Guards of honour, readings or counseling are required. Please refer to the school policy on *Critical Incidents*.

5.2.5 Death of a President/ Bishop

The Minister of Education and Skills or the Catholic Church may issue a statement to schools to close following the death of a President or Bishop. Should this arise parents, staff members and bus operators will be informed of this decision by letter or text message.

5.2.6 Essential repairs to the school

Every effort will be made to ensure that maintenance works on the school building and grounds will be carried out after school hours, during weekends and school holidays. However this may not always be possible e.g. burst pipes, collapsed ceilings, fire damage. Should this arise parents will be contacted via text message and informed that the school will remain closed. If the school has already opened and is in operation when damage occurs and remaining on the premises is a risk to all teachers will remain on the premises until all the children have been collected by either parents/guardians or bus operators.

5.2.7 Insufficient Staff/ Strike in the school

In the event of an official INTO directive to teacher to go on strike parents will be given as much advance notice as possible either by letter or text message. In the event of this arising the school must remain closed on health and safety grounds.

In the event of insufficient staff attending school, (e.g. due to a strike) the school must close on health and safety grounds. The principal may not be aware of this until school opening time. Should this arise the principal will contact the chairperson of the B.O.M to discuss this matter with a view to closing the school. All parents and bus operators will be contacted and

all teachers present will remain in the school until all children have been collected by parents/guardian or bus operators.

5.2.8 School premises required for voting

Under Rule 61 of the Rules of National Schools the school must close if the school premises or any part of it is required for voting purposes. Should this arise parents will be given as much advance notice as possible either by letter or text message.

5.2.9 In the interest of Public health

Under Rule 62 of the Rules for National Schools, schools may close in the interest of public health if is the recommendation of the H.S.E. Such occasions may arise if there was an outbreak of an infectious, highly contagious disease and remaining open would be a risk to other pupils and staff. Any outbreak of a contagious infectious disease must be reported to the HSE and advice would be given to the school on what measures to take. Should this arise the principal would discuss the matter with the chairperson of the board of management and the advice of the H.S.E. taken. Parents, staff and bus operators will be informed of the decision to close the school and on what grounds and informed by either letter or text message.

Please note:

- All half days, in-Service closures, voting in the school and staff strike days are notified to parents at least one week in advance.
- The most recent Department of Education and Skills Circular in relation to adverse weather will be consulted in relation to making up days lost due to exceptional closures.

6. Efforts to keep the school open

The following measures will be undertaken with a view to keeping the school open: -

In the event of inclement weather: -

- The principal will contact the caretaker and inform him that the school will be open. This contact will take place as soon as a decision has been reached to keep the school open. This may be late evening or early morning.
- The principal and/ or caretaker will check that systems within the school building are working (water supply, electricity and heat)
- The caretaker will be instructed to clear a pathway from the school gate to the main door of the school. This is to allow all pupils and staff enter and leave the building safely.
- The caretaker will aim to clear a pathway outside the school to allow pupils, parents and staff members to get to and from the school gate safely.
- Every effort will be made to keep these pathways clear. However this may not be possible in the event of heavy or prolonged snowfall.
- In the interest of health and safety all children will remain inside for the duration of the school day.
- Children from senior classes will be allowed leave the school at 2 p.m. if their parent/guardian is collecting a pupil from the infant classrooms at 2 p.m.
- Safe access and egress will be monitored on a daily basis as will the heating system and water supply.

- Should matters deteriorate the school may have to be closed for any or a combination of the reasons given above.
- Procedures as outlined above will be followed at all times.
- Advice from the D.E.S, C.P.S.M.A, I.N.T.O. and I.P.P.N. will be followed .

In the event of temporary loss of services (Heat, water, electricity)

Water

- There will be a limited supply of water in the storage tank in the attic. The tank in the attic services most, but not all classrooms.
- Children will be encouraged to conserve water
- Children will be encouraged to only go to the toilet when essential.

Loss of heat/ electricity

- Children will be allowed wear their coat in the classroom. While this will impact on many activities children should be warmer.
- Activities will take place in the classrooms to keep the children warm.

7. Roles and Responsibilities

Emergency closures in the school place particular responsibilities on various personnel within the school chain of command. The BOM must comply with DES circulars, Rules for National Schools and Health and Safety Legislation. The Chairperson of the BOM has the final decision regarding closing the school. The principal (or deputy principal) shall consult with the chairperson to discuss the matter. The principal (or deputy principal) shall inform parents, staff and bus operators of the decision to close by text message.

8. Ratification and Communication

This policy will be presented to the Board of Management for discussion in early 2017 with a view to ratification. Once ratified, a copy of this policy will be uploaded to the school website and parents will be advised as to where to locate it. School staff will be given a copy of this policy.

9. Implementation and Review

The policy will be implemented, once ratified by the BOM and reviewed at two year intervals or sooner should the need arise, in consultation with the staff, parents and Board of Management of St. Joseph's N.S.

References

Circular 11/95 Time in School

Rules for National School (In particular Rules 60, 61 and 62)

www.education.ie

www.cpsma.ie

www.into.ie

www.ippn.ie