



Knocknacarra Educate Together
National School

Emergency Closures Policy

This policy has been formulated by Knocknacarra ETNS to provide guidance regarding scenarios when the school would be closed outside of pre-defined holidays.

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Introduction:

This school policy on exceptional closures was written and reviewed in consultation with staff and approved by the Board of Management of Knocknacarra Educate Together NS.

Background:

Circulars 0011/1995 and 0016/2016 set out the key information from the Department of Education and Skill's perspective on exceptional closures. School authorities retain discretion in relation to the need for and duration of exceptional closures. In general, a school closure, due to unforeseen circumstances, should be compensated for later in the school year or arrangements put in place that satisfy the Board of Management that the curriculum goals are met prioritising tuition over other non-tuition activities or the period of absence of pupils was utilised by the school staff for essential school activities other than teaching.

- Every effort must be made to have works of maintenance, building, etc. carried out during vacation periods.
- Subject to the requirement outlined above it is for school authorities alone to determine whether it is necessary to close due to adverse weather. In the case of a red warning, schools must close. In the case of an orange warning, local conditions may necessitate closure.
- Should some exceptional circumstances arise (for example, failure of the heating system or damage caused by vandalism), the Board of Management may close the school even if the school cannot be kept open for 183 days (Rule 60).
- “Exceptional cause” may include the following closures (Rule 60):
 - Inclement weather
 - Heating breakdown
 - Death of a teacher in the school
 - Death of a pupil in the school
 - Death of a President of Ireland
- When the closing of a school is deemed necessary in the interests of public health, the written recommendation of the Medical Officer of Health should be obtained by the Chairperson of the Board and forwarded to the Department. The responsibility for closing the school rests with the Board of Management. (Rule 62)
- Circular 28/94 advises management authorities that the Director of Community Care/Medical Officer of Health is the appropriate person to decide on matters in relation to public health. Directors of Community Care/Medical Officers of Health may delegate that authority to the Senior Area Medical Officers or the Area Medical Officers who normally are local General Practitioners.

Rationale:

The need for the school to produce a policy on exceptional closures is due to possible eventualities such as:

- Inclement weather (heavy snowfalls, red level weather warnings, flooding, etc.),
- Heating breakdown,
- Critical Incident/death,
- National Day of Mourning,
- In the interests of public health as deemed necessary by the Area Medical Officer of the HSE and

- Essential repairs that can't be completed during vacation periods.

Relationship to School Ethos:

Knocknacarra ETNS strives to provide a child friendly, secure environment catering for all the needs of all students as far as is practicable.

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 comply with Health and Safety legislation.

Policies and Procedures:

Heavy Snowfall/Icy Conditions:

In the event of a heavy snowfall or icy road conditions, the principal will 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 school authorities will contact the local radio station, Galway Bay FM, and request that regular announcements be carried on the airwaves that the school will not be opening. A text message will also be sent to all families. All bus operators servicing the school will be contacted by the Principal or another designated person, confirming that the school will not be opening. If the snowfall or icy conditions are prolonged over a number of days and the school is closed indefinitely, parents and bus operators will be informed of re-opening dates through the local radio station and text message from school as well as on the school website and school Facebook page.

Disconnection 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. This enables the school to furnish the parent body with the relevant advance warning of such closures via circular or text. It is not the policy of the school to confirm such closures through the local radio station.

Flooding/High Winds/Thunderstorms:

The procedures in place for heavy snowfall are generally replicated in the event of flooding/storms/lightning. If the school has already opened when high winds or other inclement weather 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.

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, Board member or pupil. Parents are informed of such closures either by circular or text. In this particular instance, the school may remain open to staff and Board of Management or Parents Association if issues such as memorial services, Guards of Honour, readings or counselling is required (see Critical Incident Policy).

Please note:

All other regular closures are notified to parents at least one week in advance, via the weekly newsletter. The school calendar is available on the website.

Summary of Roles and Responsibilities:

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

- The chairperson of BOM, in consultation with the principal, will be responsible for making a decision to close the school.
- School management team members and/or the critical incident committee may assume some responsibility, depending on the circumstances.
- Communication with HSE personnel and compliance with Health and Safety legislation may be necessary.
- Maintaining a safe school environment for all staff, children and parents is of paramount importance. Parents will be informed by note if time allows. If parents cannot be contacted, phone calls/texts will be made by the school management team/secretary and notices will be sent to local radio stations.
- Pupils who cannot be sent home (because of transport problems, parents working) will be supervised by teaching staff until the end of the day.

Implementation and Review:

The policy has immediate effect and will be reviewed no later than 2022 or in the light of unplanned events that lead to unscheduled school closures.

Ratification and Communication:

The policy was ratified by the BoM on the date below. It is posted on the school website.

Louise Shields, chairperson

Date of ratification: 13/06/2019