



# Powerstown Educate Together National School

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*Powerstown Educate Together National School*

## Emergency Closures Policy

*This policy has been formulated by Powerstown ETNS to ensure the school has proper procedures in place in relation to accountability and transparency and follows the guidelines set out by the department of education in circular 34/2011*

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## **Introduction**

The school policy on emergency closures was drafted by Helena Regan and reviewed and amended by Katie Flynn and Lorraine Cullivan. An abbreviated version will be circulated to the entire school community once the policy has been ratified by the Board of Management. Copies of the full policy document will be available on request to parents/guardians.

## **Rationale**

The need for the school to devise a policy on emergency closures is primarily due to:

- a) Possibility of disruption in water or electricity supply
- b) Inclement weather, such as heavy snowfalls, high winds etc.
- c) Building programmes and alterations to the design of the school which may necessitate unscheduled closures on Health and Safety grounds
- d) Critical incidents

## **Relationship to School Ethos**

Powerstown Educate Together National School seeks to provide a child- friendly, secure and safe learning environment for all pupils, whilst also striving to ensure that staff and visiting personnel can access a safe and welcoming working environment. This aim is founded on respect for the individual, child or adult, and is fostered in a culture which values diversity and difference.

## **Aims and Objectives**

- To provide for the welfare of all pupils, staff and parents/guardians while on the school premises
- To ensure a safe, child friendly learning environment is available to all children
- To conform with Health and Safety legislation

## **Procedures**

### **Type 1: Unplanned Closures**

#### **Heavy Snowfall**

In the event of a heavy snowfall, the Principal shall consult with the Chairperson of the B.O.M. as soon as is feasible, and a decision is 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 all parents/guardians who supply the school with up-to-date mobile numbers and email addresses by text message and email. A message to this effect will be posted on the school's website page, the school's Facebook page and Twitter page. A message will also be left on the school answering service.

If the snowfall is prolonged over a number of days and the school is closed indefinitely, parents will be informed of re-opening dates through the school website, Facebook page, Twitter page, on the school phone answering service and by text and email.

#### **High Winds / Thunderstorms**

The procedures in place for heavy snowfall are generally replicated in the event of storms / lightning i.e. parents/guardians are contacted via text message and email that the school will remain closed. Messages relaying this information will also be posted on the school website, Facebook and Twitter pages. If the school has already opened and is in operation when high winds etc. occur and remaining on the premises is a risk to all, teachers will remain on the premises until all children have been collected by either parents / guardians / child minders or bus operators.

#### **Unexpected loss of services**

Where notification is not given to the school regarding loss of electricity or water services, the principal will endeavour to determine the extent of interruption to the service. Following consultation the Health and Safety Officer on staff and the chairperson of the Board of Management regarding the Health and Safety implications of the loss in service, a decision may be taken to notify parents/guardians of the need to close the school. Teachers will remain on the premises until all children have been collected by either parents / guardians or child minders.

## **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, B.O.M member or pupil. Parents are informed of such closures either by phone or circular, whichever is deemed appropriate by the Critical Incident committee. In this particular instance, the school may remain open to staff, B.O.M, Parents Association or Critical Incident committee if issues such as funeral services, liaison with media or counselling need to be addressed (See Critical Incident Policy).

## **Type 2: Planned Closures**

### **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, email or text.

### **Building Programmes**

The Health and Safety Officer on the Board of Management will consult with on-site Health and Safety personnel to ensure compliance with any statutory obligations in this regard. Parents/guardians will be briefed on such matters and the health and safety of pupils and staff will be paramount in any decisions made regarding closure in such circumstances.

## **Roles and Responsibilities**

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

-  Parents are responsible for keeping school briefed on up-to-date contact details during school year
-  Principal is responsible for organizing annual review of parent contact details
-  Helena (and School secretary when appointed) is responsible for entering review information in electronic class files
-  Chairperson of Board of Management and Principal are responsible for ultimate decision to close the school

- ✚ Health and Safety Officers at staff and Board level are responsible for advising Principal and Board of Management regarding breaches of Health and Safety Policy which may merit school closure
- ✚ Principal is responsible for notifying staff of unplanned closures; as staff grows, cascade contact system will apply
- ✚ Principal is responsible for notifying parents/guardians of school closures

## Department of Education Guidelines

Powerstown Educate Together National School is required to be open for a minimum of 183 days.

Department of Education guidance for schools in relation to making up for time lost due to unforeseen school closures is included at **Appendix 1**

The guidance provides that subject to consensus at local level, any changes to normal practice that can be made to address the shortfalls should be put in place. Examples of how this might be achieved include:

- prioritising tuition over other non-tuition activities
- consideration of whether learning in the classroom should be prioritised over school tours, etc

If necessary, the school authority should then identify any available discretionary days that the school had planned to close that could be made available to make up for time lost.

Where the above measures are not considered adequate, contingency arrangements to make up for time lost due to extensive or prolonged unforeseen school closures may now also include either or both of the following:

- The February mid-term break may be reduced by up to three days subject to the requirement that all schools must be closed on the Thursday and Friday of the week in which this break falls.
- The Easter break may be reduced by up to three days by the school remaining open up to and including the Wednesday immediately preceding the Easter weekend. All schools must be closed on the Thursday and Friday immediately preceding the Easter weekend and remain closed for the remainder of the Easter break as set out in Appendix A of this circular.

The school authority must also take into account the need to provide adequate notice of any changes to the school calendar to pupils, parents and staff. Each school authority shall also provide to parents, at the beginning of each year, a calendar which includes details of school closures. It should be made clear that the calendar could be subject to change as part of contingency arrangements to make up for time lost due to unforeseen school closures.

### **Success Criteria**

- Positive school community feedback
- Conformance with Health and Safety legislation
- Maintaining a safe school environment for all staff, children and parents

### **Ratification and Communication**

This policy was ratified in November 2011 at an interim BOM meeting. Following ratification of the policy, a summary of key points will be circulated to the parent body.

### **Implementation and Review**

The policy will be implemented following ratification and will be reviewed in the light of unplanned events that lead to unscheduled school closures, but not later than June 2012.

## **Appendix 1: Guidance for schools in relation to making up for time lost due to unforeseen closures**

1. The school authority should, in the first instance, quantify the number of school closures that have occurred.
2. The school authority should, in consultation with the Principal and teachers, assess the effect of the loss of tuition and identify any shortfalls that have occurred as a result of the unforeseen closures.
3. The school authority should consult with the Principal and teachers with a view to ensuring that the curriculum for each class/year group can be completed before year end. Subject to consensus at local level, any changes to normal practice that can be made to facilitate such work should be put in place. A non-exhaustive list of possible examples of how this might be achieved include:
  - prioritising tuition over other non-tuition activities
  - reducing where possible the length of mock/house examinations
  - consideration of whether learning in the classroom should be prioritised over school tours, etc.
  - in the case of second level schools ensuring examination classes attend all classes to the end of May.
4. If necessary, the school authority should review the school calendar with a view to identifying any available discretionary days that the school had planned to close that could be made available to make up the loss. In this regard, the school authority should take into account the need to provide adequate notice of any changes to the school calendar to pupils, parents and staff.
5. In cases where a school has been affected by extensive or prolonged school closures (e.g. due to weather, etc.) and where the school authority considers that the above measures will not adequately address the loss in tuition involved, the school authority may, having established what arrangements for school transport may or may not be feasible if other schools are remaining closed, decide to implement either or both of the following contingency arrangements:
  - the February mid-term break may be reduced by up to three days subject to the requirement that all schools must be closed on the Thursday and Friday of the week in which this break falls

- the Easter break may be reduced by up to three days by the school remaining open up to and including the Wednesday immediately preceding the Easter weekend. All schools must be closed on the Thursday and Friday immediately preceding the Easter weekend and remain closed for the remainder of the Easter break as set out in Appendix A of this circular.

6. The school authority should consider the implications of any measures identified for pupils, teachers, parents and other staff and also other parties such as school transport, bus escorts, traffic wardens, visitors to the school, etc.
7. The school authority should consult and communicate with the school community as early as possible on this matter.

## **Appendix 2: Standardised school year**

The following are the agreed arrangements in respect of the standardisation of the breaks at Christmas, Easter and mid-term in the first and second terms for the school year 2013/14:

### **School Year 2013/14**

#### ***October 2013 mid-term break***

All schools will close from Monday 28th October 2013 to Friday 1st November 2013 inclusive.

#### ***Christmas 2013***

All schools will close on Friday 20th December 2013, which will be the final day of the school term.

All schools will re-open on Monday 6th January 2014.

#### ***February 2014 mid-term break***

All primary schools will close on Thursday 20th February 2014 and Friday 21st February 2014. (Primary schools may use 3 discretionary days to extend this break to an alternative option of a 5 day break for the period from Monday 17th February 2014 to Friday 21st February 2014 inclusive unless changes are required as part of contingency arrangements to make up for time lost due to unforeseen school closures.)

Where contingency arrangements are required a school authority may reduce the length of the February mid-term break by remaining open up to and including Wednesday 19th February 2014.

#### ***Easter 2014***

All schools will close on Friday 11th April 2014, which will be the final day of the school term, unless changes are required as part of contingency arrangements to make up for time lost due to unforeseen school closures. Where contingency arrangements are required a school authority may reduce the length of the Easter break by remaining open up to and including Wednesday 16th April 2014.

All schools will re-open on Monday 28th April 2014.