



## Snow closures

### Early notice regarding school strategy/risk assessment



We have now reached the time of year when we alert you to the steps we take if we are forced to close the school in an emergency, ie due to extreme weather conditions or equipment failures associated with the change in the weather. We should stress at the outset that this is something we only do with great reluctance, but our overriding concern is the health and safety of our students and sometimes such action is unavoidable.

Feedback from parents/carers, students and staff suggests that communication over snow closures needs to be clear and timely. The handling of snow closures will always create discussion within a school community. I hope that this at least explains our approach in advance of any snow closure.

### **Current challenges around making the school site and approaches clear after snow or heavy ice:**

- Derbyshire County Council prioritises main routes and will not guarantee early clearance and gritting.
- A local business has agreed to clear both sites but cannot grit. Other companies will not grit because of a perceived fear of litigation. Clearing both sites takes longer than schools who have to clear only one site.
- We have investigated the purchase of a mini tractor/snowplough/gritter but cannot justify a significant expense for equipment that is needed for only a few days a year.
- Ice is just as big a risk to opening as snow and is as hard to clear with current resources. There have been a number of accidents on our sites caused by ice and this has resulted in injury to staff and students with resultant absences from work/school.

### **Risks of opening when heavy snow or ice is expected/forecast:**

- Snow and ice increases risk of road traffic accidents for student and staff.
- Bus services are often cancelled which results in some students being stranded with parents/carers being forced to make arrangements.
- Student numbers will be high (many are local) but staff numbers may be very low (our staff travel in from locations such as Sheffield, Stoke and Buxton). This can result in students being unsupervised on site. Usually when school is open following heavy snow, lessons are adversely affected and staff can find themselves supervising very large numbers of students with a consequent impact on learning.
- The sites are surrounded by steep hills and this provides further risk to motorists and pedestrians following heavy snow/ice.
- Where late notice is given that school is opening (as leaders seek to assess the situation until the last possible moment), parents/carers have reported that pressure is put on them to revise childcare arrangements.
- Early clearance cannot be guaranteed. Accidents on school sites following snow or ice have resulted in injury, sustained absence and costly litigation in the recent past.
- Staff/student time which can be used for productive work from home can be wasted on long and hazardous journeys to the school sites only to find lessons being badly disrupted or cancelled due to staff and student absence.

### **Risk of NOT opening when heavy snow or ice is expected/forecast:**

- Parents/carers are caused inconvenience by having to adapt childcare arrangements
- Learning time is lost (although through Covid lockdowns we have very much improved our remote learning offer)
- The leadership of the school will incur criticism if forecast heavy snow does not arrive despite school being closed.



### **School strategy regarding snow closure:**

1. The school will seek to communicate clearly with parents/carers and local cluster primary schools when heavy snow or ice is forecast or expected.
2. To minimise the risk to students and staff, and to facilitate childcare adaptations for parents and carers, the school will aim to close as soon as heavy overnight snowfall is probable.
3. The school will seek to announce closure before midnight and definitely before 6.00am. The school accepts that this may result in widespread criticism if heavy snow does not fall or does but doesn't settle.

## School emergency closure procedure

### **Snow – during school hours:**

If there is a heavy snowfall during the day while students are already in school, and it becomes clear that getting home at the normal time may be difficult or dangerous, we may decide to close early. If we do close, the following instructions are given to students before they are allowed to leave the premises:

- If students know for sure that they have a safe destination with someone to look after them (such as their own home or a relative, neighbour or friend's home) and provided they are sure they can reach this destination, they may leave when asked to do so.
- If students are uncertain whether there is someone at home, they need to check before departure and should telephone to make sure of their arrangements. The school will make its telephones available free of charge to those who do not have a mobile phone, but obviously this may delay departure as we only have three external lines. Students should only leave once they are certain of their arrangements.

It would be helpful if you can discuss at home what you want your son/daughter to do in the event of school closing early so that they know of arrangements in advance.

If students cannot make arrangements and are not sure what to do and where to go, they must remain in school in the care of the staff of the school until suitable arrangements have been made. A member of staff will always remain in school with students until everyone has been collected.

### **Snow – overnight:**

In the event of heavy snow overnight we would ask parents/carers to use their discretion in deciding if it is safe for their child to set off for school. Emergency closures happen perhaps once or twice a year.

The school will inform you of closure as soon as the decision is made to close the school, by various means: the school website; BBC Radio Derby, by text and/or email and the Weduc app. Once students have been sent home, students and parents/carers should listen to local radio or check our website for further instructions about our plans for the following day. This information is usually posted on the school website by 7.30am each morning.

### **Breakdown of equipment:**

If, as happens very occasionally, we suffer a complete breakdown of equipment, depriving the school of its basic services, such as electricity or water, we may be forced to send students home for their own safety. The same procedure will be followed as for a snow closure.