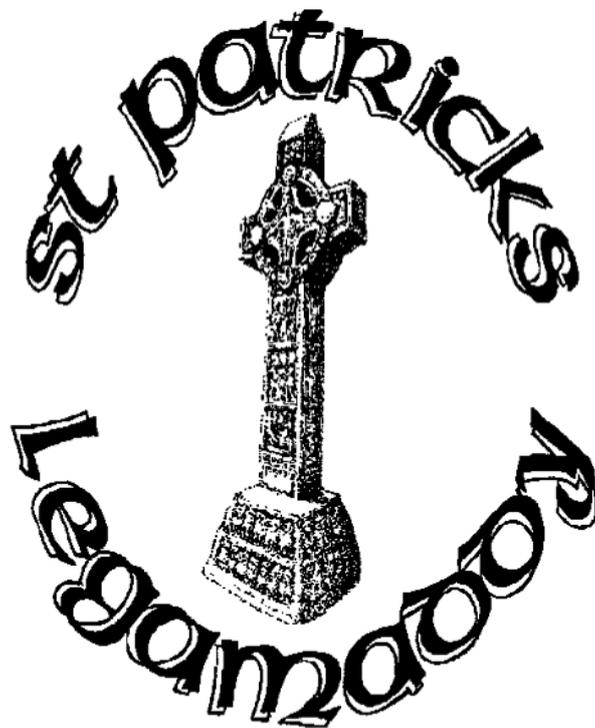


St Patrick's PS, Legamaddy



Exceptional Closure Policy
Draft
Reviewed 2016

EXCEPTIONAL CLOSURES

An exceptional closure is unplanned, and is due to unforeseen circumstances such as adverse weather conditions, power failure, or situations which affect the safety of pupils and staff. Exceptional closures require approval from the Department of Education to allow a school to reduce its operational days below the 200 required by legislation.

In times of extreme weather, such as a heavy snowfall, the Principal will consider this checklist as far in advance of closure as possible – the night before closure if circumstances allow - and, if necessary, decide to close the school the next day. This will allow early communication with parents and staff and ensure that parents are informed quickly. While it may not be possible for the Principal to make such a decision the night before, going through the checklist will help to focus on the key issues to be considered and enable them to come to a decision as early as possible. Decisions the night before can only be taken when all the indications are that adverse conditions will continue overnight. If there are doubts, the Principal will defer decisions until early morning.

Local conditions will determine the decision of the Principal (or the caretaker), who will consider a number of agreed criteria for closure. Decisions taken will be applicable to St Patrick's – not based on neighbouring schools whose conditions may differ.

Issues to consider

The following will be considered in coming to any decision to close for exceptional reasons.

- Health and safety questions, including:
 - 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?
- Transport – can buses, meal deliveries, etc., reach the school, particularly if the unforeseen circumstances affect a large proportion of pupils?
- If a limited number of staff and pupils can attend, is the PTR acceptable? An indication of the acceptable PTR should be included in the school's emergency plans for such events.
- Have local weather forecasts and road conditions, including those for areas from which staff will be travelling, been considered?

If a decision is made to close

Communication

St Patrick's has an agreed plan on communication, not only to advise parents and staff, and keep them informed, but also to advise the Education Authority, the Department of Education, and CCMS if appropriate. The DENI school reference number should be quoted in all correspondence.

- Types of communication that will be used include texting service, informing the media (television and/or radio), email, school website or telephone (either calls or a recorded message.)
- Parents are aware of the means of communication that will be used.
- If possible, parents/staff will be updated at a later time in the day with a view to the "next day" so that all have time to make suitable family arrangements.

- Staff are encouraged to keep the school updated on their position

HEALTH AND SAFETY

St Patrick's will consider the Health and Safety guidelines during the first term, before the onset of adverse weather and put in place an appropriate action plan. Assistance will be sought from Health and Safety personnel within the Education Authority (EA).

Overall responsibility for health and safety risk in schools lies with the employing authority, CCMS for Maintained schools. School Governors are responsible for the day to day management of health and safety in a school. Risk is identified and controlled through Risk Assessment. School Governors and the Principal will consult the guidance on Risk Assessment in the schools' Health and Safety Manual – A Manual for Principals and Governors. In addition to this, a number of generic risk assessments and advice on completion are available at each of the EA's' websites.

Maintained Schools

CCMS is the employing authority for all teaching staff in CCMS schools. The responsibility for management of the premises rests with the Boards of Governors of such schools as set out in Article 23 of the Scheme of Management of CCMS schools. CCMS does not have any dedicated health and safety staff, but EA staff will advise maintained schools in their area, although there is no statutory requirement for them to do so.

SEVERE WEATHER WARNING – SAFETY GUIDELINES FOR SCHOOLS INTRODUCTION

The decision to open a school during periods of severe weather will be dependent upon the Principal carrying out a risk assessment. The risk assessment will be thought out in advance of any severe weather so that, when it is required to be undertaken then it is a relatively straight forward process.

The School Principal will comply with guidance outlined in Checklist for Principals when considering Opening or Closure of School.

<https://www.deni.gov.uk/publications/checklist-exceptional-closure-schools>

Exceptional Closures

Exceptional Closures require approval from the Department of Education, to allow a school to reduce the number of days on which it is operational to below 200. Where the closure is foreseen or planned - for example, if a school is to be used as a polling station, approval to close. However, where the closure is unforeseen - for example, in periods of extreme weather - such approval will be sought retrospectively. If approval is given for Exceptional Closure a school's entitlement to Optional, Training ("Baker") and School Development Days is not affected. Exceptional Closures will only be approved when the closing of a school is outside the control of the school authorities, for example, due to: - the death of a member of staff, pupil or another person working at the school; flooding or burst pipes; electricity failure; an exceptionally heavy snowfall; or use as a polling station for parliamentary/local government elections.

Do schools have to compensate for exceptional closures?

Schools do not have to make up days that have been approved for "exceptional" closure by the Department. However, individual schools may in consultation with staff make alternative arrangements to recover lost teaching time. For example, where schools have planned to take their full 5 School Development Days, they may cancel untaken days and open as normal to pupils instead.

Development, Monitoring, Review and Evaluation of Policy

This policy has been drawn up in consultation with staff. As part of the school's monitoring and evaluation process, we continually strive to adapt and improve our practice to meet our pupils' needs. This policy will be reviewed in 2019.

Signed Principal: _____

Signed Board of Governors: _____