

Keeping schools open in bad weather: Information for headteachers

When severe weather is forecast, the Department encourages you to review the measures you have in place to reduce disruption to learning. In the interest of keeping your school open, the two main messages are (i) plan ahead, including being clear about who would take the decision whether to close; and (ii) make sure — in line with HSE's 'Sensible Risk Management' campaign — that you take a proportionate approach to risk as you take decisions regarding whether to close your school or to keep it open.

- **Plan ahead.** Assess now what hazards any snow, for example, could bring; identify the measures you already have in place to reduce risk to your pupils and staff; and do your best to bring in any extra measures that will enable your school to meet as normal despite bad weather.
- **Be clear who will make the decision.** The DCSF advises LAs that decisions on whether an individual school stays open in bad weather rest with the Head Teacher and should be consistent with clear information for parents in each local area. LAs may however take decisions with respect to community and voluntary controlled schools if they wish to adopt a consistent approach across an area; we would hope that they would only use their powers in this respect in exceptional circumstances which would on a case-by-case basis justify the closure of almost all schools in the area. LAs do not have the power to oblige foundation or voluntary aided schools or academies to close, but may come to an agreement with the governing bodies of those schools that they will follow LA advice in the event of the blanket closure of community and voluntary controlled schools.
- **Take a proportionate approach.** If the decision to close or remain open rests with you as a head, you will have to balance the risks arising from less supervision, late return journeys, slipping on icy matches and the throwing of snowballs etc. **against disruption to pupils' learning.**
- **A Risk Assessment Proforma sheet is attached for you to complete in order to comply with health and safety requirements (Appendix 1).**
- **Staff Pupil Ratio** Closing your school could be the right decision, where your judgement is that there is not sufficient Staff/pupils Ratio or where you decide that Pupil/staff would face significant risks of serious injury being on the School premises or travelling to school. But remember that every lesson counts; and consider whether it would be reasonably practicable for you to keep your school open.

If the school is open, and some pupils whose homes are not within walking distance of the school get to school by transport provided by the school or a local authority, and that transport is not available because of adverse weather conditions, those pupils should be marked using code Y (Forced and Partial Closure). Code Y does not count as absence in the statistics.

More information

- [Frequently asked questions](#) regarding schools and severe weather.
- [Questions and answers](#) on examinations in severe weather.
- [Guidance](#) on supporting learning during extended school closures. (PDF and Word versions available.)
- Find [information on sensible risk management from the HSE](#).
- Find out about local conditions forecast for your area by checking the [Met Office website](#).

See link: <http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/educationoverview/severeweather/>

For further advice contact:
Schools Health & Safety Team
Waltham Forest Council
The Town Hall
Forest Road,
London E17 4JS

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Appendix 1:
Cold WEATHER RISK ASSESSMENT CHECKLIST

	GENERAL	Yes	No
1	Has senior management taken note of warning alerts for serious cold weather conditions?		
2	Has senior management drawn up a contingency plan to deal with the implications to staff, pupils and school?		
3	Does the contingency plan provide extra resource to manage disruption that the severe weather may cause?		
4	Does the contingency plan provide staff with sufficient information on the actions that they should take during such conditions?		
5	Does the contingency plan provide parents, pupils and visitors with sufficient information on the actions that they should take during such conditions?		
6	Does the school promote anti-slip foot wear at all times?		
7	Has the gas boiler system been fully maintained?		
	Outdoors		
8	Has the walkway(s) to the school been cleared icy/snowy patches?		
9.	Have fire exit door pathways been cleared of icy/snowy patches?		
10	Are children encouraged to wrap up warm before going out at play times?		
11	Has outdoor activities been restricted or suspended, where the risk of falling on icy patches?		
	Indoors		
12	Are thermometers available to record the temperature throughout the premises?		
13	Is the temperature between 18-22°C?		
14	Are physical activities encouraged?		
15	Does the school promote the need for hot lunches during cold weather?		

London Borough of Waltham Forest Risk Assessment Form

Workplace:		Date of Assessment:	
Service Area:		Review Date:	
Name of assessor (PRINT)		Signature	

Work activity or environment List the work activities or areas being assessed	Hazard and current level of risk (Low/Med/High) Hazards which could result in significant harm in your workplace	Who might be harmed? Staff, clients and others	Control measures and remaining level of risk (Low/Med/High) Refer to relevant procedures, codes of practice, information, training, guidance notes, safe systems of work, etc.	Further action required Relevant measures required to reduce the level of risk further.

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