Townlands C of E Primary Academy

Unavoidable School Closure Policy

Approved by: Rachael Johnson (Chair of Governors)

Date: December 2026

Next review due by: December 2029

Introduction

Townlands is committed to providing a high-quality education for all of its pupils. As part of this, we understand the importance of offering a consistent service and keeping the school open to pupils where possible. However, there could be certain circumstances which mean that it is unsafe to open the school, or to keep it open after the start of a school day. In these instances, the Headteacher is authorised to close the school if it is in the best interests of the school community to do so.

Adverse weather is one of a limited set of circumstances which could mean that the school needs to be closed, there are others identified below. An emergency closure can take place to ensure the safety of pupils, staff, parents/carers and visitors. This policy sets out how the decision is made to close the school and the systems in place to achieve this safely, with minimal possible disruption to pupils and their parents/carers.

We understand that an unanticipated school closure can have implications for parents/carers who often have a range of other commitments to fulfil. However, any decision to close is taken to ensure that pupils and staff are kept safe. When a decision has been made to close, we would like to reassure parents/carers that this is not a decision that has been taken lightly and appreciate their support in this matter.

It may be necessary to temporarily close the school for a variety of reasons including:

- Severe weather including snow, flooding or storms (as defined by the DfE)
- Mass medical emergencies to children or staff
- A major incident in the locality of the school where emergency services or the local authority have advised the school to be closed
- Problems with the school site, for example loss of power supply, heating failures, hygiene problems due to lack of hot water, flooding, or fire damage
- Longer term disruption to transport, for example through petrol or diesel shortages

Note: This is not an exhaustive list.

The purpose of this policy is to:

- Make the appropriate procedures clear, in relation to operating the school during adverse weather conditions or unavoidable school closure.
- Make clear the grounds for a school closure due to the above and adverse weather conditions.
- Advise and inform staff and parents/carers of the systems and procedures in place in the event of a school closure.

Closure due to severe weather

The decision to close the school will normally rest with the Headteacher, (or in their absence a member of the Senior Leadership Team) and it will be confirmed with the Chair of Governors (or if they are unavailable, the Vice Chair) and reported to the Local Authority. The decision should be made where possible before 7.30am and on the basis of information received from the media about weather, supplemented by on the spot observation, either personally or from staff members better placed to make such observations and through appropriate external agencies such as the Met Office. Factors involved in reaching the decision to close the school are likely to be:

- Access to the school, i.e. road conditions (obstructions, snow, ice, flooding etc).
- Breakdown of school essential services (heating, electrical services, water, storm damage etc).
- The number of staff that can reach the site.

Roles and responsibilities

The Headteacher is responsible for:

- Making the decision to close or open the school due to adverse weather, following consultation with the site manager, chair of governors and Local schools.
- The Headteacher will inform the Local Authority.
- Informing parents/carers of any closure.
- Informing staff of any closure.
- Deciding whether children should be kept indoors during break times and reporting this decision to staff at the earliest opportunity.
- The decision is ratified with the Chair or Vice Chair of Governors.
- School is appropriately staffed by teachers/teaching assistants to deal with any pupils who arrive at school unescorted until parents or emergency contacts can collect the pupils.

The Site Manager is responsible for:

- Completing a risk assessment that covers adverse weather and gritting, along with unexpected problems with the school site, for example loss of power supply, heating failures, hygiene problems due to lack of hot water, flooding, or fire damage.
- Ensuring the school is fully stocked with the correct equipment, for example snow clearing equipment.
- Ensure all gritting is carried out by an outside provider.
- Ensuring all equipment is maintained and stored properly, notifying the Headteacher of any damages.

Staff members are responsible for:

- If the decision has been made to open the school during adverse weather conditions, staff members are expected to make all reasonable efforts to attend work, whether this means they will be late or not.
- The school understands that, whilst staff members are expected to make all reasonable efforts to attend work, it is essential to minimise personal risk.
- Staff members are required to liaise with the Headteacher to discuss difficulties attending work due to adverse weather.
- Adhering to the requirements of this policy.
- The safety of children, colleagues and themselves.

Office staff are responsible for:

- Communicating to all stakeholders (parents/carers, staff, governors and visitors) via our website, Arbor and Townlands social media page.
- The School Office answer phone (where technology allows) is amended to a short closure message.

- The school website has been updated with closure information.
- Where possible, notices are placed on both school entrances advising visitors, parents and pupils that school is closed

Safe guarding and welfare officer is responsible for:

- If a vulnerable person has a social worker then they will be notified and for looked-after children, the Local Authority School head.
- Agreeing with the social worker the best way to maintain contact and offer support.
- Keeping in contact with vulnerable children and young people to check their wellbeing and refer onto other services if additional support is needed.

Parents are responsible for:

- Only using the designated and cleared areas whilst on the school premises.
- Collecting their children when the school needs to close.
- Keeping their contact information up-to-date.
- Ensuring their children wear the appropriate footwear and clothing for adverse weather.

School attendance

If the school is open in snow or adverse weather the decision as to whether or not to send a pupil to school, must be at the discretion of the parent/carer, taking into account factors such as local road conditions.

The school appreciates that during bad weather children may arrive later than normal; parents/carers should endeavour to contact the school to let them know they are on their way if likely to be delayed. The school recognises there will be isolated instances where families are cut off, even where the clear majority of children can get into school. In such instances, parents/carers should inform the school of the circumstances of this exceptional situation, as the school has a duty to clarify the circumstances of each case so as to be able to formally authorise the absence to the Local Authority. Parents acting on the assumption that the school would be closed without gaining confirmation or failing to inform the school of the circumstances that prevents the child coming into school risks their child being registered as an un-authorised absence.

Staff will always make every reasonable effort to undertake the journey to school. It is appreciated that the journey may take longer than normal and therefore some staff may not be able to arrive before the normal start of the school day.

It may be necessary to ask all children to bring packed lunches if the kitchen staff are unable to reach school safely.

Communication with Parents/Carers

In the event of bad weather, parents should check to see if the school is open before travelling to the site. There are a number of ways to confirm whether the school is open or closed. The school will send out a communication to parents via our website, Arbor and our social media page. If the school is closed, we will try and make a decision as early as possible and will intend to re-open as soon as we can.

School closure during normal working hours

If the school does open, but extreme weather develops during the day, we will aim to remain open until the end of the normal school day. However, this is not always possible when roads are becoming treacherous. In these extreme circumstances, parents/carers will be contacted via our text messaging service/Arbor and asked to collect their children as soon as possible. The school will also communicate to parents/carers via our website and social media page. It is important that parents/carers do not attempt to make contact with the school before any decision has been made about closure and wait for a communication to be sent out. This is to ensure that phone lines are kept open for us to liaise with other local schools and agencies.

Online learning

If Townlands is temporarily closed due to severe weather or through serious problems with the school site, then school will deliver lessons through online learning tasks.

Equality & Disability Access Implications

If a child has a disability or mobility impairment, their individual needs and any impact of weather conditions on access to and movement around the school site will be considered, and a risk assessment undertaken where necessary.

Links to other policies

- Safeguarding Policy
- Keeping Children Safe in Education
- Health and Safety
- Equality Plan
- Pupil Attendance