

Risk Assessment: Snow closure, adverse conditions and early closure

Whole school site

Date: Spring Term 2024

Possible reasons for closing the school

There are four main reasons to close a school in severe weather conditions. These are:

1. An insufficient number of colleagues are able to get to school
2. Severe travel restrictions
3. Severe conditions around the school presenting major obstacles or danger. However, risks should be assessed realistically and preventative action such as salting and gritting should be taken into account
4. Heating failure or inability to warm the school to reasonable and acceptable levels in adverse weather

Specific considerations relating to Kennel Lane School (KLS)

The special educational needs of the learners in school vary but all require additional learning and educational support. Some learners have little communication or language, mobility limitations and physical disabilities and some are vulnerable and at risk for medical reasons. The age range of learners who attend KLS is between 3 to 19 years old.

The implications of an early / closure due to adverse weather or snow are more complex and challenging for KLS than for non-special needs settings. The level of colleague supervision to maintain learner safety is higher in comparison to other schools or colleges.

Colleagues commute at the same time as learners. During bad weather it cannot be known reliably, the number of colleagues who will make it in, or at what time they will arrive at school. If weather conditions affect KLS then they will affect other schools in the area. If other schools close then those colleagues, who are also carers or parents, may need to stay at home for their own children.

If insufficient colleagues manage to get in then learners may have to be sent home as the supervision levels could be unsafe. Some learners are supported on a ratio of 1:1, others supported 2:1. A decision on insufficient colleague ratios would have to be made based on a risk assessed at the time, taking into consideration all the relevant facts.

Specific training is required to support learners with emergency medication. Only colleagues trained on individual learners' care plans, and signed off by the School Nurse, are safe to administer emergency medication. If insufficient trained colleagues are available then a decision on learner safety would have to be made based on a risk assessment at the time, based on all the facts. Individual learners may need to be sent home, or there is a wider risk resulting in the school needing to be closed.

When there are changes to expected routines or limitations imposed, some learners can need additional support to regulate and/or co-regulate.

Challenging and/or physical behaviours increases the risk of injury, to both other learners and colleagues. A risk assessment based on all the facts would be required to decide if individual learners need to be sent home, or if there is a wider risk resulting in the school needing to be closed.

A small local heating failure would not necessitate the early closure of the school but a wider multi-building heating failure or loss of other facilities such as lighting or water may do so. A dynamic risk assessment based on all the facts would be required to decide on the wider risk and if the school needs to be closed.

The school site comprises nine separate buildings all with external access routes, and outside play areas which need to be crossed to reach them. There are disabled ramps to several of the buildings and other footpaths and vehicular access is on a gradient. Frost, snow and ice does not readily clear from many parts of the site, persisting late into the school day. Gritting, historically, has provided little improvement to conditions on the ground as it is never walked into the snow sufficiently. A judgement on whether the grounds are considered appropriately safe for learners and colleagues will be made by the Site Team early in the morning, following a risk assessment of the grounds and outside areas at that time. The Site Team will also consider the accessibility of transport vehicles, pedestrians, emergency muster points and emergency vehicle access, this information will be passed to the Headteacher and will inform a decision on closure.

Most learners come into school, and go home, on Local Authority transport. A number of learners commute from outside of the Bracknell Forest area. Transport providers will (should) not collect a learner in the morning if they cannot guarantee the transport home. Local residential roads in the region, including Kennel Lane, have historically lacked preventative gritting or snow clearance and become dangerous and impassable, resulting in transport routes being suspended and cancelled.

Learners require appropriate adult supervision when they leave school to return home and cannot be released from the school site on their own or be sent home when there is no responsible person to receive them. Early closures can, and has, resulted in learners and colleagues having to remain on the school site long after an early closure has been declared, whilst waiting for carers and parents struggling to get to the school site to collect their young person, or to get home to receive them at home. This delay can cause significant distress to the learners when they see everyone else has gone and increase the risk to learners and colleagues of travelling during deteriorating weather and/or road conditions.

When an early closure is called Local Authority transport will try to assist in getting learners home. There is no guarantee that the drivers, passenger assistants or vehicles are going to be available out of the normal contracted hours, nor that a given route will be considered accessible. However, learners will not be allowed on early Local Authority transport unless school can confirm a responsible person is at home to receive them.

A timely decision to close the school, for example, before learners leave home, ensures the safety of learners and colleagues alike and follows the Health and Safety principle of removing avoidable risk. A closure decision before learners leave home eliminates all the issues identified above and poses significantly less risk than having to close the school early.

Risk Assessment:

Risk	Potential Outcome	Action to reduce risk	Likelihood	Factors Affecting
<p>Colleagues unable to get to school</p>	<p>Potential school closure</p>	<p>The DfE says that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • where teachers are unable to get to work due to poor weather conditions, schools should consider Bringing together groups and classes with teachers and support colleagues working together • Using other school colleagues or volunteers to provide cover supervision or oversee alternative activities • Re-arranging the curriculum • It adds that, although infant classes should normally have no more than 30 learners in them, 'having more than 30 in one class due to exceptional temporary circumstances is not a reason to close the school' 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • KLS classrooms are not equipped to accommodate large numbers. A limited number of learners can join other classes providing the mix of learners and colleague ratios are appropriate. Using communal space for activities such as the hall may work with larger groups for limited periods of time • Using other school colleagues would be of limited use, as they would not be trained in behaviour management or the needs of the learners and strangers can increase negative behaviours • Changing the curriculum does not change the wider risk posed by a colleague to learner ratios in this scenario. Changes to routine can trigger behaviours and colleagues from other classes, especially other Key Stages, will not know the learners well, this will potentially impact behaviours • It is the number of colleagues required to support the learners, of all ages, which limits any combined group size and also the physical space and resources available
<p>Insufficient guidance available to colleagues</p>	<p>Poor decision making or risk management</p>	<p>Advice available from other Local Authorities includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having a specific snow and ice plan for the premises in place, identifying areas and routes required to be cleared to ensure safe access and operation of the premises • Cordoning off areas and routes 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advice is given regularly by BFC in support of emergency procedures and bad weather/closure management • A strategy for dealing with snow and ice on school site is followed by the Site Team • The size and nature of the site makes physically cordoning off

		<p>to be 'out of bounds' (for example, areas beneath overhanging roof eaves where snow might fall, hazardous walkways, etc.)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clearing areas for use by pedestrians or vehicle access and reviewing these for any changes in condition • Encouraging colleagues to wear appropriate flat soled and sturdy footwear and to carry as little as possible when walking in the school's grounds and car park • Having enough salt and grit available to keep a clear path around the school site • Having enough colleagues to supervise learners adequately • Having procedures in place for a heating failure • Gritting operations 	<p>large sections impractical</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clearing walkways and areas of snow does not make them safe, but it implies they are because there is no snow. This can increase the risk of users disregarding the continuing slip hazard as it is no longer obvious, for example, ice/black ice • KLS colleagues dress sensibly wearing appropriate footwear. Learners and colleagues by necessity bring bags into school and they are likely to require more things such as a change of shoes during snowy weather. To presume and direct otherwise is unrealistic and unachievable • School's salt/grit stocks are regularly checked and additional purchases usually made in the Spring or Summer Term • See above for previous comments • The school's Emergency Plan covers loss of utility such as heating • On site gritting is carried out as part of the Site Team's processes
--	--	--	--

Completed by: Health and Safety Leader, Headteacher and Site Team Leader