

Thorn Primary School

Unavoidable School Closure



Background

When considering if a school should close temporarily, the Department for Education (DfE) have asked Local Authorities to emphasise to schools that they should endeavour to open their premises and provide a full curriculum, or failing this, that they should provide care for children to enable parents to go to work. However, there are some exceptional and emergency circumstances that may arise when it is necessary to temporarily close the whole or part of a school. The decision to close will not be taken lightly. However, in view of the nature of unplanned and unexpected events, a decision based on a site specific risk assessment, may be required to be taken on the day of the closure. The School Standards and Framework Act 1998, Section 38, provides that the conduct of the school shall be under the direction of the Governing Body and that the Headteacher is responsible for the management of the school. Therefore, the decision to close rests with the Headteacher and Governing Body, but schools must consider the Lancashire County Council guidance and should liaise with the Local Authority where applicable.

What the Headteacher should do

The Headteacher must establish the nature of the problem. Whatever the reason for an unavoidable closure, the Headteacher should consult as quickly as possible with the:

- a) Chair of Governors (or in his/her absence the Vice Chair of Governors)
- b) Appropriate County Council Officer or Liaison and Compliance Team (if required)

Advice should be sought to ascertain whether the problem can be resolved, thus avoiding any closure, or to ensure that any closure is as brief as possible. A decision to close the school (either as a full or partial closure) lies with the Headteacher following a site-specific risk assessment. However, the decision to close must take into account Lancashire County Council's guidelines and the decision to close should only be taken following consultation with the relevant parties unless, owing to the emergency nature of the situation or for any other compelling reason, such an agreement cannot be secured. If after due consideration the school is deemed to be unfit to receive pupils, then it would clearly not be possible for the school to meet as intended. Assuming the Headteacher has acted reasonably, this should not place the Headteacher, Governing Body or the Local Authority in any breach of their obligations. Where there is any doubt concerning the health and safety of pupils and staff, then the Headteacher should err on the side of caution.

When might a school need to close?

- **Premises Related Issues**
- **Environmental Health Issues**
- **Extreme/ adverse weather - Where there is a danger to the pupils /staff at school, or in journeys to and from school, it may be necessary to close the school for the whole or part of**

the day. Delayed school start times may be put in place to allow weather/site conditions to improve. **Parents are ultimately responsible for the safety of their children up to the school gates. Where adverse weather is forecast, pupils should wear suitable clothing and footwear.**

- Personnel Issues
- Any other unforeseen circumstance
- Localised incident

Possible Alternatives to Closure

Are there any reasonable alternatives to a closure? For example:

- Partial closure of the school with remote learning for the pupils affected.

Immediate Action following a Decision to Close - Who to Inform

- Following consultation (including, whenever possible, consultation with the Chair/Vice Chair of Governors), the Headteacher should inform (as appropriate) those listed below of the decision to close and the length of closure. If the closure lasts for longer than 24 hours, the Authority (Liaison and Compliance Team) should be given the updated position on a daily basis.
- Liaison and Compliance Team - In event of closure, the Liaison and Compliance Team must be notified immediately and wherever possible before 10:00 am. If the closure lasts for longer than 24 hours, the school should inform the Liaison and Compliance Team of their circumstances on a daily basis.
- Staff – Headteacher to direct staff if they are unable to attend the school. E.g: required to report to school, undertake appropriate alternative duties or request leave of absence
- Parents/Carers and Pupils - Where an enforced closure occurs during the day the Headteacher must ensure that adequate arrangements are made for the pupils to be collected safely. This will require coordination by telephone/text messages to parents/carers etc. In some cases it may be necessary for the Headteacher to make alternative arrangements for pupils who are unable to return home, e.g. nearby school, etc. In some circumstances consideration will be given to providing remote learning. Where schools are aware of circumstances in which they have to declare an unavoidable closure in advance of the date in question, they should endeavour to notify parents/carers by **7:10am** by text message. This should assist parents/carers to make alternative childcare provision. For further advice, Headteachers should talk to the Liaison and Compliance Team.
- Consider support for families in receipt of free school meals.
- School Support Services - (If applicable) Cancel or rearrange any peripatetic teaching sessions, swimming, pre-arranged visits, school crossing patrols, etc.

Method of communication

The school communication system 'Teachers2Parents' is used to notify parents of unforeseen closures. Information would also be put on the school website, school Facebook page, and local radio stations.

Follow up Action

- 1) Headteacher to complete Form NUC/1, including the reason for the closure; the year groups and number of pupils affected: if staff remained in attendance and consultation with the relevant bodies. Once completed, the form should be returned as soon as practicable to Liaison and Compliance Team at County Hall. This can be:
 - via the Schools' Portal - Note: the unavoidable closure facility on the portal calendar should only be used to notify the Authority of a closure and not that a school has reopened on the day on which this occurs. Such an entry would misleadingly appear as a closure on the system. All entries made on the calendar transfer automatically onto the LCC website for general display
 - by e-mail
 - in hard format.
- 2) Formal Report to Governing Body - The Headteacher/Chair of Governors should ensure that the closure is reported at the next full meeting of the Governing Body. In receiving the report on the closure, the Governing Body should ensure that:
 - The circumstances giving rise to closure have been resolved.
 - Arrangements made by the school in the event of unavoidable closures are reasonable and satisfactory in respect of pupils, parents/ carers, staff and the school community as a whole.
 - Steps have been taken to fulfil the requirements relating to the attendance of staff and pupils at the school in the academic year.