

MEMBERS' BULLETIN

Adverse weather

All employers should have a policy in place for actions to be taken when there are adverse weather conditions that may affect the opening of schools.

Schools may be unable to open for a variety of reasons, including:

- breakdown in the heating;
- frozen or burst pipes; or
- inaccessibility of roads and/or the site due to very heavy snowfall or other adverse conditions.

Some local authorities have policies in which a central decision is made by the local authority about the closure of schools in its area. In many local authorities, however, the decision is left to individual schools.

In England, academies and free schools may or may not be included in a local authority decision and this should be clearly communicated to staff and parents prior to any adverse weather event.

Headteachers should ensure that school staff and parents are aware of the school/local authority policy and how they will communicate with them if the school is closed. Many schools have arrangements with local radio stations and have texting/answerphone/website facilities to communicate with parents.

Teachers need to ensure that they are aware of how the school will communicate with them if a decision is made to close the school.

If a decision is made that the weather conditions are such that it is not appropriate to open the school for pupils, then there should be no reason why the school should expect staff to come into school. If the conditions are unacceptable or dangerous for pupils, then the same considerations apply to staff.

It would be reasonable for the school to expect that if the school is closed, staff will use the time to undertake appropriate work-related activities at home. However, due to the complexities involved, the additional workloads incurred and the likelihood that many staff will have caring responsibilities, it is not appropriate for synchronous online learning to be adopted for a short-term closure. Further NASUWT advice and guidance on remote education and hybrid learning is available [here](#).

The decision about whether the school should open should take into account, for example:

- advice from the police and other agencies about travel conditions and conditions around the school;
- advice from the local authority, as appropriate;
- access to the school site for pedestrians, drivers and emergency vehicles and safety of the site; and
- availability of staff.

The 'hero headteacher' approach is not recommended, i.e. seeking to keep the school open when common sense and the advice from the police and other agencies is not to travel, or shovelling snow to seek to open the school despite the conditions and warnings.

If a decision is made to close the school, this should be deemed an unavoidable closure.

Any suggestion by the school management or employer that when the school has been closed, teachers should be expected to make up for this by:

- giving up leave;
- using any of the five teacher days;
- losing planning, preparation and assessment (PPA) time or lunch breaks; or
- losing pay;

should be firmly rejected.

It should be made clear that teachers will, as always, act professionally to do everything they can during lessons to ensure that pupils cover all the work that they need to do and may have missed during the closure.

If the school is open as usual, staff should make all reasonable efforts to get into work.

This means assessing the availability of public transport or, if they normally drive to work and are unable to do so, considering the feasibility of walking to work if they live relatively close and are fit and able to do so.

There should be no expectation that teachers will walk miles in severe conditions to get to work.

If there are severe weather warnings in the area in which they live and the police and other agencies are advising people not to travel, teachers affected will need to contact their headteacher to discuss the situation.

It may be that the school is open but some pupils and staff are unable to get into school.

Headteachers will need to assess the staff-to-pupil ratio to ensure that they are able to operate safely. It may be that they will need to advise that some groups of pupils remain at home.

Headteachers need to ensure that they conduct a health and safety risk assessment.

If any difficulties arise for NASUWT teachers or school leader members, please contact [NASUWT](#).

Enforced closure during the school day

Closing the school during the school day creates numerous issues. Therefore, school leaders and employers should monitor weather forecasts and other factors, such as planned cessation of public transport. If severe weather disruption is likely to occur during the day, they should consider closing the school before the normal start time, even if the current conditions are acceptable.

If, during the course of the day, weather conditions deteriorate to the point that a closure is required, then the school should use existing arrangements to inform parents of the decision.

Clearly, the safety of pupils is important. Those who cannot be sent home will require supervision until such time as they can be collected. However, the health, safety and welfare of staff is equally important. It is therefore unreasonable to expect all staff to remain on site to supervise pupils, and staff should also be enabled to leave the premises as soon as reducing pupil numbers allows.

This should be done on an assessment of relative risk, e.g. to determine who is at greatest risk to safety, such as those with the longest journeys or disabled staff. Staff who will remain to ensure the safety of pupils should have been identified before any adverse weather event as part of the planning for adverse weather.

Local conditions can vary widely in adverse weather events, and plans should be in place to send staff and pupils home during the day if it becomes apparent that risks to safety are increasing at their home location, even if conditions around the school are acceptable.

Flooding

This advice should be read in conjunction with [NASUWT's advice on flooding](#).

Employers have a legal duty to ensure that the health and safety of all employees is protected. It is not in anyone's interests to ask staff to risk their lives or health either during floods or in the aftermath.

Met Office 'red warnings'

Red warnings are issued by the Met Office where exceptionally severe weather is forecast and a danger to life exists. Where a red warning is issued, it will be difficult to justify opening a school. [Members should also not be expected to travel through a red warning area to reach a school outside of the red warning without a thorough risk assessment being made.](#)

If any NASUWT member is at a workplace within a red warning area which is due to open, has failed to make plans to close, [or is expected to travel through a red warning area to reach a workplace](#), contact [NASUWT for further advice](#).

You can also contact [NASUWT](#) if there is no NASUWT Representative in your school and you need support to implement this advice.