

Inclement Weather and Related Emergencies

1. The Authority has a statutory duty to provide full-time education for school pupils for 190 days each year. Reducing the pupil year below this figure is permissible only where a closure is unavoidable and it is not reasonably practicable to make up for attendances lost. It is therefore necessary that schools should be kept open wherever possible during spells of severe weather and other emergencies (e.g. breakdown of heating systems, non delivery of fuel etc).
2. Points to be borne in mind in deciding whether or not to close a school are:
 - i) The Authority does not make ‘blanket’ decisions to close schools. All decisions must be taken on the individual circumstances of the school.
 - ii) It is preferable to close a school for half a day, rather than a whole day, unless this is really not practicable.
 - iii) Where staff are unable to reach school, consideration should be given to combining classes rather than closing the school. Every attempt should be made to accommodate children who arrive at school and who are unable to return home before the end of the school day.
 - iv) The school should have in place arrangements for deciding on whether or not to close if the Headteacher is not able to reach the school. The Authority does not expect decisions to be taken without an assessment of circumstances at the school. It is also helpful to consult neighbouring establishments so that where possible a co-ordinated response to the situation can be made.
 - v) The Authority should be informed and the Chair of Governors should be consulted about all closures, unless this is not possible.
 - vi) Decisions to close should normally be for no more than two days and reassessed regularly thereafter.
3. Where the school is closed, it may be appropriate to use local radio as part of the strategy for informing parents. Local radio stations have been advised to regularly check the Staffordshire County Council Emergency School Closure website:
(<http://www.staffordshire.gov.uk/education/schoolsandcolleges/emergencyclosures>).

The radio stations have been advised to use the information from our website to broadcast school closures to their listeners. Headteachers can enter their school closure directly onto our website by following the instructions given on the Staffordshire Learning Net (SLN).

4. In the event of the school having to close, all employees should be paid normally, regardless of whether they were able to report for duty, unless the Governors believe that individuals did not make reasonable attempts to travel to work and the closure was caused mainly by their non-attendance. The Headteacher should decide whether it is reasonable or necessary to require them to remain on the premises undertaking other duties within their job description. This will depend on:
 - i) paying due regard to matters relating to health, safety and welfare of employees and pupils;
 - ii) whether or not these duties could be carried out at home;
 - iii) whether staying on the premises would create unreasonable difficulties for the journey home, particularly where conditions are deteriorating.
5. In the case of a school remaining open, where the employee does not report for duty, the Governors have discretion to allow normal pay. In determining whether or not pay is to be allowed, the basic issue should be whether or not the employee has made every reasonable effort to attend school.
6. Advice from weather forecasters and the Police for people to 'stay at home' does not constitute an entitlement to pay for staff that follow this advice.
7. Where the Governors decide to withhold pay because of the employee's absence, they should notify the Authority so that the appropriate deduction can be made. This could involve a deduction for less than the full period of absence, if they believe that some of it was justified.
8. Governors are advised not to consider disciplinary action against staff who are absent because of inclement weather.

