

Closures Advice for Schools

There are two types of school closures, those that are planned and those that are unscheduled but required due to an emergency. Below you will find advice on how to inform the Local Authority (LA) and other relevant persons of each.

IMPORTANT - The online school closures notification tool (accessible via the schools portal home page) is designed for notifying emergency or unavoidable closures, usually where there is less than 24hrs notice.

Planned Whole or Partial Closures/Changes to Term Dates

Community and Voluntary Controlled Schools should follow the term dates as set by the LA. All maintained schools are required by law to open for the purpose of educating pupils for 190 days (or 380 sessions) in a school year. If a school is

prevented from meeting for one or more sessions because of an unavoidable event, it should find a practical way of holding extra sessions. If it cannot find a practical way of doing this then it is not required to make up the lost sessions.

Aided and Foundation Schools set their own dates but meet any additional transport or catering costs if they deviate from the LA's set dates. Academies also set their own dates. It is important for schools to notify the LA if your term dates days will differ from those directed by the LA.

If a school wants to close for an additional closure day over and above the statutory five days, this can only be done in exceptional circumstances.

For certain building projects or necessary works, it may be possible for the County Council to support a closure day to allow the school to work with the Council to manage any necessary issue but again this is supported only in exceptional circumstances.

Schools who wish to notify or discuss a **planned** full or partial closure, must contact the Local Authority in the first instance - You can do this via the Health and Safety Team, who will advise and direct requests to the Assistant Director of Schools and Learning where required. The Health and Safety Team can be contacted on 01228 221616 or by e-mail: healthandsafety@cumbria.gov.uk

Admission Registers - Code # This code should be used for whole or partial school closures that are known or planned in advance such as: between terms; half terms; occasional days (for example, bank holidays); weekends (where it is required by the management information system); up to five non-educational days to be used for curriculum planning/training; and use of schools as polling stations.

The above procedure is for planned closures only. Please do not use it to report emergency or unplanned/unscheduled closures such as those due to adverse weather or emergency incident. For information on how to report unplanned closures please follow our **emergency and unscheduled school closures process below.**

Emergency and Unscheduled Closures

It will generally be up to the Head Teacher to determine whether or not their school needs to close in an emergency. Such emergencies and unscheduled events might include weather conditions, gas leak or loss of services, e.g. heating, water, electricity. You should ascertain from any agencies involved, e.g. United Utilities, National Grid etc., the likely duration of the fault prior to the decision to close being taken. In coming to a decision to close, the health and safety of the children and staff is paramount and you should consider local factors and conditions.

Reporting Emergency and Unscheduled Closures Online via the School Portal

The County Council operates an online **emergency school closures tool** allowing schools to update their school status directly from the schools' portal. You login as normal and will be able to change your setting from 'Open' to 'Closed' and complete the reasons and expected duration of your closure. This will ensure that your schools status is updated on Cumbria County Council's website; www.cumbria.gov.uk

The Health and Safety Team can update your status on your behalf if you are unable to access the portal for any reason (contact details below).

Online notification triggers RSS and Twitter feeds to which local media, Governors and Parents can subscribe to free of charge. Full instructions for the online system are available on the schools' portal. In the event of the decision to close being taken you should be satisfied that you have notified the following by the quickest possible means:

1. **Parents** By whatever means are most appropriate in your situation. E.g. text to home alerts.
- **BBC Radio Cumbria** and other local media will subscribe to the portal RSS feeds, but they are always willing to assist schools directly to send out important messages. Contact details are; Radio Cumbria Carlisle 0845 3051122 (01228 592444 after 9.00am) Barrow 01229 836767 (not always manned)
- **CFM Carlisle** 01228 818964 (01228 810444 before 9:00am) Online <https://planetradio.co.uk/cfm/>
- **Heart North Lancashire and Cumbria** (Studio) 01524 848969 (Station) 01524 895000 Contact - <https://www.heart.co.uk/northlancs/contact/contact-us/>
- **Smooth Lake District Kendal** 01539 872000 Text - 65588

As a security check you may be asked to quote the school's DfE Number.

2. **Local School Services** - Catering and home/school transport operator(s)
3. **The Health and Safety Team** – Advisors will be alerted by email when your online school status is updated to "closed". For emergency support please contact either 01228 221616 (office hours), Sharon McCubbin Lead H&S Adviser, Children's Service's and Schools 07825 340570 or for out of hours use the 24hr emergency number phone - 0300 303 1042
4. **Your Chair of Governors**
5. **Your General Adviser (Learning Improvement Service)**

Closures due to Adverse Weather

If for any reason it is impossible for any teaching or non-teaching staff to reach the school, a cascade system of communication needs to be put into practice to ensure that children are not left at the school by parents who are unaware of the staff situation.

Your cascade system should include the use of Governors, some of whom generally live close to the school. In the absence of any member of the teaching staff, a Governor can then take charge of the situation and ought to make his/her way to the school as soon as possible to ensure that parents are informed of the fact that the school is to be closed. Any communication system put in place should be based around availability of Governors and/or other members of staff who would be able to assist locally. If staff find it impossible to reach their normal place of work because of bad weather but they could safely attend a school closer to their home, they should make contact with that school in order to establish whether or not their services may be required, in terms of helping out for the duration of the bad weather.

Closing Early due to Adverse Weather Conditions

If it is decided that the school must close early because of adverse weather conditions, all parents must be contacted as soon as possible.

No primary school pupil should be allowed to leave the school premises until it has been established that their parents/ carers are aware of the situation and have given permission for the child either to make their way home alone or leave with another parent.

Emergency Support in the event of Major Incidents/Accidents/Fatalities

Although thankfully rare, a serious situation could occur, for which you require the additional support of the LA to help coordinate and assist you with responding to the emergency. This assistance can be for incidents at your school or for incidents affecting your staff/pupils off-site.

Examples of such incidents could be a fatality, serious accident/incident, fire, major flooding, bomb threat etc. The LA can help coordinate such issues as support following emergency response, assistance from additional transport operators, emergency catering requirements or health advice. There is a system in place to arrange the coordination of various organisations to ensure that help for schools is, as far as possible, always available. The network of organisations includes Childrens and Schools and Learning teams, Property Unit, Resilience Team, Police, Fire and Rescue Services, Public Health, etc. If required, press and media calls can also be dealt with centrally.

Should you require access to this network, you should contact Sharon McCubbin, Lead H&S Adviser, Children's Services/Schools, Corporate Health and Safety Team, 07825 340570 or 01228 221616 (main H&S office) during office hours.

Outside normal office hours, the team also operates a 24-hour /7 days a week emergency number for health and safety emergencies only as follows:

Phone - 0300 303 1042

Leave your message including a telephone number. A member of the team will then make contact with you as soon as possible. Please ensure that all staff are aware of the emergency contact numbers and of the help available if it is required.

If you have any queries about any of the above information, please do not hesitate to call. General Advice for Emergency Planning in Cumbria can be accessed here:

www.cumbria.gov.uk/emergency/default.asp