

# Torquay Girls' Grammar School

## Severe Weather Policy

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*See Severe Weather Protocol for operational details*

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## **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 This guidance document provides advice for Head Teachers and School Governors and has been prepared following the severe weather of recent winters. The advice aims to provide clarification on a number of important matters relating to severe weather and includes information provided by government.
- 1.2 The DfE recognises the important role of Head Teachers in deciding whether schools should remain open in periods of severe weather and this advice has been prepared in order to help them in making those decisions. Above all, it strongly encourages schools to make every effort to remain open during periods of severe weather and suggests strategies for doing so, including, for example, reduced hours of opening and clearance of snow from the school site.
- 1.3 It is for individual schools to make any decision to close. They know the local conditions and the contingency possibilities which may allow the school to stay open for some or all pupils. Such decisions should however be based on a common sense approach, having regard to the conditions at the school and the need to continue to provide an education to children whenever feasible.

## **2. Planning ahead for severe weather**

- 2.1 When it comes to severe weather conditions such as heavy snow, Head Teachers are expected to keep schools open for as many pupils as possible whenever it is reasonable for them to do so. If schools close for whatever reason it can be disruptive to children's education and make life difficult for working parents. Therefore schools should be planning on the basis that they intend to remain open during severe weather.
- 2.2 At some time during the winter we might expect there to be a bout of severe weather. Therefore schools need to have plans in place, even if it doesn't happen this year, it will be valuable planning for the future.
- 2.3 In making plans for the winter, the Head Teacher should consider:
  - how to contact staff and parents, as well as the wider community, including the local authority and the press
  - maintaining stocks of salt and grit and reviewing the level of stock held, in the light of supply problems in previous years
  - identifying which areas of the school site need to be kept clear of snow and ice and ensuring that school staff who will usually assist with salting and gritting or otherwise keeping the relevant parts of the site clear know what steps to take, including undertaking these tasks safely

- arranging for help to be available from the school community to help clear paths, entrances and steps which will involve;
  - a. associated risk assessments to be undertaken by the school and issuing specific instructions to staff, or other people, based on them.
  - b. estimating who amongst your staff will be able to get in safely for the beginning of the day and how you will be able to manage the school in those circumstances.
  - c. preparing for a day (or more) that might involve a reduced curriculum offer, where you will need to supervise students more than be able to provide the usual rich curriculum.
  - d. setting up an incident management team that would be available to manage the situation when it arises.
  - e. working together in cluster groups so that parents with more than one child in schools are able to make their decisions on the basis that schools in the area are making the same arrangements (it might also help with transport arrangements if all schools in an area decide, for example, to open late).

### **3. Taking the decision to close the school**

- 3.1 The DfE advice will be to remain open except in the most extreme or exceptional of circumstances. Head Teachers are authorised to make an emergency closure when the state of the weather or any other exceptional circumstance make it absolutely necessary in the best interests of the pupils.
- 3.2 The overall decision on whether to close therefore lies with the Head Teacher – it is not possible to have a centralised or uniform approach on this matter as each school is best placed to know the local conditions. Head Teachers should inform the Chair of Governors of the decision taken.
- 3.3 Decisions must be supported by the latest and most accurate information available (Met office). The presumption should be in favour of keeping the school open unless, in the Head Teacher’s view, to do so would put the health, safety or welfare of pupils and/or staff at risk. In reaching this decision, Head Teachers should take full account of local circumstances and, in particular, the following considerations:

#### **Both short and longer term weather information.**

- 3.4 It would be inadvisable to react to the first flurry of snow without seeking further

information on the weather conditions ahead. Equally, it would be unwise to send people (pupils or staff) home when a blizzard is at its height.

### **Advice from transport operators**

- 3.5 Transport operators are key players in such circumstances as they will be the ones who decide whether vehicles should/can continue to operate.

### **Arrangements for pupil safety**

- 3.6 The absolute priority is to ensure that provision is made for each and every child. Where children cannot be collected or delivered home, they should be kept at school and supervised.
- 3.7 It is often specific access or other localised issues that require schools to close. Therefore, in these circumstances the closure or opening of other schools in the proximity should not be the key factor in taking decisions. The overriding principle is that it is the responsibility of all employees to make every effort to attend for duty at their normal school.
- 3.8 Any decision to close should, where practicable, be made before 7.00am to allow information to be passed onto the media and relevant people as soon as possible.

### **Closure during the school day**

- 3.9 The safety and well-being of pupils should be paramount. Safe and speedy dismissal of pupils in the event of an emergency closure depends on the school and parents working in partnership.
- 3.10 Parents should be fully aware if there should there be an emergency closure. Normally, this information would appear on school website and be communicated by email.
- 3.11 Parents should provide the school with any specific instructions in respect of their child should the school require to close during the day. Parents are required to give schools an emergency contact and should have told the children what to do in the event of an emergency closure.

### **Precautions**

- 3.12 Reasonable attempts should be made to ensure that children and young people will go home to a safe environment should school be closed. Clearly, the relevance of the following precautions will be dependent upon the age of the child or young person.
- 3.13 It may be that a parent who collects his/her children offers to give shelter to other children. The agreement of the parents of these children should be sought before releasing pupils in this way.

- 3.14 If it is customary for pupils to walk home at the end of the school day, it would be reasonable for the school to release these pupils to walk home in an emergency but only if there were a parent or an identified adult expecting their arrival. Account should be taken also of the age of the pupil, the severity of weather conditions and the distance to be walked.

#### **Children remaining in school**

- 3.15 Provision of adequate supervision by members of teaching staff should be made for those pupils who cannot go home or to their emergency destination immediately and have therefore to remain at school.

#### **4. Remaining open**

- 4.1 As an alternative to closure, Head Teachers should consider:

- opening the school later in the day and closing earlier
- how the school building might be used to ensure there is adequate supervision, for example use of the hall and other larger spaces where this is practicable
- limit the extent to which students have to move between buildings
- plan the curriculum offer or the strategies you will use to ensure students are managed effectively and safely with the staff available

#### **5. Communication arrangements**

- 5.1 It is essential that when there is potential for school closures due to severe weather conditions, Head Teachers are in a position to communicate quickly and clearly with parents. This is just as important in relation to schools which are to remain open as it is to those which are closed. The school website email and local media are now seen by many parents as the information channel in these situations. To make best use of the communication channels they offer, any decision to close should be taken as early in the day as possible.
- 5.2 Schools should also follow the usual procedures (Parent pay) to inform parents and carers. To make every attempt to publicise any closure.

#### **Services**

- 5.3 All of the service providers who will be affected by the closure should be informed as soon as possible.

- 5.4 Arrangements for school transport and crossing patrols should be made.
- 5.5 Schools which share transport should make absolutely certain that each is aware of what the other is doing.
- 5.6 Parents should give strict instructions to the children as to what they should do in the event of transport not turning up to take them to school.

## **6. Arrangements for staff**

- 6.1 The overriding principle is that it is the responsibility of all school staff to make every effort to attend for duty at their normal school. The following arrangements will be adopted where time away from normal place of work becomes necessary as a result of severe weather.

### **First day of bad weather**

- 6.2 Where a member of staff arrives late or leaves early, or is unable to attend work for their contracted hours they should make every effort to report their absence as early as possible. They should engage in a suitable programme of work to be carried out at home.

### **Subsequent days of bad weather**

- 6.3 If the member of staff is still unable to report for work on subsequent days, they should carry out a suitable programme of work at home for up to a maximum of three days in total, subject to review each day in agreement with their line manager.
- 6.4 If this option is not possible, the Head Teacher should use discretion in deciding when to instigate unpaid leave. Where a school is completely closed to all, for example when the police or the authority deems this to be necessary, then salary payments will be unaffected.

### **Deterioration of weather whilst at work**

- 6.5 Should a staff member request to leave early due to weather becoming worse and their desire to head for home, before it possibly becomes too bad to travel, a Head Teacher would be expected to use suitable discretion. In such circumstances, a suitable programme of work to be carried out at home should be agreed.