



Muchgrange NS

Exceptional Closures Policy

2025

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Introduction:

This school policy on exceptional closures was written and reviewed in consultation with staff and approved by the Board of Management of Muchgrange NS.

Background:

Circulars 0011/1995, 0016/2016 and Circular 0072/2022 set out the key information from the Department of Education and Skill's perspective on exceptional closures. School authorities retain discretion in relation to the need for and duration of exceptional closures. In general, a school closure, due to unforeseen circumstances, should be compensated for later in the school year or arrangements put in place that satisfy the Board of Management that the curriculum goals are met prioritising tuition over other non-tuition activities or the period of absence of pupils was utilised by the school staff for essential school activities other than teaching. Every effort must be made to have works of maintenance, building, etc. carried out during vacation periods.

Should some *exceptional circumstances* arise, the Board of Management may close the school even if the school cannot be kept open for 182 days (Rule 60). "**Exceptional cause**" may include the following closures:

- Inclement weather
- Heating breakdown
- Water Breakdown
- Death of a teacher in the school
- Death of a pupil in the school
- Death of a President of Ireland
- Essential repairs (Emergency) that can't be completed during vacation periods.

- In the interests of public health as deemed necessary by the Area Medical Officer of the HSE and Exceptional Closures Policy - 2019

When the closing of a school is deemed necessary in the interests of public health, the written recommendation of the Medical Officer of Health should be obtained by the Chairperson of the Board and forwarded to the Department.

*The responsibility for closing the school rests with the
Board of Management.*

Circular 28/94 advises management authorities that the Director of Community Care/Medical Officer of Health is the appropriate person to decide on matters in relation to public health.

Directors of Community Care/Medical Officers of Health may delegate that authority to the Senior Area Medical Officers or the Area Medical Officers who normally are local General Practitioners.

Rationale:

The rationale behind a school closing for exceptional circumstances, such as adverse weather events, death, or breakdown in essential services like electricity, water, and heating, prioritises the safety and well-being of students and staff. During severe weather conditions, travel hazards and safety risks may prevent safe access to the school, necessitating closure to protect individuals from potential harm. In instances of death, particularly within the school community, closure allows for appropriate mourning and support for those affected, fostering a compassionate and supportive environment. Additionally, the failure of critical services such as electricity, water, or heating can disrupt the learning environment and compromise health and safety standards. By closing, the school ensures that all members of the community are safeguarded, allowing for a return to normal operations only when conditions are suitable and safe.

Relationship to School Ethos: Muchgrange NS strives to provide a child friendly, secure environment catering for all the needs of all students as far as is practicable.

Aims and Objectives:

- To provide for the welfare of all pupils while on the school premises.
- To ensure a safe, child friendly school environment is available to all children.
- To comply with Health and Safety legislation.

Policies and Procedures:

Heavy Snowfall/Icy Conditions: In the event of a heavy snowfall or icy road conditions, the *Principal will consult with the chairperson* of the BoM as soon as is feasible, and a decision will be made as to whether it is in the interests of all parties to close the school. If it is decided to close the school, the *school secretary* will inform parents via email and 'TextaParent'. If the snowfall or icy conditions are prolonged over several days and the school is closed indefinitely, parents and bus operators will be informed of reopening dates through text message from school as well as updates and information posted on the school website.

Disconnection of Services: Where water or electricity services to the school are to be disconnected, a week's notification is normally given to the school authorities. This enables the school to furnish the parent body with the relevant advance warning of such closures via email or text. It is not the policy of the school to confirm such closures through the local radio station.

NB – Breakdown of the school heating system may not result in closure depending on the season and the ability of staff to utilise alternative heat sources – i.e.: electric heaters.

Flooding/High Winds/Thunderstorms: The procedures in place for heavy snowfall are generally replicated in the event of flooding/storms/lightning. If the school has already opened when high winds or other inclement weather occurs and remaining on the premises is a risk to all, teachers will

remain on the premises until all the children have been collected by either parents/guardians or bus operators.

Subject to the requirement outlined above it is for school authorities alone to determine whether it is necessary to close due to adverse weather.

- In the case of a **red warning**, schools must close.
- In the case of an **orange warning**, local conditions may necessitate closure.

Critical Incident/Death: In some instances, the school might remain closed for pupils in the event of a critical incident or death of a staff member, Board member or pupil. Parents are informed of such closures either by email or text. In this instance, the school may remain open to staff and Board of Management or Parents Association if issues such as memorial services, Guards of Honour, readings or counselling is required (*see school Critical Incident Policy*).

Please note: All other regular closures are notified to parents at least one week in advance. The school calendar is available on the website

Summary of Roles and Responsibilities: Exceptional closures in the school place particular responsibilities on various personnel within the school chain of command:

- The Chairperson of BOM, in consultation with the Principal, will be responsible for deciding to close the school.
- School management team members and/or the critical incident committee may assume some responsibility, depending on the circumstances.
- Communication with HSE personnel and compliance with Health and Safety legislation may be necessary.
- Maintaining a safe school environment for all staff, children and parents is of paramount importance. Parents will be informed by note if time allows. If parents cannot be contacted, phone calls/texts will be made by the school management team/secretary and notices will be sent to local radio stations.
- Pupils who cannot be sent home (because of transport problems, parents working) will be supervised by teaching staff until collection.

GOOD PRACTICE BY BOARDS A Board of Management should assess critically each proposal for closure of its school on days not occurring during the school vacation, to determine whether closure of the school is in the best interest of the children. To guarantee that its school is in operation for, the prescribed minimum number of days, a Board, in planning the school year, should make allowance for days on which the school may have to be closed due to unforeseen or exceptional circumstances. The Department will only abate the **minimum requirement of 182** days where the Board can satisfy it that the circumstances that warranted additional closures were entirely exceptional and that, therefore, it would not have been possible to achieve the required minimum over the remaining days of the school year. A Board of Management should bear in mind that events which might require the exceptional closure of a school to pupils (e.g adverse weather) may not necessarily justify the non-attendance of teaching staff.

Lost Time:

Guidance for schools in relation to making up for time lost due to unforeseen school closures is included at Appendix B of Circular 0072/2022. This guidance sets out a structured approach to determining the measures to be put in place to make up for time lost. A non-exhaustive list of possible examples of how this might be achieved include:

Short Term Closure:

- prioritising tuition over other non-tuition activities
- consideration of whether learning in the classroom should be prioritised over school tours, etc.

Extensive or Prolonged school closures:

- The February mid-term break *may* be reduced by up to three days subject to the requirement that all schools must be closed on the Thursday and Friday of the week in which this break falls
- The Easter break *may* be reduced by up to three days by the school remaining open to and including the Wednesday immediately preceding the Easter weekend.
 - It *may* be decided that additional school days be added at the end of the school year.

Implementation and Review: The policy has immediate effect and will be reviewed no later than 2027 or in the light of unplanned events that lead to unscheduled school closures. Ratification and Communication: The policy was ratified by the BoM on the date below. It is posted on the school website.

Ratified by the Board of Management of **Scoil Naomh Mhuire**, Boher on:

_____ Date: _____

Principal

_____ Date: _____

Chairperson