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Adverse Weather & Emergency Site Closure Policy

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1. Purpose

At St John Fisher Catholic Primary School, the safety and wellbeing of our children, families and staff must always come first. We will make every reasonable effort to keep the school open during adverse weather, but there may be occasions when conditions make this unsafe or prevent us from operating effectively.

This policy explains how decisions will be made when snow, ice, high winds, heavy rain, flooding, extreme heat or other emergencies affect the school. It sets out the arrangements for preparing the site, deciding whether the school can open, informing families, managing an unexpected closure during the day and reopening safely.

The aim is to make decisions promptly, communicate clearly and minimise disruption wherever possible, without compromising safety.

2. Scope

This policy applies when adverse weather or an associated emergency affects, or is likely to affect:

- The safety of the school buildings, grounds, entrances and access routes.
- The ability of children, staff and visitors to travel safely to and from school.
- The availability of sufficient staff to supervise children and deliver provision safely.
- Essential services, including heating, electricity, water and sanitation.
- The safe use of classrooms, playgrounds, outdoor learning areas and other facilities.
- The school's ability to remain open throughout the day.

It covers snow, ice, frost, freezing temperatures, high winds, storms, heavy rainfall, flooding, extreme heat, fallen trees, damage to buildings and other emergencies that may require the school to restrict access, change its hours or close.

3. Principles

When considering whether the school can open, the Headteacher will balance the need to maintain education with the safety of the school community.

The following principles will guide decisions:

1. Prioritise the safety and welfare of pupils, staff and visitors.
2. Make decisions based on a proportionate assessment of actual and anticipated risks, rather than a weather warning alone.
3. Make reasonable efforts to keep the school open wherever it is safe and practicable to do so.
4. Consider the condition of the school site, the availability of safe access, essential services and the staff required to supervise pupils.
5. Communicate decisions to families and staff as early as reasonably possible.
6. Maintain appropriate safeguarding and supervision arrangements if the school remains open, closes early or operates with restricted provision.
7. Consider the individual needs of pupils who require additional support, medical care or specific safeguarding arrangements.
8. Record significant decisions, risk assessments, control measures and actions taken.
9. Review the effectiveness of arrangements following any significant weather-related incident.

4. Responsibilities

4.1 Headteacher

The Headteacher is responsible for deciding whether St John Fisher will open as normal, operate with restrictions, change its hours or close.

In reaching a decision, the Headteacher will:

- Monitor Met Office weather forecasts and warnings relevant to Thamesmead and the surrounding area.
- Consider advice from the London Borough of Bexley and relevant emergency services.
- Obtain information about the condition of the premises and any hazards identified.
- Consider whether sufficient staff can attend to operate the school safely.
- Assess whether children can be supervised and essential provision maintained.
- Consult the senior leadership team and available premises support where practicable.
- Decide what action is necessary and when it should take effect.
- Ensure that parents and carers, staff and relevant service providers are informed.

- Ensure that the school closure information is published through the agreed communication channels.
- Record significant decisions, the reasons for them and any follow-up action required.

Where an immediate decision is needed to protect safety, the Headteacher may act without prior consultation.

If the Headteacher is unavailable, the designated senior leader will make an urgent decision using the same principles and will inform the Headteacher as soon as practicable.

4.2 Premises support

The person undertaking premises duties will, where available and safe to do so, support the Headteacher by:

- Checking the condition of entrances, paths, steps, playgrounds, drainage and other relevant external areas.
- Identifying ice, standing water, fallen branches, damaged structures and other hazards.
- Checking that heating, electricity, water and other essential services are operating safely.
- Undertaking or arranging appropriate precautionary measures, including gritting designated areas where necessary.
- Restricting access to unsafe areas and reporting hazards promptly.
- Recording inspections, remedial actions and any areas that cannot safely be made available.
- Reporting building damage or suspected defects that require specialist assessment.

Where the usual Premises Manager is unavailable, the Headteacher will confirm who is responsible for carrying out these checks and actions. Agency staff and other premises support must only undertake tasks for which they are suitably competent, instructed and equipped.

The school must not rely on the availability of a particular individual without ensuring that suitable cover and clear responsibilities are in place. If essential premises checks

cannot be completed safely or adequately, this will be taken into account when deciding whether the school can open or remain open.

4.3 Senior leadership team

The senior leadership team will support the Headteacher by reviewing staffing capacity, supervision arrangements, the needs of vulnerable pupils, communication with families and the practical implications of opening or closure.

Senior leaders may be asked to assist with site checks, staff communication, parent communication, pupil supervision and the implementation of any agreed restrictions or emergency arrangements.

4.4 All staff

Staff are expected to:

- Take reasonable care of their own safety and that of others.
- Report hazards or damage promptly.
- Follow instructions concerning access restrictions, supervision and emergency arrangements.
- Inform the Headteacher or designated senior leader as early as possible if severe weather is likely to prevent them from attending work safely or cause significant delay.
- Avoid undertaking unsafe journeys or tasks because of pressure to attend work.
- Follow any arrangements for alternative working or deployment communicated by the Headteacher.

Staff attendance and any necessary adjustments to working arrangements will be managed in accordance with the school's employment procedures and relevant guidance.

4.5 Parents and carers

Parents and carers are expected to check official school communications during periods of adverse weather, follow instructions concerning access and collection, and inform the school if weather-related circumstances prevent their child from attending safely.

Parents and carers remain responsible for making reasonable decisions about the safety of their child's journey, taking account of local conditions and the individual circumstances of their child.

Any weather-related absence should be reported to the school and will be considered in accordance with the Attendance Policy and applicable attendance guidance.

Parents and carers should ensure that their contact details on School Gateway are up to date and that they can receive school messages. They should not rely solely on social media, informal messages or information about the closure of other schools.

5. Monitoring and preparation

During periods when adverse weather is forecast or reasonably anticipated, the Headteacher or designated member of staff will monitor relevant forecasts and warnings, including information from the Met Office.

Checks should be proportionate to the forecast conditions and may include:

- Reviewing weather warnings and expected timings.
- Considering the likely condition of roads, pavements and public transport.
- Assessing the condition of school entrances, pedestrian routes, steps, playgrounds and other external areas.
- Checking whether the school building and essential services are likely to remain safe and operational.
- Confirming the availability of appropriate premises and supervision staff.
- Ensuring suitable materials and equipment are available for managing foreseeable hazards.
- Identifying any areas that may need to be closed or access restricted.
- Considering the needs of pupils who may be particularly affected by the conditions.

Where significant weather is forecast overnight, an initial review should take place before the normal school opening arrangements begin. Where conditions are developing during the day, monitoring should continue and the risk assessment should be reviewed as necessary.

Where practicable, preparations should be made before conditions deteriorate. The school will not require staff to undertake checks or remedial work where doing so would expose them to unreasonable risk.

6. Snow, ice and freezing temperatures

Snow and ice can create risks of slips, falls and unsafe access. The school will take reasonable and practicable steps to reduce these risks.

Where necessary, designated access routes will be prioritised for inspection and treatment. These will normally include the main pedestrian entrance, the principal route into the school building and other essential access routes. The precise areas to be treated will depend on the conditions and the school's site risk assessment.

The school will:

- Identify priority routes for gritting or other appropriate treatment.
- Ensure suitable materials and equipment are available.
- Arrange treatment before the school opens where conditions and staffing allow.
- Restrict access to areas that remain unsafe.
- Use appropriate warning signs or barriers where necessary.
- Monitor treated areas because conditions can deteriorate or ice can reform.
- Record significant inspections, treatment and decisions to restrict access.

Gritting must only be undertaken by a person who has been appropriately instructed, with suitable equipment and consideration of manual handling and other risks. Staff must not be expected to work outside safely manageable conditions.

The school recognises that it may not be practicable to remove every patch of snow or ice. Decisions will therefore focus on identifying and controlling significant risks, prioritising essential routes and preventing access to areas that cannot be made reasonably safe.

Where safe access cannot be maintained, or conditions elsewhere on the site present unacceptable risks, the Headteacher will consider restricting access, delaying opening or closing the school.

7. High winds and storms

During high winds or storms, the school will consider the risks posed by falling branches, loose roofing materials, damaged fences, unstable outdoor equipment, debris and other hazards.

The school may:

- Close outdoor play areas or parts of the grounds.
- Suspend outdoor learning, PE and other outdoor activities.
- Secure or remove loose items where safe to do so.
- Restrict access to areas beneath trees, near damaged structures or close to other identified hazards.
- Arrange inspection by a competent person where damage or structural concerns are suspected.
- Check for damage to roofs, fencing, external equipment and other parts of the premises following significant conditions.

Staff must not attempt to deal with fallen trees, damaged structures, electrical hazards or other dangerous situations unless they are suitably competent and it is safe to do so.

Where damage affects the building, safe access or the operation of essential services, the Headteacher will assess whether partial or full closure is necessary. Any affected area must remain out of use until it has been assessed and made safe.

8. Heavy rain and flooding

The school will monitor conditions where heavy rainfall may cause flooding, standing water, drainage problems or water ingress into the building.

Staff will report flooding and water ingress promptly. Areas affected by standing water, slippery surfaces, electrical hazards or suspected structural damage will be isolated until they have been assessed and made safe.

Where flooding affects safe access, classrooms, electrical systems, heating, sanitation or other essential facilities, the Headteacher will consider whether the affected areas can be taken out of use or whether the school must close.

Where water is suspected of affecting electrical installations, staff must not enter the affected area or attempt to operate electrical equipment until it has been confirmed safe to do so by an appropriate competent person.

Emergency services and relevant local authority or specialist support will be contacted where the severity of the incident requires it.

Before affected areas are brought back into use, the school will consider whether cleaning, drying, repairs or specialist inspection is required.

9. Extreme heat

During periods of unusually high temperatures, the school will take reasonable steps to reduce the risk of heat-related illness and discomfort.

Measures may include:

- Ensuring pupils have access to drinking water.
- Making appropriate use of ventilation and available shading.
- Adjusting the timing or intensity of physical activity.
- Limiting strenuous outdoor activity during the hottest periods.
- Making uniform changes: pupils wearing P.E. kits.
- Making appropriate adjustments for pupils and staff who may be particularly vulnerable to heat.
- Monitoring classroom conditions and the effectiveness of control measures.
- Moving activities to cooler suitable areas where practicable.

Staff should remain alert to signs that a pupil or colleague may be experiencing heat-related illness and follow the school's usual first aid and emergency procedures where necessary.

Where conditions inside the building become unsuitable for safe occupation, or essential services fail, the Headteacher will consider whether alternative arrangements, restricted use of particular rooms or temporary closure are necessary.

10. Deciding whether to open or close

The Headteacher will make the decision about opening, delayed opening, partial closure, early closure or full closure, taking account of the circumstances at the time.

The options are:

- Open as normal: The school opens at its usual time and operates as planned, with any necessary precautions.
- Open with restrictions: The school remains open, but particular areas, facilities or activities are unavailable.
- Open with amended hours: The school opens later or closes earlier where this can be managed safely and communicated clearly.
- Partial closure: Part of the school or a particular provision is closed where the remaining provision can still operate safely.
- Full closure: The school is closed to pupils for all or part of the day.

The assessment will consider:

- The severity, duration and timing of the weather.
- The safety of the school site and access routes.
- The condition of local roads and pavements and the availability of public transport.
- Whether sufficient staff can attend to provide safe supervision and meet the needs of pupils.
- Whether heating, electricity, water, sanitation, catering and other essential services are available and safe.
- The needs of pupils who require additional support, medical care or specific care arrangements.
- Whether identified risks can be controlled through reasonable measures.
- Advice from relevant local authority services and other appropriate agencies.
- The likely effect of the decision on pupils already on site and the safety of their journey home.

A weather warning will not automatically result in closure. Equally, the absence of a formal warning will not prevent the Headteacher from closing the school if local conditions create unacceptable risks.

The school will aim to remain open wherever it is safe and practicable to do so. Closure will be considered where risks cannot reasonably be controlled, the premises cannot be accessed safely, essential facilities are unavailable or staffing levels are insufficient to maintain safe provision.

The Headteacher may consult the Chair of Governors or relevant local authority representatives where appropriate. Consultation must not delay urgent action needed to protect pupils and staff.

The Headteacher will record significant decisions and the main reasons for them.

11. Communication of closure

11.1 School communication

School Gateway is the school's primary communication channel for informing parents and carers about school closures and changes to normal arrangements. The school website will be updated as a further source of information where practicable.

The school will communicate decisions to staff through the school's agreed internal communication arrangements. The Headteacher will also follow the applicable London Borough of Bexley school-closure notification procedures and any other relevant reporting requirements.

The school will aim to communicate decisions as early as reasonably possible. Where a situation is developing and a final decision cannot yet be made, further updates will be provided when practicable.

A closure message should state, as appropriate:

- Whether the school is closed, opening late, closing early or operating with restricted provision.
- The date and, where relevant, the expected time of closure or reopening.
- Whether clubs, wraparound provision, trips, meetings or other activities are cancelled.
- Any arrangements for collecting pupils already on site.
- Whether any areas or facilities are unavailable.
- How families will receive further updates.

The school will use alternative communication methods where appropriate if School Gateway or the website is unavailable. Families should not rely solely on social media or informal messages for confirmation of school arrangements.

11.2 Checking school closures through GOV.UK

Parents and carers can also use the GOV.UK school-closure service to find the relevant local council website:

https://www.gov.uk/check-school-closure

When prompted, enter the school's postcode, DA18 4BA. The service will direct users to the relevant local council website, where school closure information may be available.

Parents and carers should check School Gateway and the school website before setting out in severe weather. The GOV.UK service provides an additional route to local authority information; it does not replace the school's own communications.

If a parent or carer is unsure about arrangements, they should check the published updates before travelling. They should not assume that the school is closed simply because weather conditions are poor or another school has closed.

12. Closure before the school day begins

If the school is to remain closed before the start of the school day, the Headteacher or designated senior leader will:

1. Review the forecast, site information, essential services and available staffing.
2. Assess whether the risks can be managed through reasonable measures or whether closure is necessary.
3. Confirm the decision and record the reasons.
4. Notify staff and families through School Gateway and update the school website where practicable.
5. Notify the relevant local authority or other required bodies in accordance with local procedures.
6. Confirm arrangements for any scheduled clubs, meetings, visitors, contractors or other activities.
7. Consider whether remote education is appropriate if closure is prolonged.
8. Review the situation if conditions change and communicate any subsequent decisions.

Staff should not travel to the school following a closure instruction unless specifically authorised to do so and it is safe to travel.

Where the decision is to delay opening rather than close for the day, the communication must clearly state the revised opening time and any arrangements

families need to follow. The school will only open once it is satisfied that the premises and staffing arrangements are safe.

13. Closure during the school day

If conditions deteriorate after pupils have arrived, the Headteacher will assess whether the school can safely remain open.

Where early closure is necessary, the school will:

1. Inform staff and parents or carers as soon as possible through School Gateway and use the school website where practicable.
2. Confirm collection arrangements and the expected collection time.
3. Ensure pupils remain supervised in a safe indoor area until collected or otherwise safely dismissed.
4. Follow the school's normal collection and authorised-release procedures.
5. Make individual arrangements for pupils whose parents or carers cannot collect them promptly.
6. Maintain appropriate safeguarding arrangements until every pupil has been safely dismissed or transferred to an agreed arrangement.
7. Record the decision, the reason for closure and any significant actions taken.

No child will be left unsupervised or released to an unauthorised person because of the pressure created by an early closure.

Parents and carers will be asked to follow the collection instructions provided by the school and to contact the school if they are unable to collect their child within the stated timeframe.

Where a pupil normally attends wraparound provision or an after-school club, the school will communicate whether that provision is affected and what arrangements apply.

Where it is unsafe for staff or pupils to leave the building immediately, the school will follow the appropriate emergency arrangements and seek assistance where necessary.

14. Partial closure and restricted provision

Where risks are confined to a particular area or activity, the Headteacher may decide to restrict access rather than close the whole school.

Examples include:

- Closing a playground or part of the school grounds.
- Restricting access to a particular entrance or pathway.
- Moving a class to an alternative suitable room.
- Suspending outdoor activities.
- Taking a room or facility out of use because of temperature, water ingress, damage or an essential service failure.
- Adjusting the use of the premises to maintain safe supervision.

Any alternative arrangements must maintain appropriate supervision, accessibility, safeguarding and health and safety standards. Areas must not be used until the relevant risks have been assessed and controlled.

The Headteacher will consider whether restrictions can be implemented without compromising the safety or educational needs of pupils. If safe provision cannot be maintained, full or partial closure will be considered.

Parents and carers and staff will be informed of any restrictions that materially affect school arrangements.

15. Remote education and continuity of learning

Where closure is necessary and likely to affect pupils' education beyond a short period, the Headteacher will consider the school's emergency remote education arrangements and relevant Department for Education guidance.

Any provision will be proportionate to the circumstances, the length of disruption, pupils' ages and access to learning resources. Appropriate consideration will be given to pupils with SEND and those who may face barriers to accessing remote learning.

Where possible, families will be informed of the arrangements for accessing learning and any support available.

The provision of remote education does not replace the requirement to assess whether the school can safely remain open or reopen as soon as reasonably practicable.

16. Reopening following adverse weather

Before reopening, the Headteacher or designated member of staff will confirm that the site can be occupied safely.

This will include consideration of:

- The condition of entrances, pathways, playgrounds and other external areas.
- Any remaining ice, flooding, debris or storm damage.
- The safety and operation of the building and essential services.
- The availability of sufficient staff for safe supervision.
- Any areas that must remain closed or restricted.
- Any outstanding remedial work or specialist advice required.
- Whether suitable access and safeguarding arrangements can be maintained.

Where risks can be managed through restrictions or alternative arrangements, these will be considered before a full closure is extended.

The school will not reopen an affected area until it has been assessed and any necessary control measures are in place. Where specialist assessment or repairs are required, the school will take appropriate advice before allowing the area to be used again.

Families and staff will be informed of the reopening arrangements, including any continuing restrictions, through School Gateway and the school website where practicable.

If the school is to reopen at a later time than usual, the revised opening time and any relevant arrangements will be communicated clearly.

17. Recording and review

Significant weather-related decisions and actions will be recorded. Records may include:

- Weather warnings and forecast information considered.
- Site inspection findings.
- Risk assessments and control measures.
- Gritting or other remedial actions.
- Decisions to open, delay opening, close or restrict access and the reasons for them.

- Communications issued to staff, parents and relevant agencies.
- Any accidents, near misses, damage or service failures.
- Actions required before reopening.
- Any follow-up measures identified after the event.

Records will be retained in accordance with the school's record-keeping arrangements. Following a significant incident, the Headteacher will review the effectiveness of the school's response and identify any improvements needed. This may include reviewing communication arrangements, site preparation, staff responsibilities, risk assessments and the effectiveness of measures taken.

The policy and supporting arrangements will be reviewed at least annually and following any significant change in circumstances or lessons learned from a weather-related incident.

18. Related information

- **School Gateway:** St John Fisher's primary communication channel for parents and carers.
- **St John Fisher Catholic Primary School website:** https://www.sjf.bexley.sch.uk/
- **GOV.UK - Check school closures:** https://www.gov.uk/check-school-closure
  Enter postcode **DA18 4BA** to find the relevant local council website.
- **Met Office weather warnings:**
  https://www.metoffice.gov.uk/weather/warnings-and-advice/uk-warnings
- **Department for Education - Emergency planning and response for education settings:** https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/emergency-planning-and-response-for-education-childcare-and-childrens-social-care-settings