**Winter Planning Guidance for Schools in Kent  
2021-2022**

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| *“Schools should, wherever possible, stay open in severe weather. They play a key role in their communities and by staying open help both their pupils and parents.”*  **– Department for Education** |

Every winter brings the possibility of snow and ice. Extreme bad weather can cause widespread and prolonged disruption. Schools are often affected and it can be difficult to maintain an education service.

This guidance provides advice for headteachers about the risks that schools may face, some preventative strategies and advice on how to communicate a school closure to parents, stakeholders and the Local Authority.

This winter has the added complication of the impact of Coronavirus and possibility of disruption linked to the termination of the UK/EU transition period. It is essential therefore that schools take the action in this guide to prevent disruption from winter weather

The aim of the guidance is to be a useful touchstone and offer reassurance that acting reasonably and applying sound risk assessment principles will enable headteachers to determine risks and to confidently make the best decisions for schools.

This guidance has the following sections:

* Preparing for severe snow and ice – short and long term actions
* School staff
* Risk assessment/management
* Communication with parents and staff
* The Kent Closures Website
* Appendix 1: Useful Websites
* Appendix 2: Example Newsletter to Parents
* Appendix 3: Risk Assessment Template

As a fundamental principle, every effort must be made to keep schools open, even if only limited numbers of pupils can attend. Following the Coronavirus lockdown, most schools are now experienced at managing partial closures. However, there will be circumstances where schools may have to close completely due to unavoidable circumstances, an example being that it is no longer safe for staff or pupils to be onsite. The cancellation or reduction of public transport or the inability to run a normal timetable due to staff absences are not in themselves, reasons for closure.

The government has stressed the importance of schools remaining open, wherever possible, as closures have a knock on effect on parents/carers who are key workers in other areas of the public sector, e.g. Health Services, thus undermining crucial service delivery. The overriding principle is, therefore, for schools to remain open to the maximum degree possible, as is consistent with health and safety requirements, even if it is not possible to run a full timetable.

**Preparing for Severe Snow and Ice**

There are long and short term measures you can take that will increase your ability to remain open during times of severe snow and ice.

**Long term** – consider these actions well in advance of winter weather:

* Develop a written school policy for extreme snow and icy conditions and ensure it is fully communicated to staff and parents/carers. (See Appendix 2: Example Newsletter to Parents).
* Ensure stocks of salt/grit/sand are adequate for the time of year and foreseeable weather.
* Consider alternative local suppliers of road salt, such as your Parish Council. Please remember salt stocks should be sourced well in advance of winter, not days before predicted snow because transporting salt may be inhibited by bad weather.
* Pre‐identify the outdoor areas used by pedestrians most likely to be affected by ice, for example: ‐ building entrances, pedestrian walkways, shortcuts, sloped areas and areas constantly in the shade or wet.
* Ensure water, boiler and heating systems are regularly maintained.
* Inspect windows and exterior doors for draughts. Consider repairs and draught‐proofing.
* Check that pipes are appropriately lagged.
* Consider making arrangements with a contractor to clear the school site (as supermarkets do) and possibly work with other schools to share the service.
* Talk to local community groups that may be able to support during heavy snow and ice.
* Perhaps put agreements in place with staff in advance of severe weather.

**Short term** – consider these actions daysbefore forecasted severe snow and ice:

* Regularly check weather forecasts via news and websites. Take action whenever freezing temperatures are forecast. A member of staff could be designated to monitor the following sites:
  + BBC Weather <http://www.bbc.co.uk/weather>
  + Met Office [http://www.metoffice.gov.uk](http://www.metoffice.gov.uk/)
* Leave heating on a low setting overnight.
* Where curtains and blinds are fitted consider closing them at night to retain heat.
* Close doors between areas of differing temperatures.
* To enable proper circulation of warm air, consider keeping radiators clear of obstruction.
* Put procedures in place to prevent any icy surface forming and/or to keep pedestrians off the slippery surface.
* Use grit or similar on areas prone to being slippery in frosty/icy conditions.
  + Gritting should be carried out when frost, ice and snow is forecast or when walkways are likely to be damp or wet and the ground temperatures are at, or below freezing.
  + The best time is early evening before the frost settles, if this is not possible (or additional salt is required), use it early in the morning before people arrive. Salt doesn’t work instantly; it needs sufficient time to dissolve into the moisture on the ground. Please remember, if you grit when it is raining heavily the salt will be washed away causing a problem if the rain then turns to snow.
* Divert pedestrians to less slippery walkways and barrier off existing ones.
* Consider plans to restrict the movement of pupils and staff around the school grounds.
* Remember it is not always necessary to clear the car park of snow as it can be taken out of use until such time as it is safe to be used. Staff can make alternative parking arrangements providing it is safe to do so.
* Accidents can happen inside, where water, ice or snow can make interior floors very slippery. Ensure access points into buildings have the means for people to wipe off water, snow or ice from their shoes.

**School Staff**

Please remember you cannot direct a member of staff to drive in severe weather. However, the expectation is that staff will make every effort to attend school during severe snow and ice except in the most extreme cases where they can demonstrate a high degree of risk or by virtue of distance or terrain and absence of transport that it’s simply not possible for them to attend.

* The headteacher should be aware of the location of their staff and be able to communicate with them to determine attendance.
* Ask staff in advance, what alternative arrangements they intend to make to get to work: walk, bus, train, car sharing. Please bear in mind any prevailing Covid restrictions.
* Please also consider planning for staff such as county clearance/gritting plans/routes etc (information about planned gritting routes can be found on:

<https://www.kent.gov.uk/roads-and-travel/what-we-look-after/winter-service/road-salting-and-snow-clearance>

* If possible, consider arranging for staff to accommodate each other locally in severe conditions if returning home is impossible. Please bear in mind any prevailing Covid restrictions
* An agreement may be reached for certain staff not to be expected until later in the morning or to be released early.

**Risk Assessment/Management**

Risk management and assessment aims to help schools identify potential risks in advance of severe snow and ice and ensure appropriate control measures are implemented. It also assists headteachers in making the right decision on the day by adopting an approach that is grounded in common sense and being proportionate.

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| *“‘The decision whether to close must however, be for headteachers as they know their schools and surrounding areas. They should use common sense in assessing the risks when deciding whether to keep their schools open.”*  **– Department for Education** |

The decision to close or restrict attendance should be taken by the headteacher of the school or in their absence by the most senior member of the teaching staff available and after the completion of a suitable and sufficient risk assessment (see Appendix 3: Risk Assessment Template).

The following should be considered and management systems put in place:

* Is the school building accessible?
  + Are pedestrian routes on the school grounds passable?
  + Are there means to clear these routes e.g. salt/grit?
  + Can priority be made in respect to slopes, steps or ramps or can these areas be restricted from use?
  + Outside metal staircases should also be avoided unless appropriately treated.
* Can the headteacher ensure enough teaching and/or supervisory staff to operate safely?
  + The emphasis would be to operate safely, not whether a full or normal curriculum could be followed.
  + There are no supervisor ratios for non‐teaching periods. Internal management should decide staffing numbers depending on risk and by considering the type of pupils (age, behaviour, disabilities) and the type of activity they are doing.
* Is the school appropriately heated?
  + Is there enough fuel for the day?
* Are water systems working appropriately?
* Is it possible to restrict outside play to limit the snow/ice becoming compacted and therefore more dangerous?

It is important that a risk assessment is completed prior to the decision being taken to close, in order to ensure all the safety issues have been considered and control measures implemented. It will also serve as justification if needed, to defend the school closure.

Several times during the day, headteachers should review their risk assessment. It is expected that a school will remain open until normal time for the end of the school day. However, if the revised risk assessment indicates that circumstances have changed to such an extent that the headteacher believes conditions are now unsafe, early closure may be necessary. In such circumstances the school should register their closure online at (see ‘Communication with Parents and Staff’).

A school must never close completely unless the headteacher is certain that no child will present his/herself without the means to return home safely. This may mean that a member of staff needs to be present at the school until outside of normal school hours. Similarly, a member of school staff must remain on site, after a closure decision, in case any students or staff arrive at the school after it has announced it is closed. Arrangements must always be made for the safety and security of children with parental consent being required if sending them home.

If you have any questions about completing a risk assessment, please contact Kent County Council’s Health and Safety Unit on 03000 418456 or [healthandsafety@kent.gov.uk](mailto:healthandsafety@kent.gov.uk).

**Communication with Parents and Staff**

It is vital that parents and staff are made aware of the school’s closure as early as possible. Please

also consider any onsite stakeholders that may also be affected if the school is closed, e.g. Adult

Education classes etc.

***Communication with parents in advance of severe snow/ice***

You may already do this but consider communicating with parents in advance of severe snow and ice via a school newsletter to aid preparation and ensure they know how to find out if the school is closed. (See Appendix 2: Example Newsletter to Parents).

* Re‐iterate the advice from the Department of Education about schools remaining open (see page 1).
* Remind parents about the preparations the school will be undertaking to ensure the school remains open for as long as possible.
* Remind parents they can go online to see if their school is closed [www.kentclosures.co.uk](http://www.kentclosures.co.uk)
* The Kent Closures website may also display closures for a number of services including libraries, nurseries and Children’s Centres.
* Remind parents that local radio such as KMFM, BBC Radio Kent and Heart FM, will sometimes give some information on school closures.
* They can also visit [www.kent.gov.uk/winter](http://www.kent.gov.uk/winter) for more information about salting routes, KCC, services affected, travel issues etc.
* Suggest parents should sign up for the email alerts on [www.kentclosures.co.uk](http://www.kentclosures.co.uk/)
* Suggest visiting the BBC or gov.uk websites for home learning resources to support children’s learning while the school is closed, although most schools already have comprehensive blended and remote learning measures in place where necessary, due to experience following Covid closures.

**The Kent Closures Website**

After the decision has been made to close or partially close the school you will want to communicate that closure to parents and staff as soon as possible.

The Kent Closures website has been completely overhauled for 2022. It allows a school representative to log in (with a school specific password) and change the ‘status’ of the school to ‘open’, ‘closed’ or ‘partially open’. The information will then be displayed on the website for parents and staff and notifications will be sent out by email to all registered users.

Please also consider any onsite stakeholders that may be affected if the school is closed e.g. Adult Education classes, Early Years provisions, etc.

**Please note**: this website is intended to display term time closures only, not times when the school is closed due to holidays.

**Register with the Kent Closures Website**

In advance of winter please register, or check your registration, with the Kent Closures website

It is case sensitive, so best to copy and 'paste as plain text'.

To access the site:

1. Click on the link. <https://kentclosures.co.uk>

2. This will show three tabs.  "Register for Alerts", "User Sign-In " and "Administrator sign-in"

3. Schools need to use the "Administrator Sign In" tab.  ("Users" are the people such as staff, students or parents who register to receive alerts)

4. Click on the drop down "Select administration level"

5. Click "School or Venue", then "Continue"

6. Type in your school name until the school name appears.  Click on it

7. Enter the pass code that should have been sent to you by your Area Education Officer team. If you haven’t received one, contact your Area Education officer. The passcode is case sensitive, so type or copy/paste (paste as plain text)

**Parents, Carers and Staff**

If previously registered under the old system, then that registration will have transferred over, but users should check that they are registered.

**Existing Users**

There is a Forgot Password field that sends the password to their email. From there they can amend their details, and update / change their password as well as add / remove schools and alert types.

If you cannot use the email address that you have used in the past, please register again, as a New User, below.

**New Users**

Parents/carers and staff may register as users at any time now, by them clicking on the "Register for Alerts" tab and completing the fields.  Note that after registering as a user, they can choose to receive notification from one or more schools or establishments as they need.

For most users, email is now the only method of notification. SMS texts may still be received by a few users, but are no longer an option for new users.

If you registered last year, you can still use the same email address and password to log in.

If you don’t know whether your school is already registered, you can find out by clicking on your school from the drop-down menu. You may then receive a message on screen saying you’ve already registered. This means you are already registered and have already created your school specific password. If you don’t remember your password, click the original ‘Education service login’ button again and under ‘School / Service Log in’, type in the email address which was previously displayed in the onscreen message and click ‘forgot password’. A password reminder will then be sent to your registered email address.

If you need to change the email address that you originally registered with last year, you should re-register your school as a new school. KCC officers periodically trawl through the registered schools and remove duplicates.

**On the morning of severe snow/ice, or other closure, including Covid.**

Once the decision has been made to close your school:

1. Click on the link. <https://kentclosures.co.uk>

2. Schools need to use the "Administrator Sign In" tab.

3. Click on the drop down "Select administration level"

5. Click "School or Venue", then "Continue"

6. Type in your school name until the school name appears.  Click on it

7. Type in your school pass code. It is case sensitive.

8. You should arrive at a page with five tabs on it. Click on the fourth tab, “Send Alert”. Note that the first tab allows you to notify changes to your school details. The second and third tabs are not used. They are not integral to the operation of the website and are being purged. There might be some cross transfer of data, but there is no action for your school, and any data is not confidential. The fifth tab is for you to sign out.

The fourth tab brings you to a page that looks like this:

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|  | ***To Notify Users of a status change*** |
| Tick both if you are notifying a closure or re-opening.  Tick neither if you are updating your status form some time ago. |
| Only use this with bubble/year or partial closures due to Covid |
| Choose status change.  Open  Closed  Partially Open |
| Whatever you type into the first box, will go out to all registered users.  The second box is just for nay notes you wish to make. It will not be broadcast.  Finally click confirm status change. |

It is now no longer necessary for your school to call the radio stations and/or the Local Authority to announce the school closure. However, you can still speak to your Area Education Officer if you would like advice about whether to close or not.

**Re-Opening**

Remember to change your status back when the school opens again.

If you cannot get online on the morning of severe snow/ice, you can call your Area Education Officer (AEO) or Area Schools Organisation Officer (ASOO) and they will note the necessary details and complete the online information for you. Their contact details are below:

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| **Marisa White** | **Area Education Officer for East Kent**  **Canterbury, Swale and Thanet** | 03000 418794 | 07834 841560 |
| Lorraine Medwin | Area Schools Organisation Officer, East Kent | 03000 422660 |  |
| Aimee Lloyd | PA to Marisa White | 03000 416143 |  |
|  |  |  |  |
| **Ian Watts** | **Area Education Officer for North Kent**  **Dartford, Sevenoaks & Gravesham** | 03000 414302 | 07919 212062 |
| David Hart | Area Schools Organisation Officer, North Kent | 03000 410195 |  |
| Ann Drury | PA to Ian Watts | 03000 410157 |  |
|  |  |  |  |
| **Lee Round** | **Area Education Officer for South Kent**  **Dover, Ashford and Folkestone & Hythe** | 03000 421415 | 07824 306242 |
| Debbie Sales | Area Schools Organisation Officer, South Kent | 03000 419328 |  |
| Julie Hawkins | PA to Lee Round | 03000 410199 |  |
|  |  |  |  |
| **Nick Abrahams** | **Area Education Officer for West Kent**  **Maidstone, Tonbridge & Malling and Tunbridge Wells** | 03000 410058 | 07967 467106 |
| Paul Wilson | Area Schools Organisation Officer, West Kent | 03000 415650 |  |
| Emma O’Connor | PA to Nick Abrahams | 03000 412134 |  |

***SMS Service***

The SMS service is no longer being offered as an option. Those parents with outstanding credit will still continue to receive alerts, but no new requests for SMS alerts will be accepted. All alerts are by email, although KCC are considering looking into the development of an smartphone app that receives free alerts.

***Be Prepared***

Before the winter and the chance of severe snow/ice, please ensure:

1. A member(s) of staff has been nominated to carry out the process of logging into the Kent

Closures website and changing the status should the school need to close.

1. The password has been kept secure but is easily accessible/known by the several nominated persons.
2. That [www.kentclosures.co.uk](http://www.kentclosures.co.uk/) is accessible or saved as a quick link on a school/home computer.
3. The number for your AEO/ASOO is known should you be unable to get online.
4. The name and contact number of the AEO is available should you require advice about

whether to close or not.

**Appendix 1: Useful Websites**

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| Kent County Council Highways | School closures, gritting routes | <http://www.kent.gov.uk/winter> |
| Kent Health and Safety Unit | All aspects of H & S, including Event Safety, First Aid and Lone Working | <https://www.kelsi.org.uk/school-management/health-and-safety> |
| Health and Safety Executive | Risk assessment/ management | <http://www.hse.gov.uk/risk/index.htm> |
| Highways Agency | Conditions on motorways and trunk roads | <https://www.trafficengland.com> |
| AA Road Traffic Advice | Traffic on Kent Roads | <http://www.theaa.com/traffic-news/index.jsp> |
| RAC Road Traffic | Traffic on Kent Roads | [https://www.rac.co.uk/route-planner/traffic-news](https://www.rac.co.uk/route-planner/traffic-news/) |
| Bus routes | Arriva | [https://www.arrivabus.co.uk/kent-and-surrey/updates](https://www.arrivabus.co.uk/kent-and-surrey/updates/) |
| Bus Routes | Stagecoach | <https://www.stagecoachbus.com/regional-service-updates/south-east> |
| Bus Routes | Go Coach | <http://www.go-coach.co.uk> |
| Bus Routes | Chalkwell | <https://chalkwell.co.uk/bus-services> |
| Bus Routes | Nu Venture | <http://www.nu-venture.co.uk> |
| Bus Routes | RedRoute | <http://www.redroutebuses.co.uk/news> |
| Bus Routes | Kent Coach Tours | [https://kentcoachtours.co.uk/bus-services](https://kentcoachtours.co.uk/bus-services/) |
| Bus Routes | 1st Bus | <https://www.1stbusstop.co.uk/routes> |

**Appendix 2: Example Newsletter to Parents**

Dear Parents and Carers,

***Severe Snow/Ice Plan for Parents and Families***

Every winter brings the possibility of snow and ice. Extreme bad weather can cause widespread and prolonged disruption. Schools are often affected and it can be difficult to maintain an education service.

As a fundamental principle every effort must be made to keep schools open, even if only limited numbers of pupils can attend. However, schools may close due to ‘unavoidable’ circumstances. Those circumstances being that it is no longer safe for staff or pupils to be onsite.

We recognise that it is important our school remains open so parents are able to work and pupils can continue to learn. **[Name of school]** will make every effort to prepare for severe snow/ice this winter by **[insert preparations e.g. gritting pathways, clearing access points etc].**

***How will we let you know if the school is closed?***

If we do experience severe snow/ice resulting in hazardous conditions, [**our Headteacher]** may have to take the decision to close the school. Once this decision has been made we will notify parents via the Kent Closures website. To determine whether [**name of school**] is open or closed please visit [www.kentclosures.co.uk.](http://www.kentclosures.co.uk/) Search for the school in the search box. The Kent Closures website may also be used to find out if other services in Kent are open or closed, such as nurseries, children’s centres and libraries. We also recommend parents sign up for Email alerts on the Kent Closures website. This service will send an email alert to let parents know if **[name of school]** is closed. Local radio will sometimes provide information of school closures.

***What can you do to help?***

* Please visit [www.kent.gov.uk/winter](http://www.kent.gov.uk/winter) for more information about gritting routes and travel issues around Kent so you can plan your journey.
* Please approach the school from **[detail a pre‐identified access into the school].**
* Check with the school to see whether you need to provide a packed lunch from home in case school meals cannot be provided.
* Don’t forget suitable warm clothing – gloves, hats, scarves, wellies etc. or even a change of clothing.
* If you are a working parent or feel you may have a problem with a sudden earlier pick up, please could you put a back‐up plan in place with another family member or parent and inform the school. This will allow staff to leave earlier for their safety if weather dictates.

Many thanks for your support in helping **[name of school]** remain open during periods of severe snow/ice.

**Appendix 3 Risk Assessment Template for Snow and Ice**

In accordance with government policy every effort should be made to keep a school open and the closure of the school must be justified. In order to determine a decision, work through the following risk assessment. If your site has specific issues that are not listed, these should be added. Any pre‐planning controls not in place must be transferred to your action plan at the end.

This assessment should be carried out:

• Before any bad weather arrives ‐ make sure identified control measures are implemented; refer to your action plan at end

• At the time of the emergency ‐ consider and complete last header column

• After the event ‐ does the risk assessment need to be reviewed?

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|  | **Are the following control measures in place?** | **State what risks are involved and the consequence of the risk** | **State which control measures are in place to reduce the risk** | **Are the controls in place? (Pre‐Planning** | | **Are the controls in place?**  **(On the day)** | |
|  |  |  |  | **Yes** | **No** | **Yes** | **No** |
| 1 | Is there enough salt/grit available on site to keep a clear path for safe access and egress around the school site? | Slip/Trip of pupils, staff, 3rd party visitors, causing a falling injury. | Maintain stocks of salt/grit.  Identify which walkways or areas need to be cleared to allow people to get around the premises safely.  Allocate a responsible person to monitor weather reports and grit/salt prior to snow/ice forming.  Reduce the movement of people around the premises.  Identify access specific routes and restrict movement to those routes. |  |  |  |  |
| 2 | Is there an acceptable ratio of staff to pupils\* to attain adequate supervision? | Staff not being able to attend school, leaving pupils without adequate supervision, | Estimate how many staff members need to get in for the school to operate safely by identifying how many pupils could attend.  Identify how many staff would be safe to travel to work in severe conditions. |  |  |  |  |

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|  | (\* staff/pupil ratios are not legally defined for children over the age of four. Acceptability is what the head teacher assesses as acceptable following their risk assessment). |  | Inform staff to listen to Road Safety (AA) to see if the roads are safe to travel on. Remember: travelling to school is considered ‘essential travel’.  Devise a system where staff can report to headteacher by 7.45am and contact number given. |  |  |  |  | |
| 3 | Are there procedures in place for heating failure? | Unable to sufficiently heat school to the recommended minimum working temperature, causing staff and pupils to suffer from the cold. | Contact Property Service Desk to have emergency heaters delivered.  Consider only using the parts of the school that has heating.  Keep doors, curtains and blinds closed during the night to retain the heat. |  |  |  |  | |
| 4 | In the event of a closure, has it been identified which pupils are safe to be sent home? | Pupils unable to get into their homes, left stranded. | Identify which pupils have alternative arrangements if they were to be sent home.  Consider if enough staff can stay on site to supervise the pupils unable to return home, and that those staff will be able to get home at a later time. |  |  |  |  | |
| 5 | Will the school have adequate hygiene facilities? | Staff and pupils are unable to wash their hands, flush the toilets, or have access to drinking water. | Ensure that there is anti‐bacterial wash on site.  Reserve supplies of bottled water.  Consider if all toilets are operational or whether alternative toilets can be used. |  |  |  | |  |
| 6 | Would the school have provision for the pupils to cross the road safely? | Pupils involved in a vehicle collision. | Consider if the road patrol officer is able to get to the school.  Consider if alternative arrangements need to be made if the road patrol officer cannot get to the school. |  |  |  |  | |

**All actions, where possible, should be completed before the bad weather arrives.**

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| **Pre‐planned control measures that are not in place:** | **Actions to be taken:** | **By Who:** | **Date Completed:** |
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| **Completed By:** | **Position:** |
| **Signed:** | **Date of completion of risk assessment:** |

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| **Review dates:** | **Signature:** |
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**Signature of Head teacher: Date:**

**Signature of Chair of Governors: Date:**