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## Introduction

Over the last few years schools in West Berkshire suffered the impact of severe winter weather. Guidance has been developed to assist schools, and the community, to reduce the impact in the future.

Schools are expected to remain open in all but the most extreme circumstances. Factors such as site size, slope and spread, the access to the site, the distance of staff from the site and the variation of weather patterns in different areas making travelling unpredictable will need to be factored in. The decision to close a school, restrict opening hours or limit pupil attendance should not be taken lightly. Decisions are best taken locally by those who are closest to the situation and should always take into account a balance of risks against disruption to pupil learning, and always put the safety for pupils and staff to the fore.

*“In the Department’s view, essential travel includes pupils going to school to keep learning and school staff going to work. The Department is confident that head teachers and parents will support this”* – Department for Education

It is recognised that Head teachers might have fewer staff to supervise pupils on days of bad weather. Schools should plan for how, if they have fewer staff available in the short term, they will continue to supervise pupils and deliver as much of the curriculum as possible.

Closing at short notice may cause difficulties for families if they need to make arrangements for children to be cared for during the school day. In some cases this may result in loss of earnings, loss of employment and / or have a detrimental impact on vulnerable pupils. Any children at the school should remain there until the Head teacher is satisfied that appropriate alternative arrangements have been made.

Advance planning and preparation can help to mitigate the impact of severe weather. Whenever possible, work should be planned for pupils to do at home should a school have to close. Head teachers should consider training requirements for staff on the use of learning platforms and websites to ensure that work can be set for pupils during a prolonged closure.

This document will assist you when preparing or updating your Severe Weather Plan. You can either adapt the information and use this as your plan, or use sections to enhance what you have already produced.

## Additional Guidance to Help Prepare for Severe Weather Conditions

Appendix 1 - Preparing the Premises

Appendix 2 - Checklist

Appendix 3 - Generic Risk Assessment for Snow/Ice Clearance

## Key Contacts

Mark Lewis	EPP&D Manager	01635 519038
Fiona Simmonds	EPP Team Leader	01635 519366

## Woolhampton CE Primary School Severe Winter Weather Plan 2023

<b>School Name</b>	Woolhampton CE Primary School
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<b>Date of Plan</b>	November 2023
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<b>Review date of Plan</b>	November 2024
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<b>Plan created by</b>	Headteacher
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We are a village school on a single site. We run a minibus service to pick up and drop off children. Local roads do not always have footpaths which means that many local families choose not to walk to school for safety reasons.

Any decisions relating to closure will be made using information from the local area and people living close by the school. Roads leading to the school are country roads which are not all gritted and driving can be hazardous in severe weather conditions. Many staff travel by car from their homes which are located up to 15 miles away.

The school maintains a store of gritting salt in a salt bin on site. The site is gritted by staff during icy weather conditions and the main entrance to the site from the school gate is prioritised during severe weather conditions.

Decisions relating to the closure of the school will balance any risks to safety against disruption to children's learning. The safety of children and adults in the school community will always be our priority.

## Aims

Every effort will be made to keep the school open and functioning in the event of severe weather for as long as it is possible and when safe to do so.

As a fundamental principle every effort must be made to keep schools open. There is a legal requirement to keep schools open for children to attend for 190 days per year (380 half day sessions). However, schools may need to close due to “unavoidable” circumstances, which are usually health and safety related. Unavoidable circumstances are those that mean it is no longer safe for staff or pupils to be onsite. The cancellation of public transport or the inability to run a normal day due to staff absence are not considered unavoidable circumstances.

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.

## Consequences

We acknowledge the closure of the school will have a significant impact upon members of the community, but the decision will be made when necessary to ensure all children and adults in the school community are kept safe.

Any closure can have a knock-on effect on the community and the local economy as well as on staff and pupils. Closing at short notice may cause difficulties for families if they need to make arrangements for children to be cared for during the school day. In some cases, this may result in loss of earnings, loss of employment and/or have a detrimental impact on vulnerable pupils.

### Triggers

The headteacher (or in their absence, the senior teacher) will trigger the severe weather plan in response to weather warnings issued by WBC and ongoing monitoring of weather forecasts and local conditions when the severity of conditions could compromise the safety of the school site or the ability of children and staff to travel safely to and from the school.

Any decision to close the school will be made in conjunction with the Chair of Governors. If the Chair of Governors is unavailable, the headteacher or senior teacher will liaise with the Deputy Chair of Governors.

Decisions to close the school at the start of the day will be made before 8.00 am whenever possible.

Monitor weather forecasts - **prevention is key**. Action is required whenever freezing temperatures, ice or snow are forecast. A system to regularly check weather forecasts via news and websites should be put in place. Ideally designate a member of staff to check the Met Office website during the day and evening as necessary: <http://www.metoffice.gov.uk> The LA will also receive information and warnings from the Met Office and will pass these on where appropriate. This information should also be used when considering when to trigger the plan.

When to take the decision to close the school is important; the benefits of an early decision to provide parents with enough time to arrange childcare and avoid unnecessary journeys must be balanced against any likelihood that a bad situation may not result as initially feared. If weather forecasts make it likely that a school will not be able to open the next day it may be appropriate to take a decision the previous afternoon.

Consideration should be given to severe weather events that occur during the school day, whilst the school is operating. It may be difficult for parents to get to the school if the road network is affected and staff/pupils may not be able to travel home. Any children at the school should remain there until the head teacher is satisfied that appropriate alternative arrangements have been made.

## Roles and Responsibilities

Once the plan has been triggered, a risk assessment using the most recent weather information will be carried out by the headteacher and the School Business Manager. In the absence of the headteacher, the assistant headteacher will lead the risk assessment process. The risk assessment will focus on any measures necessary to ensure the safety of all members of the school community.

Examples of risk assessment control measures taken to ensure safety may include restricting access to hazardous areas of the school site, changing the opening hours of the school or closing early to allow children and adults to return home safely when severe weather conditions are expected.

The risk assessment will be revisited during the course of the day to ensure changes in conditions and up to date forecast information are considered.

Any decision to close the school will be made by the headteacher in conjunction with the Chair of Governors. It will be based on outcomes of the risk assessment process. If the headteacher is unavailable, the Chair of Governors will liaise with the assistant headteacher. If the Chair of Governors is unavailable, the Headteacher will liaise with the Vice Chair of Governors.

Discussions to close the school will always take into account information about local conditions. The school will contact other local schools to share information and to take into account their risk assessments.

*"You need to be clear who will make any decision about closure. In most cases this decision is delegated, rightly in the Department's view, to head teachers, who will know local weather and ground conditions, and the likely impact of the weather on the numbers of staff and pupils who will be able to get into school."* – Department for Education.

The responsibility for making the final decision rests with the head teacher, or in their absence by the most senior member of the teaching staff available, after the completion of a suitable and sufficient risk assessment. Discussions with the Site Controller and other members of staff who live close to the school will establish local conditions which will inform the decision. In addition, contact with head teachers of local schools will ensure that an informed and united decision can be made. The head teacher will arrange for parents and school staff to be notified and inform the Chair of Governors. The LA will need to be informed and members of staff should be familiar with the contents and location of the Critical Incident Plan.

It is vital 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 evidence should justification be needed to defend the school closure.

During each day staff will want to review their risk assessment. It is expected that a school will remain open until the 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 head teacher believes conditions are now unsafe, early closure may be necessary.

## Woolhampton CE Primary School Severe Winter Weather Plan 2023

**Communication**      The telephone numbers of the people named below are not public but have been shared as appropriate.

**Name and Phone Number of Headteacher**      Kath Burns

**Name and Phone Number of Alternate**      Rebecca Cox

**Name and Phone Number of Chair of Governors**      Nikki Jordan

Telephone Number of LA (Critical Incident Team)      **01635 519027**

Telephone number of LA (Out of hours, Incidents only)      **01635 42161**

This number to be used to report any school closures or incidents during office hours. To report an incident (not a closure) out of hours use the out of hours number above. Please refer to the relevant section of Critical Incident Plan.

School Closures Email Address      [schoolclosures@westberks.gov.uk](mailto:schoolclosures@westberks.gov.uk)

This e-mail address should be used to notify the LA of any full or partial closures. This information is used to populate the West Berks website and is also picked up by the radio stations. Details given should include nature of closure, anticipated re-opening, help if required and must be factual and accurate.

### Radio Stations

Names and contact numbers of radio stations in use or insert details from LA sent out in Autumn term  
These will be used alongside the school website and texts to inform all stakeholders of a school closure.

If the decision is taken to close the school, parents will be advised by text message, email and via an alert banner on the school website. Staff will be advised by text message and staff and governors will receive an e-mail confirming closure of the school. The Local Authority will be advised on the school closures e-mail address.

Parents are asked to note that it may not be possible for staff to answer the telephone and we would ask that they do not phone the school. All parents will be made aware of the need to check text messages/emails and the school website as these are the preferred methods of checking whether the school is closed.

We recognise that many of our parents live in rural locations. If the school is open but parents do not feel that they can safely travel to the school, they should contact the school office. The headteacher has the discretion to authorise absence in such circumstances.

We will ensure any notification to WBC includes details of any public examinations, or critical school events for the students, due to take place.



### External Factors

Smaller rural roads may not be gritted making local travel hazardous.

Site is located on a slope which may present a greater risk in icy conditions for both pedestrians and vehicles.

### Liability for Snow Clearance

The approved code of practice which supports the Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations states that "arrangements should be made to minimise risks from snow and ice. This may involve gritting, snow clearing and closure of some routes.....".

WBC includes volunteers in its liability insurance programme, that is for both Public and Employers Liability Insurance. We are covered for our legal liability as defined, both for injury caused to them, for which we are legally liable and injury / damage caused by them, for which we become legally liable, providing that a suitable and sufficient risk assessment has been carried out to include these people.

**It is important to complete a suitable and sufficient risk assessment** – See Appendix 3. Ice slippages and back injuries from clearing snow are likely to be the greatest concerns. When areas are cleared, an assessment is still required to ensure that it is safe to open on the day.

Ultimately, if **all reasonable precautions** have been taken then we will significantly reduce the possibility of a claim. Bear in mind that claimants in civil action only have to prove their case on the balance of probabilities. All hazardous areas **must** be put it out of commission. There has in recent years only been one successful claim against the Authority within the school environment for slippage on ice where prior knowledge was not acted upon.

Health and Safety legislation provides a duty to clear ice and snow and also to make sensible decisions about opening depending on the safety for the entire site. If a claim is made, the Council has the expertise to defend it providing all reasonable precautions are taken, such as a suitable and sufficient risk assessment, safe working practices, frequent rest breaks and the provision of suitable equipment.

### Access Routes

All children and accompanying adults will enter and leave the school by the main entrance.

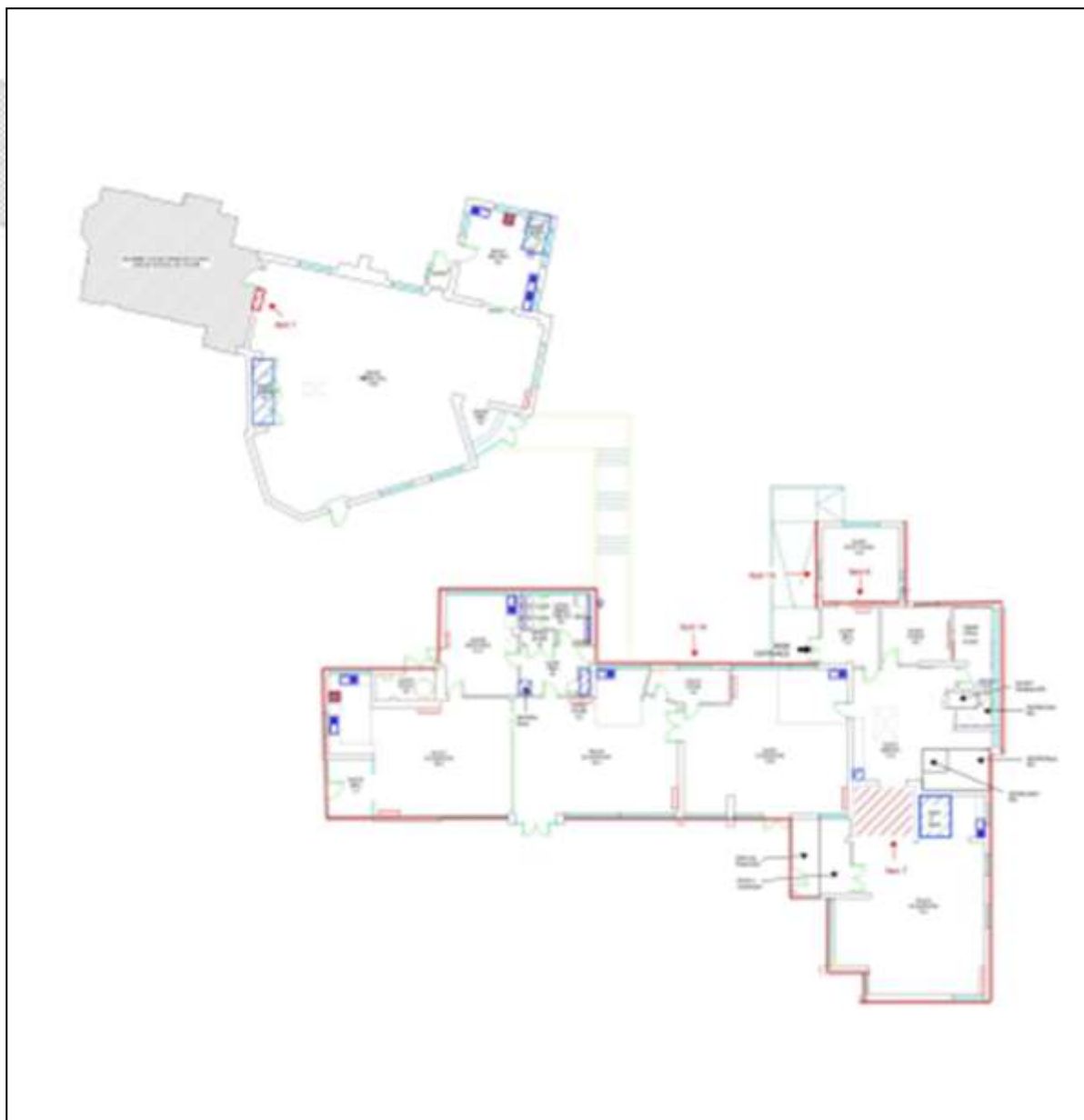
Vehicle access to the school site may be restricted due to safety concerns relating to the access routes and use of the car park.

Staff will try to clear a path from the main school gate to the nearest entrance to the school building. Where time, resources and safety considerations permit, pathways to other entrances and the car park and other areas of the school grounds will be cleared and gritted. Some areas which remain unsafe but would usually be accessed, e.g. the back playground, will be coned off with clear signs advising of the risk.

If outside areas are in use for break and lunchtime, children will be supervised as required for the conditions.

Supplies of salt/grit will be stored appropriately. These supplies are checked regularly and more obtained as necessary at the start of the Autumn Term. Gritting should be carried out when frost, ice or snow is forecast or when walkways are likely to be damp or wet and the floor temperatures are at or below freezing. Gritting should be repeated at appropriate intervals when temperatures remain below freezing. When possible, gritting will take place the day before an icy spell is forecast (PM) or on the morning when an unexpected frost has occurred. We will take into account that Salt does not work instantly; it needs sufficient time to dissolve into the moisture on the floor. Rock salt starts to become ineffective at -6 o centigrade.

## School Site Plan



<b>Practicalities</b>	Refer to complete checklist and risk assessment.
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### **Key points**

- Ensuring we maintain good supplies of gritting salt and gritting in advance when possible
- Once a weather alert has been issued, the senior staff should review this plan and associated risk assessments and issue reminders to staff, children and parents/carers about key points
- Opening the school with reduced staffing is acceptable as long as children's this does not pose a risk to children's safety, acceptable staffing levels should take into account the age of the children and individual learning needs
- Consider whether there is likely to be any interruption to services provided by outside contractors, e.g. Caterlink, Glen Cleaning etc – what contingency plans are in place.
- All members of the community should wear suitable clothing and footwear and adults supervising children outside should ensure children do not become too cold
- The risk assessment of site safety may require restricted access to areas which remain hazardous due to ice or other factors linked to the severe weather
- Consider site specific risks, i.e. weight of snow on canopies and similar could cause collapse
- Nobody should be expected to make a journey in severe weather conditions if to do so places them or others at risk
- If school closes, children will be able to access work from the school's website. Parents will be provided with work in the morning of closure.
- If school closes, check the school diary for any external visitors to cancel.

## Woolhampton CE Primary School Severe Winter Weather Plan 2023

### Staff Planning Form

This form is designed to assist the school with planning staffing numbers and the likelihood of different members of staff being able to make it safely to school during periods of severe winter weather. Staff can fill in the information on a regular basis, at least annually, and can alter responses following periods of severe weather where lessons have been learned and responses may alter. Please note that staff should only be required provide the information that they are willing to share and have the right to refuse to provide any information requested. This information is confidential and is intended for the use of the schools senior management team only.

Name of staff member : \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Distance from school:

Under 5 miles

5-10 miles

10+ miles

Able to walk safely to school

Yes/No

Description of route, main road, well gritted, rural back roads etc ....

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Place to stay locally arranged:

Yes/No

Do you have experience of driving in extremely poor weather conditions?

Yes/No

Have you been driving for less than 12 months?

Yes/No

Other factors that should be taken into consideration, such as medical conditions, primary carer, pregnancy etc...

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Name of nearest WBC school to your home: \_\_\_\_\_

NB: Please state if none, or if not accessible during periods of winter weather.

### High Risk Groups

Staff and pupils with mobility difficulties need to be aware of potential hazards around the school grounds including steps at front of school, slope in top playground and doorways which may become slippery in icy conditions. Extra time can be taken when walking between areas of the school such as classroom and school hall for lunch or assemblies, with staff this may be before or after children arrive.

### Conclusion/Additional Information

We intend for this plan to be as thorough and informative as possible to enable our whole community to remain safe in any severe weather whilst maintaining an education and learning for all.

Any questions or queries regarding this severe weather plan can be directed to the school office or the Governing Body and we will endeavor to answer them.

## Appendix 1 – Preparing the Premises

To prepare your premises for severe weather conditions, Head teachers should ensure the following actions have been taken:

- Sufficient fuel is stocked - allow for increased usage during extreme cold weather. Plan a system for regular monitoring and ordering, allowing for delay in delivery times.
- Boilers are fully serviced.
- Thermostat is set to **at least** ten degrees to avoid pipes freezing.
- Radiators are bled periodically through the heating season to remove air locks that prevent water circulation.
- Before leaving for any breaks ensure the system is set up correctly and you are familiar with the working of your heating controls.
- At times of extreme cold the heating system is monitored on a regular basis, especially during periods where the school is not in occupation.
- Before returning to school check to ensure the heating system is working effectively. If a fault is discovered contact your maintenance contractor immediately to rectify the problem prior to school starting.
- Familiarisation with the water system – be aware of how to turn off the water and who to call in cases of emergency. Test plumbing shut off valves to check they work and prevent them from seizing.
- Sufficient insulation around your water tank(s), loft and external water pipes.
- Drain down outside taps and insulate any exposed pipe work.
- Sufficient salt/sand is stocked appropriately. Plan to manage stocks allowing for increased usage and delay in delivery times.
- Remove rubbish from roofs and valleys - Drink cans, plastic bags and balls are often the cause of blockages, floods and ingress into the building.
- Gutters and rainwater pipes are clear.
- Ground drains are cleared to avoid flooding.
- Check roof is fully watertight. Replace any slipped or missing tiles.
- Masonry is cleared of any vegetation. Roots will cause frost damage as well as damp penetration.
- Check outside lights are operational.

## Appendix 2 - Checklists

### Winter Property Maintenance Preparation

Action	Completed By	Date
Boiler Serviced.	SBM – School Business Manager	Annually
Loft and pipe insulation checked.	SBM	Annually
Heating set up for holiday correct and thermostat set to a minimum of 10 degrees.	SBM	Ongoing
Fuel levels checked, monitoring and ordering system in place.	SBM	Weekly
Radiators bled.	SBM	As required
Plumbing shut off valves located and working.	SBM	Annually
System in place for monitoring heating during periods of extreme cold.	SBM and AHT (class teachers to advise)	Ongoing
Outside taps drained down and exposed pipes insulated as required.	SBM	As required
Gutters, rainwater pipes and drains checked and cleared as necessary.	SBM	Annually
Outside lights working.	SBM	As required
Vegetation removed from masonry.	SBM	Annually
Plentiful stock of salt/grit.	SBM / Admin team	As required

### Winter Weather Planning and Organisation Checklist

Action	Completed By	Date
Risk assessment completed for Snow/Ice clearance.	HT, SBM & CoG to complete	31.01.24
Site plan identifies routes/areas to be cleared and those to have restricted access. Who will salt/grit and when?	HT, SBM & CoG to complete	31.01.24
System in place to monitor temperature and weather forecast.	SBM, CoG or other members of the admin team.	Ongoing
Who will salt/grit and when?	SBM or other members of the admin team.	As required - day before (PM) if forecast suggests necessary or on the day as need becomes apparent.



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Action	Completed By	Date
List of volunteers available for snow clearance and 4x4 transportation.	CoG/SBM	31.01.24
System in place to monitor safety of canopies.	SBM/ H&S Gov	As needed
Can staff work from home and provide work for pupils? Any additional training required has been provided.	Google classroom login for all staff - AHT	31.01.24
Pupils know to access websites for work during periods of closure.	Class teachers – passwords issued	31.01.24

### Winter Weather Communication Checklist

Action	Completed By	Date
System in place to make early decision to close/open school or restrict hours.	HT/ SBM to call CoG	As needed
System in place to communicate with parents / carers, staff and Governors.	Email – Website – Text Message	31.01.24
Who will notify <a href="mailto:schoolclosures@westberks.gov.uk">schoolclosures@westberks.gov.uk</a>	HT	31.01.24
System in place to notify radio stations. Parents/carers and staff know which radio station/s you will be using. Code word for notification is known.	SBM	31.01.24
System in place for updating school website. Including any training required.	School Office	31.01.24
Inform WBC of special circumstances including public examinations.	HT	As needed
Once decision taken to reopen school notify <a href="mailto:schoolclosures@westberks.gov.uk">schoolclosures@westberks.gov.uk</a> , update school website and notify parents/carers.	HT	As needed
Know who to call for additional assistance.	CoG	31.01.24