



Shellybanks Educate Together National School

# Shellybanks ETNS Emergency School Closures Policy

## Introduction:

The school policy on emergency closures was drafted as a whole school exercise, involving consultation with the staff, parents and Board of Management. It will be circulated to the entire school community via the school website in due course.

## Rationale:

The need for the school to produce a policy on emergency closures is primarily due to:

- Inclement weather, such as heavy snowfalls, high winds etc.
- Leaks in the local water scheme which causes a Health & Safety Issue regarding access to toilets
- Break down in the heating system or electricity supply
- Serious damage to the school building
- Building programmes and alterations to the design of the school which may necessitate unscheduled closures on Health and Safety grounds
- Critical Incident

## Relationship to School Ethos:

Shellybanks ETNS strives to provide a child-friendly, secure and safe learning environment catering to the needs of all students, whilst also striving to ensure that staff and visitors can access a safe and welcoming working environment. This aim is founded on respect for the individual, child or adult and is fostered in a culture which values diversity and difference.

## Aims and Objectives of the policy:

- 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 conform to Health and Safety legislation

## **1.Unplanned Closures:**

### **Heavy Snowfall**

In the event of a heavy snowfall, the Principal shall consult with the Chairperson of the Board of Management as soon as is feasible, and a decision is 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 authorities will contact all school staff and parents/guardians by email to inform all that the school will not be opening. A message to this effect will be posted on the school's website. We will also try to ensure this message is sent to class reps where it can be posted on the class WhatsApp group. If the snowfall is prolonged over a number of days and the school is closed indefinitely, parents will be informed of re-opening dates by email and through the school website.

### **High Winds/Thunderstorms**

The procedures in place for heavy snowfall are generally replicated in the event of storms/lightning i.e. parents are contacted via email and informed that the school will remain closed. If the school has already opened and is in operation when high winds etc, occur and remaining on the premises is a risk to all, teachers will remain on the premises until all children have been collected by either parents/guardians.

### **The unexpected loss of services**

Where notification is not given to the school regarding the loss of electricity or water services, the principal will endeavour to determine the extent of the interruption to the service. Following consultation with the Health and Safety Officer on staff and the chairperson of the Board of Management regarding the health and safety implications of the loss in service, a decision may be taken to notify the parents/guardians of the need to close the school. Teachers will remain on the premises until children have been collected by their parents/guardians.

### **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, BOM Member or pupil. Parents are informed of such closures, by whichever means is deemed appropriate by the Critical Incident Committee. In this particular instance, the school may remain open to staff, BOM, Parent Teacher Association or Critical Incident Committee, if issues such as funeral services, liaison with media or counselling need to be addressed (See Critical Incident Policy).

## **2. Planned Closures:**

### **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.

### **Building Programmes**

The Health and Safety Officer on the Board of Management will consult with on-site Health and Safety personnel to ensure compliance with any statutory obligations in this regard.

Parents/guardians will be briefed on such matters and the health and safety of pupils and staff will be paramount in any decisions made regarding closure in such circumstances.

### **Department of Education Guidelines**

In cases where the Department of Education issue a directive for all schools to close, due to adverse weather conditions, Shellybanks ETNS will comply with these announcements and parents will be informed via email and school website. We will also try to ensure this message is sent to class reps where it can be posted on the class WhatsApp group. In the past, Status Red Weather Warnings have resulted in school closures.

Shellybanks Educate Together National School is required to be open for a minimum of 183 days.

**Department of Education guidance for schools in relation to making up for time lost due to unforeseen school closures is included in Appendix 1. Decisions relating to the need to make up these days or how they will be made up at school level. Schools are not always obliged to make up days. We wait for guidance from the Department of Education in relation to this.**

The guidance provides that subject to consensus at a local level, any changes to normal practice that can be made to address the shortfalls should be put in place.

Examples of how this might be achieved include:

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

If necessary, the school authority should then identify any available discretionary days that the school had planned to close that could be made available to make up for time lost.

Where the above measures are not considered adequate, contingency arrangements to make up for time lost due to extensive or prolonged unforeseen school closures may now also include either or both of the following:

- The February mid-term break may be reduced by up to three days subject to the requirement that all schools must be closed on 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 up to and including

### **Roles and Responsibilities:**

Emergency closures in the school place particular responsibilities on various personnel within the school.

Parents are responsible for :

- Keeping school informed on up-to-date contact details during the school year

Principal and secretary are responsible for:

- Organising annual review of parent contact details.
- The principal is responsible for notifying staff of unplanned closures; as staff grows, cascade contact system will apply

Chairperson of BOM and Principal are responsible for:

- Ultimate decision to close the school.

Health and Safety Officers at staff and Board level are responsible for :

- Advising Principal and Board of Management regarding breaches of Health and Safety Policy which may merit school closure

All staff are responsible for :

1. Regularly checking work emails
2. Compliance with Health and Safety legislation and procedures in school
3. Maintaining a safe school environment for all staff, children and parents

**Success Criteria**

- Positive school community feedback
- Conformance with Health and Safety legislation
- Maintaining a safe school environment for all staff, children and parents

**Ratification and Review:**

This policy was ratified by the Board of Management on...

This policy will be reviewed in 2022 or beforehand if necessary

Chairperson of the BOM: Jessica Ryan Date 19th November 2018.

Principal: Johanne Dunne

Date: 19th November 2018

## Appendix 1:

Guidance for schools in relation to making up for time lost due to unforeseen closures :

1. The school authority should, in the first instance, quantify the number of school closures that have occurred.

2. The school authority should, in consultation with the Principal and teachers, assess the effect of the loss of tuition and identify any shortfalls that have occurred as a result of the unforeseen closures.

3. The school authority should consult with the Principal and teachers with a view to ensuring that the curriculum for each class/year group can be completed before year-end. Subject to consensus at the local level, any changes to normal practice that can be made to facilitate such work should be put in place. A non-exhaustive list of possible examples of how this might be achieved include:

- prioritising tuition over other non-tuition activities
- Reducing where possible the length of mock/house examinations
- Consideration of whether learning in the classroom should be prioritised over school tours, etc.
- In the case of second level schools ensuring examination classes attend all classes to the end of May.

4. If necessary, the school authority should review the school calendar with a view to identifying any available discretionary days that the school had planned to close that could be made available to make up the loss. In this regard, the school authority should take into account the need to provide adequate notice of any changes to the school calendar to pupils, parents and staff.

5. In cases where a school has been affected by extensive or prolonged school closures (e.g. due to weather, etc.) and where the school authority considers that the above measures will not adequately address the loss in tuition involved, the school authority may, having established what arrangements

for school transport may or may not be feasible if other schools are remaining closed, decide to implement either or both of the following contingency arrangements:

- The February mid-term break may be reduced by up to three days subject to the requirement that all schools must be closed on 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 up to and including the Wednesday immediately preceding the Easter weekend. All schools must be closed on the Thursday and Friday immediately preceding the Easter weekend and remain closed for the remainder of the Easter break as set out in Appendix A of this circular.

6. The school authority should consider the implications of any measures identified for pupils, teachers, parents and other staff and also other parties such as school transport, bus escorts, traffic wardens, visitors to the school, etc.

7. The school authority should consult and communicate with the school community as early as possible on this matter.