

St. Peter's National School

Emergency Closures Policy

Introduction

The school policy on emergency closures was drafted as a whole school exercise involving parents, staff and Board of Management. It will be circulated to the entire school community in Dungourney via the school website in due course. It has been formulated with circulars 11/95 and 34/2011 in mind as well as Rule 60 of National Rules for Schools. Rule 60 states that "Should some exceptional circumstances arise (for example, failure of the heating system or damage caused by vandalism), the Board of Management may close the school even if the school cannot be kept open for 182 days".

Rationale

The need for the school to devise a policy on emergency closures in recent years is primarily due to

- a) Inclement weather, such as heavy snowfalls, high winds, extreme frost etc.
- b) Possibility of a heating break down.
- c) Possibility of a water leak which may cause a health and safety issue with regard to toilet access.
- d) Possibility of a critical incident.
- e) The instruction of the DES to make up days lost, due to exceptional closing, during the February or Easter breaks.
- f) To act in accordance with circulars 11/95 on Exceptional closures and circular 34/2011, section 4 with regard to contingency arrangements in the event of unforeseen school closures.

Relationship to School Ethos

St. Peter's National School strives to provide a child friendly, secure environment catering for all the needs of all students as far as is practicable and where respect is fostered in a culture which values diversity and difference

Aims and Objectives

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

School closures will be the last resort. Every effort will be made to keep the school open at all times but the safety and welfare of the pupils, staff and parents will be paramount in making any decision.

Procedures

Heavy Snowfall/ Dangerous Roads

To help prevent closures and to ensure that the school environment is safe, the following preparation will happen;

- Ensure that there is sufficient ice-melt in October of each year. If there is not enough, the Principal is responsible for ordering more.
- Send a letter to Parents in November reminding them of safety precautions and informing them of procedures in the event of emergency closures.
- Ensure that the Principal, Deputy Principal and secretary have the requisite passwords and know how to operate Aladdin.

However, in the event of a heavy snowfall or treacherous roads the Principal shall consult with the Chairperson of the B.O.M. as soon as is feasible, and preferably before 8.a.m. on the day of closure, 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 parents and staff using Aladdin Connect. It is the responsibility of all parents to make sure their mobile numbers are correct and available to the school. If the snowfall is prolonged over a number of days and the school is closed indefinitely, parents will be informed of re-opening dates through Aladdin Connect. Every effort will be made to contact parents and staff prior to 8 a.m.

In the event of an emergency closure during the school day, parents will be contacted through the Aladdin service and staff members will remain with children until all are collected.

Disconnection of Services

Where 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 Aladdin Connect.

Elections

In the case of St. Peter's National School being used as a polling station, closure on polling Day alone is reckoned as part of the minimum number of days. As very advance is given to the school, parents will be notified by Aladdin Connect.

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 Aladdin Connect 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, parents and guardians will be contacted in order to collect children as soon as possible.

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, B.O.M. member or pupil. Parents are informed of such closures by notification on Aladdin Connect. In this particular instance, the school may remain open to staff and B.O.M. or Parents' Association if issues such as church services, guards of honour, readings or counselling is required (See Critical Incident Policy).

Closing of the school in the interests of Public Health.

Circular 28/94 advises that the Director of Community Care /Medical Officer of Health is the appropriate person to decide on matters in relation to public health. When the closing of a school is deemed necessary in the interests of public health, the written recommendation of the Medical Officer should be obtained by the Chairperson of the Board of Management and forwarded to the Department. The responsibility for closing the school lies with the Board of Management. Parents will be notified via Aladdin Connect.

Essential Maintenance Repairs

Rule 52 of the Rules for School s states that "Works of maintenance should be carried out, as far as possible, during the vacation periods". However, should the Board of Management deem it necessary to close the school in such a context to comply with health and safety, the parents will be notified via Aladdin Connect.

Please note

All early closures and In-Service closures are notified to parents at least one week in advance.

Roles and Responsibilities

Emergency closures in the school place particular responsibilities on various personnel within the school chain of command;

- The staff are responsible for supplying their mobile numbers to the school secretary.
- The Principal and Chairperson must act in compliance with health and safety legislation.
- The Principal, and staff must provide a safe environment for all children and parents.

School closures will be the last resort. Every effort will be made to keep the school open at all times but the safety and welfare of the pupils, staff and parents will be paramount in making any decision. In the case of burst pipes or leaks, unless more than two classrooms are deemed unsuitable for work, school will remain open and classes will take place in the hall.

Contingency Arrangements in the Event of Unforeseen School Closures.

According to circular 34/2011, there is a need to provide for contingency arrangements within the standardised school year to deal with exceptional closures. Appendix B of the named circular (see attached to this policy) gives guidance in relation to making up for time lost due to unforeseen closures. St. Peter's National School will abide by such guidance.

Ratification and Communication

This policy was formulated in September 2026 and ratified by the Board of Management on 05 October 2026. It will be forwarded to the Parents' Association following ratification at the school B.O.M. meeting

Implementation and Review

This policy will be implemented from November 2026 and be reviewed in the light of unplanned events that lead to unscheduled school closures.

Jean O'Sullivan 05/10/26

Barry O'Flynn

Appendix B: Circular 0018/2026

Part 2: Contingency arrangements for making up lost time due to unforeseen school closures

The parties have recognised that there is a need to include flexibility and to provide for contingency arrangements within the standardised school year to deal with unforeseen school closures for example due to weather. It is important that any time lost due to unforeseen closures is made up by the school so that teaching and learning is not negatively impacted.

The purpose of the contingency arrangement is:

- to assist school authorities to plan for any impact that unforeseen school closures may have on teaching and learning.
- to inform the school community of the plans that are in place to make up for time lost.

The contingency arrangement should take account of both circular 0018/2026 “Standardisation of the school year in respect of primary and post-primary schools for the years 2026/27, 2027/28 and 2028/29, and where closures are due to weather, the guidance available to school authorities by the Office of Emergency Planning on the Be Winter Ready website.

The main focus for school authorities in the event of an unforeseen closure, is to ensure that any impact on teaching and learning is addressed in an appropriate manner. Since both the time of year of the closure and the amount of time lost can vary from school to school, the actual impact on teaching and learning is something that can only be assessed at individual school level.

2 (a) Contingency arrangements to deal with prolonged unforeseen school closures. Although spells of prolonged unforeseen school closures due to severe weather events for example are relatively few, school authorities are required to have clearly documented procedures in place for the occasions when a school may have to close in order to ensure the safety of all pupils/students and staff. A sample template contingency plan which schools can use is published alongside this circular.

The Government “Be Winter-Ready Information Campaign” provides advice and information to help the public including schools to be better prepared to deal with a period of severe weather. The Office of Emergency Planning has prepared a booklet “Be Winter-Ready” and developed a website Be Winter Ready to provide practical advice and contact details of the main services that can provide help in extreme weather-related emergencies. It is important for school authorities to be prepared, to keep themselves informed and to follow the advice published on the Be Winter Ready website.

Guidance for schools in relation to making up for time lost due to unforeseen school closures is set out below. This guidance sets out a structured approach to determining the measures to be put in place to make up for time lost. The guidance provides that subject to consensus at local level, any changes to normal practice that can be made to address shortfalls and to ensure that the curriculum is completed by the end of the

school year should be put in place.

2 (b) Checklist to assist planning for contingency arrangements for making up for lost time:

1. The school authority should, in the first instance, quantify the number of school closure days 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 the end of the school year. Subject to consensus at 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 prioritized over school tours, etc.
 - in the case of post-primary schools ensuring examination and transition year 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/students, parents and staff.

5. In cases where a school has been affected by prolonged school closures for example due to severe weather, 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 the Thursday and Friday of the week in which this break falls
- the Easter break, in primary schools, 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 primary 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/students, teachers, parents and other staff and also other parties such as school transport, bus escorts, traffic wardens, visitors to the school, etc.

The contingency arrangements within the standardised school year to deal with unforeseen school closures do not provide for remote teaching and learning. Each school authority shall also provide to parents, at the beginning of each year, a calendar which includes details of school closures. It should be made clear that the

calendar could be subject to change as part of contingency arrangements to make up for time lost due to unforeseen school closures.

A copy of the school calendar and contingency plan must also be made available on the school's website.

