

SEVERE WEATHER POLICY

Policy type	Omnia Foundation
Review period	Triennial
Last reviewed on	Summer 2023
Next review due	Summer 2026
Approval level	Chief Operating Officer

Approved by (Name, date, signature)

Chief Operating Officer, 5 July 2023
Chief Operating Officer, Liz Keeble
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Omnia Foundation Website

POLICY FOR SEVERE WEATHER

Mission

We believe in investing in people. As professionals in the teaching and training professions, we strive to provide a better future for the children, young people and home settings we work with. Success for us means unleashing the potential of each individual so they can grow, develop and reach the potential of which they are capable. Our values are grounded in our determination to be the change we want to see in the world, through passion, commitment and integrity. We strive to plant a seed of kindness and compassion in a generation that will produce resilience and hope and enable them to aspire and achieve productive and fulfilled lives. Our success is measured in the lives we changed.

At the Omnia Foundation, we create a secure and safe environment that encourages communication, self-belief, mutual respect and success. We provide a rich and balanced curriculum that develops every child, allowing them to achieve their true potential.

Aims of the policy

This policy aims to

- provide clarification on a number of important matters relating to severe weather and includes information provided by government
- help the Head of Foundation make decisions regarding site safety and potential site closure
- ensure that decisions are made with a common sense approach, taking into account local conditions and contingencies against the need to provide an education for our young people

This policy should be read in conjunction with the Health & Safety Policy and the Risk Assessment Policy.

This policy is based on guidance from Bolton Council.

Planning ahead for severe weather

When it comes to severe weather conditions such as heavy snow, the Head of Foundation is expected to keep the site open for as many students as possible whenever it is reasonable for them to do so. If the site closes for whatever reason it can be disruptive to a young person's education and make life difficult for working families.

In making plans for the winter, the Head of Foundation will include:

- how to contact staff and home settings
- liaising with the Head of Estates regarding
 - associated risk assessments and issuing specific instructions to staff based on them (see Appendix I – Site Safe Procedures)
 - maintaining stocks of salt and grit and reviewing the level of stock held
 - identifying which areas of the site need to be kept clear of snow and ice and ensuring that staff who are responsible for salting and gritting or otherwise keeping the relevant parts of the site clear know what steps to take, including undertaking these tasks safely and in a timely manner
 - site closure, should the Head of Estates deem the site unsafe
- estimating who amongst the staff will be able to get in safely for the beginning of the day and how provision for students can be managed in those circumstances
- preparing for a day (or more) that might involve a reduced curriculum offer, where available staff will need to supervise students more than be able to provide the usual rich curriculum
- setting up an incident management team that would be available to manage the situation when it arises
- ensuring all the information that is needed is available in advance including contacts (name, telephone numbers) for those who will collect children if home settings are not available and taxi drivers' telephone numbers for student transport, so that direct contact can be made with them

As an independent school, with a small cohort of students coming from all over the county and neighbouring counties, there is no requirement to advise the media of a closure. It is necessary to advise local authorities out of courtesy.

Taking the decision to close the site

The government advice will be to remain open except in the most extreme or exceptional of circumstances. The Head of Foundation is authorised to make an emergency closure when the state of the weather or any other exceptional circumstance make it absolutely necessary in the best interests of the students and staff.

The overall decision on whether to close lies with the Head of Foundation, having liaised with the Head of Estates – it is not possible to have a centralised or uniform approach on this matter as each site is best placed to know the local conditions. The Head of Foundation should consult with and/or inform the Chief Operating Officer regarding the decision taken.

Decisions must be supported by the latest and most accurate information available. The presumption should be in favour of keeping the site open unless, in the Head of Foundation's view, to do so would put the health, safety or welfare of students and/or staff at risk. In reaching this decision, the Head of Foundation should take full account of local circumstances and, in particular, the following considerations:

- Both short and longer term weather information. It would be inadvisable to react to the first flurry of snow without seeking further information on the weather conditions ahead. Equally, it would be unwise to send students or staff home when a blizzard is at its height.
- Advice from transport operators. Transport operators are key players in such circumstances as they will be the ones who decide whether vehicles should/can continue to operate.
- Arrangements for student safety. The absolute priority is to ensure that provision is made for each and every child. For example, if a severe blizzard occurs while students are on-site and they cannot be collected or delivered home, they should be kept on site and supervised.

It is often specific access or other localised issues that require schools to close. Therefore in these circumstances the closure or opening of other schools in the proximity should not be the key factor in taking decisions. The overriding principle is that it is the responsibility of all employees to make every effort to attend for duty at their place of employment.

Any decision to close should, where practicable, be made before 7.00am to allow information to be passed onto relevant people as soon as possible.

Closure during the school day

The safety and well-being of students is paramount. If in doubt a student should not be released. Safe and speedy dismissal of students in the event of an emergency closure depends on the staff, transport providers and home settings working in partnership.

Home settings should be fully aware of the procedures which will operate should there be an emergency closure. This information is held on the foundation website and will be circulated to home settings where weather warnings are issued.

Home settings are required to provide the foundation with any specific instructions in respect of their child should the site require to close during the day. Home settings are required to give the foundation an emergency contact and should have talked through with their child what will happen in the event of an emergency closure.

Precautions

Reasonable attempts will be made to ensure that our students return home to a safe environment should the site have to close during the school day. Generally, under these circumstances, students will be escorted home by staff or taxis obtained where possible. Omnia Foundation staff will ensure that there is a responsible adult at home or that, given the age and maturity of our young people, procedures are in place for them to enter their home on their return. Should this not be possible for whatever reason, foundation staff will keep the young person with them and remain in telephone contact with the responsible adult and site staff until such times as the student can be safely returned to their home setting.

Students remaining in school

Provision of adequate supervision by members of foundation staff will be made for those students who cannot go home or to their emergency destination immediately and have therefore to remain on site until such times as the student can be safely returned to their home setting.

Remaining open

Remaining open during severe weather can be an adventure for young people, can be a good context for learning and create fond memories of their time in education as they grow older. Properly risk assessed and supervised snowball fights and building of snowmen is encouraged by the foundation as an enrichment experience.

As an alternative to closure, the Head of Foundation will consider:

- opening the site later in the day and closing earlier
- how the site and buildings might be used to ensure there is adequate supervision, for example use of the hall and other larger spaces where this is practicable in the absence of staff
- limit the extent to which students and staff have to move between buildings
- plan the curriculum offer or the strategies used to ensure students are managed effectively and safely with the staff available

Communication arrangements

It is essential that when there is potential for site closure due to severe weather conditions, the Head of Foundation is in a position to communicate quickly and clearly with staff, home settings and transport providers. This is just as important in relation to the decision to remain open as it is to close, as our students travel in from a wide range of destinations where the weather may be better or worse than it is local to the foundation.

Since numbers of students on-roll are small, it is expected that the Head of Foundation and delegated members of staff will make contact with home settings directly, rather than relying on the website to communicate a closure. Any decision to close will be taken as early in the day as possible.

Arrangements for staff

The overriding principle is that it is the responsibility of all foundation staff to make every effort to attend for duty on-site. The following arrangements will be adopted where time away from normal place of work becomes necessary as a result of severe weather.

- First day of bad weather. Where a member of staff arrives late or leaves early, or is unable to attend work for their contracted hours they should make every effort to report their absence as early as possible. Where the Head of Foundation is satisfied with the member of staff's explanation, a suitable programme of work/study to be carried out at home will be agreed.
- Subsequent days of bad weather. If the member of staff is still unable to report for work on subsequent days, a suitable programme of work/study to be carried out at home will be agreed for up to a maximum of three days in total, subject to review each day.
- Deterioration of weather whilst at work. The Head of Foundation will permit early departure for staff before it possibly becomes too bad to travel. In such circumstances, a suitable programme of work/study to be carried out at home will be agreed.
- Where a site is closed to students. The Head of Foundation will arrange for staff to work from home and will organise a programme of work/study using Teams.

Monitoring & Review

This policy will be monitored by the Head of Foundation with the Head of Estates and reviewed following periods of severe weather conditions by the Chief Operating Officer with the Heads of Foundation and Estates.

Appendix I - Site Safe procedure for severe weather out of school hours.

- Head of Estates to check weather forecast and/or respond to any sudden adverse change in weather overnight that would prove a risk to staff, learners and/or visitors.
 - Head of Estates to instruct estates team to attend site at 6am to clear access to PortaKabins for cleaners (Cleaners will be asked to start work in the main clubhouse while this is being carried out).
 - Estates team to clear and re-salt all paths. During the clearing of, and while salt is melting snow/ice, staff should use the woodchip/bark areas to walk over to gain access to PortaKabins. Estates team will temporarily lay rubber mats over the path/woodchip junction in front of each PortaKabin door access.
 - Estates team will monitor the paths during the school day, adding salt and clearing as required.
 - Salt to be laid over paths again at the end of the school day and the process above repeated each day as instructed by Head of Estates until weather improves.
 - In the event of extreme weather, the Head of Estates in consultation with the school Head of Foundation, will decide when it is deemed unsafe for the site to open. In this instant, all staff, contract cleaners, pupils and visitors will not be allowed on site until the site has been deemed safe to return by Head of Estates, again, in consultation with the Head of Foundation.
 - A Jumbo 850kg bulk bag of Rock salt has been ordered for delivery and will be divided into manageable sized bags for use by the estates team. This will be stored and re-plenished as required and monitored by the estates team on site.
 - Caution slippery surface signs need to be on display when de-icing work is being carried out.
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Site Risk Assessment

Site: Omnia Foundation School , Omnia Foundation

Date: 13.12.2022

Location: Access paths between PortaKabins classrooms and main building

Description: Slippery and hazardous paths due to severe weather including ice and snow.

Hazard	Who's at Risk	Risk rating (tick)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Slippery, soft snow on pathsFrozen slush/rain on paths causing a slip hazard.Trip hazard from steps and thresholds obscured by fallen snow.	All staff, learners and visitors to site.	High ✓ Medium Low

Actions taken

- Head of Estates to instruct estates team to attend site at 6am to clear access to PortaKabins for cleaners (Cleaners will be asked to start work in the main clubhouse while this is being carried out).
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Risk rating after additional control actions:

High Medium ✓ Low

Recommendations made by: Laurie Carter

Signature: 

Date: 13.012.2022
