



# **School Business Continuity - Issues for Consideration**

**Briefing note (including guidance on managing the impact of severe weather on service provision) - February 2021**

## 1. Purpose of Briefing Note

- 1.1. Emergencies, significant incidents and /or extreme weather conditions (such as freezing temperatures, snowfall, heavy rainfall/flooding, etc.) can have an impact on the ability of a school to ensure the health, safety and wellbeing of its students and staff. Whilst it is expected that Heads will do everything possible to keep their school open following a significant incident or during extreme weather, there will be occasions when closure or part closure is a consideration.
- 1.2. This briefing note provides advice and guidance to Hackney schools when maintaining a full service may be difficult. It also aims to support schools to plan and mitigate against risks of extreme weather and the potential need to close the site.
- 1.3. Any decision regarding closure should be supported by the school's **Emergency Management Plan**. This sets out actions required to identify and respond to emergencies and/or any events that may interrupt service delivery – including extreme weather conditions. Schools should ensure that this plan is reviewed and updated, where required, on a regular basis. HLT's Services for School website provides documents to support and inform business continuity planning within your school, including a critical incidents framework and model school emergency plan – go to <https://www.hackneyservicesforschools.co.uk/extranet/business-continuity>.

## 2. Preparing for Bad Weather

- 2.1. Whilst we have experienced incidents of flooding resulting in school closure, the majority of closures reported in Hackney due to extreme weather have been as a result of freezing temperatures and/or snowfall occurring during December, January or February.
- 2.2. Given this, it is recommended that throughout the year (and especially during the Autumn Term), schools start to plan for potential extreme weather conditions over the winter months. Examples of advance preparation include (but are not limited to)
  - Ensuring supplies of road salt are purchased in preparation for any snowfall
  - Keeping guttering clear of autumn leaf fall
  - Undertaking a full service of the school boiler
  - Confirming what access you have to additional heaters
  - Confirming how will you manage staff cover if there is travel disruption?
  - Having a plan in place to manage all communications in and out of the school regarding any potential closure
  - Having additional protection measures (e.g., sandbags) readily available for parts of the building which may be vulnerable to flooding – e.g., server rooms, high value equipment, etc.
  - Contacting the Property Team (on 020-8820-7024) if you have particular concerns regarding a likely failure of any element of your building (mechanical, electrical or building fabric).
- 2.3. Weather forecasts up to 30 days are available from the Met Office site – <http://www.metoffice.gov.uk/public/weather/forecast/gcpvj0dup> . This site also has a cold weather alert page which operates between 1 November and 31 March each year – go to <http://www.metoffice.gov.uk/public/weather/cold-weather-alert/> . Please note, however, that information from these sites will only provide a forecast (using up to date information regarding potential scenarios) that will give you time to assess risk and to plan accordingly.

**3. Epidemics and Pandemics**

- 3.1. The current Covid-19 pandemic means that schools should ensure measures are in place to manage low staffing levels, as well as to continue to implement measures and promote messages to reduce the risk of transmission of infection from one person to another whilst on site.
- 3.2. Alongside this, as winter approaches, pupils and staff in schools continue to be particularly susceptible to infections which increase over the winter months, such as seasonal influenza (flu) and stomach infections (such as norovirus). These can be very infectious and cause outbreaks in school settings due to the close contact amongst pupils and staff. Public Health England have previously published winter readiness information for London Schools & Nurseries<sup>1</sup> to help schools review and plan for important health considerations over the winter.

**4. Making a Decision to Close a School or Setting**

- 4.1. During severe weather conditions, the Department for Education (DfE) expects headteachers to keep schools open for as many pupils as possible whenever it is reasonable for them to do so. Hackney Education (HE) expects the same approach to apply following a significant incident which may impact on service delivery. In line with this, HE expects schools to have contingency plans in place to keep the school open. Where, however, health & safety of the staff and students cannot be guaranteed, the headteacher should make a decision about school closure as quickly as possible, and providing as much advance notice as possible (ideally by 3pm the preceding day).
- 4.2. **Hackney Community Schools** – We ask that headteachers speak to either the Director of Education or, as appropriate, the Head of Primary, Secondary or Early Years & Early Help prior to making any final decision to close your school.

Title	Name	Email	Phone
Director of Education	Annie Gammon	annie.gammon@hackney.gov.uk	020-8820-7631
AD School Standards & Improvement	Stephen Hall	stephen.hall@hackney.gov.uk	020-8820-7067
Senior Primary Leadership and Management Adviser	Jason Marantz	jason.marantz@hackney.gov.uk	020-8820-7613
Principal Secondary Adviser	Anton Francic	anton.francic@hackney.gov.uk	020-8820-7063
Head of Early Years & Early Help	Donna Thomas	donna.thomas@hackney.gov.uk	020-8820-7594
Out of hours (only) emergency contact	Duty Emergency Planning Officer		020 8356 2366
	Main Monitoring Room (24/7 availability)		020 8356 2323

<sup>1</sup> Go to <https://www.hackneyservicesforschools.co.uk/system/files/extranet/Winter%20readiness%20information%20for%20London%20schools%202019-20.pdf>

4.3. **Voluntary Aided Schools and Academies** – decisions to close voluntary aided schools and academies are made locally. However, to support service planning and enable us to respond to queries received, we ask that schools inform HE as soon as a decision is made (see contact details in 3.2 above)

**5. Communications regarding school closures**

- 5.1. Decisions regarding school closures need to be communicated to staff, parents/carers and students as quickly as possible using a variety of methods – telephone, email, website, digital media (e.g., Twitter, Facebook if used by the school). It is the school’s responsibility to inform those affected.
- 5.2. Messages should be agreed by school senior management and should be consistent. They should be publicised in a central point (such as the school’s website) which should also be regularly updated to reflect the current position. Ideally, from a parent’s perspective, we would urge all schools to clarify the position regarding whether or not the school is open the next day by 3pm at the latest, and earlier where that is possible.
- 5.3. During severe weather, HE will assume that your school is open unless closure is formally confirmed with us. Likewise, if informed that the school is closed, we will publicise this until told otherwise.
- 5.4. HE’s Marketing Team will use the website, [education.hackney.gov.uk](http://education.hackney.gov.uk), and Twitter feed, to post as much information as possible regarding Hackney school closures. We will update this information morning and late afternoon but depend on schools providing regular information to inform these updates.
- 5.5. The Marketing Team can be contacted as follows:

Title	Name	Email	Phone
Head of Marketing & Sales	Jayne Banks	<a href="mailto:jayne.banks@hackney.gov.uk">jayne.banks@hackney.gov.uk</a>	020-8820-7033
Marketing Planning Manager	Moustapha Bennadi	<a href="mailto:marketing@hackney.gov.uk">marketing@hackney.gov.uk</a>	020-8820-7474

- 5.6. In the event of closure, we also ask that you inform other key services providing a service to the school or individual students (e.g., SEND Travel Assistance Service to rearrange pick up times from school and/or to cancel collection from home). This should also be done providing as much advance warning as possible.
- 5.7. Where bad weather is forecasted over the weekend, impacting on the ability to open the school on Monday morning, publicising a closure can be more challenging. School processes should be developed to ensure any decision made over the weekend is publicised quickly and efficiently. In the event that staff responsible for updating your website and other social media applications cannot get into school, you should plan to ensure that they have access to do this remotely from home/another location.

**6. Emergency & Out of Hours Contacts – Hackney**

6.1. For use out of office hours or in the event of an emergency or major incident, a list of mobile telephone numbers for members of HE’s Senior Leadership Team will be sent annually to headteachers via the Leadership Update. Headteachers are asked to save these numbers securely, whilst allowing access in the event of an emergency. Any changes to emergency contact numbers will be flagged up as soon as possible.

- 6.2. Hackney’s Emergency Planning Team ensures that a coordinated response to all notified emergencies is in place. They work with Council teams and external organisations (such as the Police and Health) to put appropriate support and responses in place across the borough – e.g., targeted street cleaning, targeting gritting, managing traffic, setting up diversions, etc.
- 6.3. HE will inform Hackney’s Emergency Planning Team of all school closures and the reasons for closures so that any required support can be provided.
- 6.4. In addition, LBH’s Facilities Management team can also provide support and advice in response to property related issues such as burst water pipes, etc. Please contact:

Title	Name	Email	Phone
Facilities & Support Services Manager	Tracy Spallin	<a href="mailto:tracy.spallin@hackney.gov.uk">tracy.spallin@hackney.gov.uk</a>	020-8820-7115 07768 557819
Out of hours (only) emergency contact	Duty Emergency Planning Officer		020 8356 2366
	Main Monitoring Room (24/7 availability)		020 8356 2323

**7. Emergency Contacts – Schools**

- 7.1. So that HE can contact schools in the event of an emergency during the school day or out of hours, HE asks that all Hackney Schools provide 2 or more emergency contacts. We recommend the main contacts to be the Headteacher and the school caretaker / premises officer. It is also helpful for us to have out of hours contact details for the Deputy Headteacher and School Bursar.
- 7.2. HE will undertake an annual exercise to review and update emergency contact details directly with schools. Contact details provided will be held securely by HE and will only be accessible to those senior managers with emergency and/or business continuity responsibilities.
- 7.3. Schools are asked to ensure that these details are reviewed and updated on a regular basis, especially if there are any changes to staffing and/or roles & responsibilities midyear. Where changes are made, HEs Management Information, Systems & Analysis (MISA) Team should be notified as soon as possible so that our records can be updated. In this instance, please email [ben.brennan@hackney.gov.uk](mailto:ben.brennan@hackney.gov.uk) or phone on 020-8820-7181.

**8. Other considerations**

**8.1. Insurance & security/fire arrangements**

- 8.1.1. In the event of a significant incident that may require an insurance claim, we recommend that you contact your insurer (and their loss adjuster as appropriate) as soon as possible. For Hackney Community schools or any school that has chosen to remain in the Hackney Insurance Scheme, this should be done through the LBH Insurance Manager (contact details below)
- 8.1.2. In the event of an incident that affects your security/fire arrangements, you must notify your school’s insurer as soon as possible, setting out any reasonable steps you have taken to cover and control any potentially increased security/fire threats to the premises covering the life of the incident.

- 8.1.3. An example of such an incident may be where, following a power failure, a school’s intruder and fire alarms have become disabled. As a result, depending on the insurance policy in place at the time, the school may not be covered for any loss. Reasonable steps to secure the building may be to provide security staff to cover the premises overnight, at weekends and/or during holiday periods. This should, however, be discussed with your insurer to confirm if this is sufficient mitigation and if costs can be reclaimed.
- 8.1.4. If it is appropriate to provide security staff, this can be booked via LBH security contract with CIS Security. In this case, contact Tracy Spallin (see contact details below). The school will be charged for any security costs incurred in this instance
- 8.2. For maintained provision, contact details are:

Title	Name	Email	Phone
LBH Insurance Manager	Michael Pegram	<a href="mailto:Michael.pegram@hackney.gov.uk">Michael.pegram@hackney.gov.uk</a>	020-8356-2647
Out of hours (only) emergency contact	Tracy Spallin, Facilities & Support Services Manager		07768-557819
	Duty Emergency Planning Officer		020 8356 2366
	Main Monitoring Room (24/7 availability)		020 8356 2323
	LBH Insurance Manager (Michael Pegram)		07971-836469

**9. Further Advice & Information**

The Gov.uk website provides further advice regarding school closure during extreme weather. Go to – <https://www.gov.uk/emergencies-and-severe-weather-schools-and-early-years-settings>

Appendix A - – Bad Weather Protocol: Schools process flow chart

