



Gracehill Primary School

19 Church Road, Gracehill.
BALLYMENA
BT42 2NL

Tel. 028 2564 3482

Fax. 028 2563 1878

Website: www.gracehillps.com

Principal: Mr R McCombe
BSc(Hons) PGCE MEd PQH(NI)

Caring, Learning, Achieving Together

September 2018

Severe Weather Guidance for Parents / Carers

As we move into the winter months, the potential for severe weather increases. There have been prolonged periods of frost and snow in recent years which have had an impact on the day to day running of some services. The following advice is designed to help you know how school will deal with such eventualities this incoming year.

In the event of severe weather, Gracehill PS will remain open unless the Senior Management Team decides that we cannot operate safely and effectively or that the risks of continuing to operate are such that it is in the best interests of the pupils, staff and parents to close.

The decision as to whether to stay open or close is a difficult one for a school to make and is not taken lightly. While we appreciate school closure may be an inconvenience to parents/carers, pupil safety is our priority and we ask for your understanding in this.

Some examples of what may lead to a school closure are:

- The school building has become unfit for use (eg heating break down, hazardous movement around school due to snow and/or ice, flood damage etc.)
- Freezing conditions, ice and snow resulting in dangerous and disrupted roads to the extent that staff and pupils cannot get to school
- The number of staff able to get to school is inadequate to continue operating
- The weather conditions and the short term outlook strongly suggest a rapid deterioration in conditions that may significantly effect the safe travel of children and staff on their homeward journey

The nature of the climate in Northern Ireland means that weather conditions can change and develop very rapidly and decisions about school closure are often taken at short notice. Sometimes a severe weather forecast doesn't cause much disruption in a particular area and yet in another locality nearby, conditions can be much more severe.

We do our best to make the right judgement call and inform parents as quickly as possible. If we do have to close, we will use the following methods:

- Text message from school – please ensure you keep us updated with number changes
- Department of Education www.nidirect.gov.uk/school-closures
- Local Media – www.bbc.co.uk – the BBC will often publish this information on their website
- Parents can phone school – although in such situation, the one line is usually busy

We will always do our best to make a decision and get information through the media as early as possible but the uncertain nature of weather events means that such decisions are inevitably short notice.

Personal Decisions – Assessing Risks

Many of us put in a determined effort to get to our work and keep things moving even when conditions are poor. It is up to each adult to make a calculated judgement about the level of risk, their personal experience and ability in dealing with the conditions (for example when driving) and the hazards that are beyond their personal control.

It goes without saying that this decision is more complex when travelling with children. Some adults may be happy to attempt a journey as individuals in poor conditions, but would choose not to do so when transporting their children, as the consequence of even a minor accident, or of having to abandon a vehicle, is more serious. As a school we do bear these factors in mind when we make a decision about staying open or closing.

Ultimately it is up to individual parents and staff to make a judgement on whether they feel it is safe to travel to school.

- If weather is so severe that you feel you are taking an excessive risk in travelling to school, you should not travel. Education, alongside attendance at school is important, but safety is the priority
- If conditions are such that you are unsure about whether the school might be open, use the means of communication detailed overleaf to check before setting out
- If conditions are such that you can get to school, please do so carefully
- **Please note: the roads around Gracehill Village are not routinely gritted by the Department of Infrastructure. We have made representations at the highest level to have this decision reviewed.**

Useful Websites

www.gracehillps.com

www.trafficwatchni.com

www.metoffice.com

www.nidirect.gov.uk/school-closures