



St. Paul's National School

Exceptional Closure plan



This Exceptional Closure Plan is subdivided into two sections.

Section 1 refers to exceptional closures related to **weather events**.

Section 2 refers to exceptional closures related to **other reasons** such as, but not limited to, utility failures, building/ structural issues, public health concerns, critical incidents, safety or security issues.

Rationale

- The primary objective of this exceptional closure plan is to ensure the safety and welfare of pupils, staff and the school community during severe weather and other exceptional events that may happen.
- The decision to close, delay opening, or adjust school operations rests with the principal.
- The principal will inform the Chairperson by phone call (email if Chairperson is unavailable) and members of the Board of Management via email.
- Where applicable (e.g. for weather warnings), they will liaise with principals of other local schools (primary and post primary schools) to ensure, as far as practicable, that a unified local response to severe weather conditions may be implemented.. The principal will make a decision taking all of the information from other schools into account.
- All actions must prioritise pupil and staff safety and that of the wider school community.

Section 1 – Exceptional closures relating to weather incidences.

The following information outlines the protocol to be followed for the various weather warnings and the communication that will be sent to all relevant parties.

Applicable Weather Warnings & Decision Triggers

Status Yellow:

- Monitor conditions; no automatic closure.

Status Orange:

- Assess local conditions; liaise with local authority / Gardaí and other principals in the local area, consider closure, delayed opening or early closure.

Status Red:

- Mandated to close for the duration of the warning.
- If a Status Red weather warning occurs **unexpectedly during the day**, the principal will contact An Garda Síochána (local station in Ashbourne) to seek further advice and they will communicate next steps with staff and parents in a timely manner. This communication to parents / guardians is outlined below.

Pre-adverse weather preparation

- Ensure that up-to-date contact lists for emergency services, parents/ guardians, and local schools have been checked and are accessible to principal or the deputy principal in their absence.
- Ensure that Aladdin continues to be functional to communicate with parents/ guardians and make sure that the email system is operational as a back – up to Aladdin.
- Test communication systems on a regular basis.
- Assign winter-readiness roles to staff (i.e. Weather Watch Co-Coordinator).
- Inspect heating, plumbing, roofs, trees, paths on a regular basis year round and ensure any repairs that are needed are carried out immediately. Caretaker of school should inform the principal of any repairs needed and inform them when they have been carried out.
- Stock grit, shovels, sandbags and torches.

Roles & Responsibilities of staff.**Principal:**

Monitor weather warnings, assess risk, make final decisions, notify Chairperson of Board with their decision, liaise locally, and send clear, timely alerts to staff and parents / guardians.

Weather-watch Coordinator:

Monitor forecasts, update principal, and assist principal to contact agencies if needed.

Caretaker:

Ensure all areas of the school are in working order and in good condition, carry out or arrange repairs of anything that needs to be fixed that could adversely affect the school building or school community. Carry out or arrange repairs of parts of the school that could be damaged by severe weather, Grit paths, check heating, inspect premises after storms.

Decision-making Protocol

1. Weather-watch Coordinator alerts the principal of warnings.
2. Principal assesses risk and local conditions.
3. Principal liaises with neighboring schools, local authority and / or Gardaí where possible.
4. Principal informs Chairperson of the Board of Management by phone call (or email in the event that the Chairperson is unavailable). The Board of Management members have agreed that the principal makes the final decision on school opening. The Board of Management will be informed of the decision via email (sent out at the same time as the parent's email) after informing the Chairperson via phone call/ email.
5. Communications issued to parents/ guardians and staff on Aladdin (or email if Aladdin is not available / undergoing maintenance). Communications based on a variety of different weather-warning scenarios are attached to this plan.
6. After the weather warning officially ends, the entire school premises and its grounds will be inspected by the caretaker and the principal / deputy principal/ AP1 before reopening. A communication will be made to parents/ guardians that the school will reopen once it has been determined that the school is safe for the school community to enter.

Communication Strategy

- Use Aladdin, email, or website to inform parents/ guardians of weather warnings and actions to be taken by the school.
- Remind parents/ guardians to keep contact details updated.

Post-Weather warning Review

- Review effectiveness of actions and communication.
- Inspect buildings and grounds.
- Update the plan based on lessons learned.

National Guidance

- This winter – ready plan is aligned with national “Be Winter Ready” guidance.
- This plan reflects common practices across Irish primary schools.

Notifications to be sent to parents / guardians for weather warnings.

The following communication will be sent to parents/ guardians via Aladdin to inform them of the weather warning. **It is an initial communication** made to parents/ guardians. This reassures parents/ guardians that the school are aware of the weather warning. It affords the principal adequate time to determine their decision and contact relevant parties.

Subject: Winter Weather – Important Update

Dear Parents/Guardians,

A [Status Orange / Red] warning has been issued for our area. We are assessing the situation in line with our Winter-Ready Plan. We will update you with more information in due course.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Mr. Harte

Communication to parents/ guardians where there is an **orange warning** but the school will **not** close as the severity of the weather does not reach the threshold to close the school from a safety point of view.

Subject: Important Update: School Opening During Status Orange Weather Warning

Dear Parents/Guardians,

Met Éireann has issued a **Status Orange weather warning** for our area for **[date/time]**. Following a careful assessment of local conditions, consultation of official guidance, and consideration of safety on the school grounds and surrounding routes, the school will **remain open as normal**.

A Status Orange warning does **not** automatically require school closure. Decisions are made based on **local conditions, accessibility, transport safety**, and the **ability to operate the school safely**. At this time, pathways, roads, and the school grounds are considered safe for pupils, staff, and families. We will continue to monitor conditions closely throughout the day.

Please note the following:

- Parents/guardians should use their **own discretion** if road or weather conditions in their immediate area differ from those near the school.
- If you decide that it is unsafe for your family to travel, please notify the school in the usual way and your child's absence will be understood.
- Should conditions deteriorate unexpectedly, we will issue updates by Aladdin, email, and the school website.

Pupil and staff safety remains our **highest priority**, and today's decision is based on all available information and the most up-to-date local assessment.

Sherpa Kids, the childcare facility, will run as normal.

Thank you for your cooperation and continued support.

Kind regards,

Mr. Harte

Communication to parents/ guardians where there is an **orange warning** and the school **will** close as the severity of the weather reaches the threshold to close the school from a safety point of view.

Subject: Important Notice: School Closure Due to Status Orange Weather Warning

Dear Parents/Guardians,

Met Éireann has issued a **Status Orange weather warning** for our area for **[date/time]**, with conditions expected to significantly affect travel and safety. Following a full assessment of local road conditions, the safety of access routes, and the ability to operate the school safely, a decision has been made to **close the school** on **[date]**.

While an Orange warning does not automatically require school closures, in this case the **local conditions present a genuine safety concern**, particularly for pupils, staff, and families travelling to and from school. The safety of all members of our school community is our highest priority, and today's decision has been taken with that firmly in mind.

Please note:

- The school will remain closed for the duration of the warning.
- We will provide a further update by **[time/date]** regarding reopening, once conditions have improved and the school building and grounds have been reassessed.

Please note that the childcare facility, Sherpa Kids, which is attached to the school, will also be affected by this closure and will not operate on the above dates/ times.

We appreciate your understanding and cooperation as we work to ensure the safety of our school community.

Kind regards,

Mr. Harte

Communication to parents/ guardians where there is a **red weather warning** and the school **must** close as the severity of the weather reaches the threshold to close the school from a safety point of view. This notification will be sent to parents / guardians where the red **warning is issued BEFORE school begins**. As per protocol outlined above, the Principal will contact An Garda Síochána (local station) and the advice given to the Principal will be communicated to the parents and these details will be added to the below notice.

Subject: Urgent Notice: School Closure Due to Status Red Weather Warning

Dear Parents/Guardians,

Met Éireann has issued a **Status Red weather warning** for our area for **[date/time]**. Under national guidance, all schools in affected areas are required to **close for the duration of a Status Red warning** due to the significant and immediate risks to public safety.

In line with this guidance, St. Paul's National School **will remain closed on [date]**. This decision is mandatory at national level and is based on the need to protect the safety of pupils, staff, and families. Status Red conditions are associated with severe risks, including dangerous travel conditions, potential infrastructure disruption, and a high likelihood of accidents.

Please note the following:

- The school will be closed for the full duration of the Status Red warning.
- Once the warning is lifted, the school building and grounds will be assessed to ensure that it is safe to reopen (e.g., pathways, access routes, utilities).
- We will issue an update by **[time/date]** regarding reopening plans or any further necessary actions.
- Parents/guardians are advised to follow all public safety advice issued by Met Éireann and the National Emergency Coordination Group.

Please note that the childcare facility, Sherpa Kids, attached to the school will also be affected by this closure and will not operate on the above dates/ times.

Thank you for your cooperation and understanding. The safety of our school community remains our highest priority.

Kind regards,
Mr. Harte

This notification will be sent in the event where a red weather warning situation arises unexpectedly during the school day when the children and staff are on the school premises already. As per protocol outlined above, the principal will contact An Garda Síochána (local station) and the advice given to the principal will be communicated to the parents / guardians and these details will be added to the below notice.

Subject: Urgent Notice: School Closure Due to Status Red Weather Warning.

Dear Parents/Guardians,

Met Éireann has issued a **Status Red weather warning** for our area for **[date/time]**.

Status Red conditions are associated with severe risks, including dangerous travel conditions, potential infrastructure disruption, and a high likelihood of accidents.

As the school day has commenced already and the official advice indicates that travel to or from the school is unsafe, the school will remain open as a place of safety for pupils and staff until conditions improve or it is deemed safe for collection and travel.

The principal, in consultation with the Board of Management and relevant authorities where appropriate, will implement emergency arrangements to ensure the safety and welfare of all pupils and staff. These arrangements may include:

- Maintaining adequate supervision of pupils throughout the period of closure.
- Ensuring access to suitable indoor accommodation, toilet facilities, drinking water.
- Communicating regularly with parents/guardians regarding the situation and any collection arrangements.

The school will follow all guidance issued by relevant authorities and emergency services.

Please note the following:

- We will issue an update by **[time/date]** regarding reopening plans or any further necessary actions.
- Parents/guardians are advised to follow all public safety advice issued by Met Éireann and the National Emergency Coordination Group.
- Pupils will not be permitted to leave the school unless collected by a parent/guardian or unless it is considered safe to do so in accordance with official guidance. The school will continue to monitor the situation and will communicate any updates to parents, guardians, and staff as soon as practicable.

Please note that the childcare facility, Sherpa Kids, attached to the school will also be affected by this closure and will not operate on the above dates/ times.

Thank you for your cooperation and understanding. The safety of our school community remains our highest priority.

Kind regards,
Mr. Harte

Weather Notice – Late Start / Early Closure (delete as applicable)

Dear Parents/Guardians,

In line with our school's Exceptional Closure Plan, a decision has been made due to **adverse weather conditions** to implement a **[late start / early closure]** today.

- **Late Start:** School will open at **[insert time]**
- **Early Closure:** Pupils will be finished at **[insert time]**

This decision has been taken following careful consideration of pupil and staff safety, local travel conditions, and in consultation with other schools in the area.

We ask that you take extra care when travelling and ensure that arrangements are in place for the safe collection of your child, where applicable.

We will continue to monitor the situation and will provide further updates if necessary.

Please note that the childcare facility, Sherpa Kids, attached to the school will also be affected by this closure and will not operate on the above dates/ times.

Thank you for your understanding and cooperation.

Kind regards,
Mr. Harte

Communication to parents/ guardians where there is a weather event has happened and the school **must** open later or close earlier as the severity of the situation reaches the threshold to open or close the school at a certain time.

Section 2 – Exceptional closures relating to other incidences.

Exceptional circumstances which trigger a school closure or a late start/ early finish to the school day are situations where the school cannot operate safely and where the issue is outside of management control and there is no reasonable alternative but to close the school.

- The following information outlines the protocol that will be followed where an exceptional event has occurred and as a result, the school needs to close.
- The following information also outlines what is considered a reason for an exceptional closure.
- The communication that will be sent to all relevant parties is included.

Exceptional closures may happen for the following reasons. This list is not exhaustive and other exceptional incidences may trigger a school closure. To this end, communication to parents/ guardian will be made with a full explanation and sent in a timely manner to afford them the opportunity to make arrangements.

Reasons for exceptional closure may include:

1) Utility failures.

- Electricity outages (power cut that the school has been informed could last the full or most of the duration of the school day).
- Heating failure.
- Water supply issues (no drinking water or toilet access).

2) Building or structural issues.

- Burst pipes or serious leaks that are serious enough to interfere with school access or activity or adversely impact the safety and welfare of staff and pupils.
- Fire damage or fire safety concerns.
- Structural instability.

3) Public health concerns.

- Infectious disease outbreaks.
- Direction and advice will be sought and given by the HSE.

4) Critical Incidents.

- Death of a pupil or staff member.
- Serious accident or traumatic event affecting the school.

5) Safety and security issues.

- Local security threats.
- Advice from Gardaí to close.

6) Emergency maintenance or infrastructure failure.

- Major repair works that cannot be delayed and are immediately needed.
- Sudden failure of essential systems and structures (roof, heating, electricity)

7) Staffing crisis.

Extreme staff shortages (e.g. multiple staff absent due to illness) and as a result there is an inability to safely supervise pupils.

Decision-making Protocol

1. Principal is alerted to the exceptional incident/ circumstances.
2. Principal assesses risk and the local conditions.
3. Where applicable, Principal liaises with neighbouring schools, local authority and / or Gardaí where possible.
4. Principal informs Chairperson of the Board of Management by phone call (or email in the event that the Chairperson is unavailable). The Board of Management members have agreed that the principal makes the final decision on school opening. The Board of Management will be informed of the decision via email (sent out at the same time as the parent's email) after informing the Chairperson via phone call/ email.
5. Communications issued to parents/ guardians and staff on Aladdin (or email if Aladdin is not available / undergoing maintenance). Communications based on the exceptional incidence is attached to this plan and will be edited by the principal to reflect the situation.
6. After the exceptional incident ends and where applicable, the entire school premises and its grounds will be inspected by the caretaker and the principal / deputy principal/ AP1 before reopening. Advice may be sought from experts (e.g. an engineer) to determine if an issue is fully fixed and if the school is ready to be reopened safely. A communication will be made to parents/ guardians that the school will reopen once it has been determined that the school is safe for the school community to enter.

Communication Strategy

- Use Aladdin, email, or website to inform parents/ guardians of exceptional closures and actions to be taken by the school.
- Remind parents/ guardians to keep contact details updated.

Notifications to be sent to parents / guardians for exceptional closures that are not weather related.

Communication to parents/ guardians where an exceptional event has happened and the school **must** open later or close earlier as the severity of the situation reaches the threshold to open or close the school at a certain time.

Notice of Late Start / Early Closure (delete as applicable) due to exceptional incident.

Dear Parents/Guardians,

In line with our school's Exceptional Closure Plan, a decision has been made due to **(insert reason why)** to implement a **[late start / early closure]** today.

- **Late Start:** School will open at **[insert time]**
- **Early Closure:** Pupils will be finished at **[insert time]**

The decision has been taken following careful consideration of pupil and staff safety, advice sought from An Garda Síochána, local travel conditions, and in consultation with other schools in the area.**(delete any of these that are not applicable)**

We ask that you take care when travelling and ensure that arrangements are in place for the safe drop off / collection of your child, where applicable.

We will continue to monitor the situation and will provide further updates if necessary.

Please note that the childcare facility, Sherpa Kids, attached to the school will also be affected by this closure and will not operate on the above dates/ times.

Thank you for your understanding and cooperation.

Kind regards,
Mr. Harte

Communication to parents/ guardians where an exceptional event has happened and the school **must** fully close as the severity of the situation reaches the threshold to do so.

Notice of Exceptional School Closure

Dear Parents/Guardians,

In line with our school's Exceptional Closures Policy, the school will be closed on **[insert date(s)]** due to **[insert reason for exceptional closure]**.

This decision has been made in the interests of the health, safety, and wellbeing of all pupils and staff, and follows careful consideration of the circumstances.

The school will **reopen on [insert reopening date]** and we look forward to welcoming pupils back then.

If there are any updates or changes, these will be communicated to you as soon as possible.

Please note that the childcare facility, Sherpa Kids, attached to the school will also be affected by this closure and will not operate on the above dates/ times.

Thank you for your understanding and cooperation.

Kind regards,
Mr. Harte

Sherpa Kids childcare facility.

Sherpa Kids currently operates in our school and provides childcare to a number of our pupils before school and after school.

The company will follow our exceptional closures policy at all times and their operating hours will be also delayed or paused temporarily depending on the school's circumstances.

In consultation with Sherpa Kids, the following line is added to the communication notices:

Please note that the childcare facility, Sherpa Kids, attached to the school will also be affected by this closure and will not operate on the above dates/ times.

Policy Review and Ratification

Version: One

Date: 9th of June 2026

*Approved by the Board: **Yes** / No*

Next review: June 2029