



# Pilgrims School

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## Emergency Closure Policy

January 2023

Next review date: January 2024



Please note: 'School' refers to Early Years Foundation Stage (Little Pilgrims, Kindergarten and Pre- School) and Pilgrims Main School.

## **Introduction**

Pilgrims is committed to remaining open to children and staff at all times, however, we acknowledge that there may be instances when the decision to close the school must be considered to maintain the health, safety and wellbeing of our school community.

This policy does not set out to specify every time the school may consider closing, however it will set out key principles to be adopted, a sequence to be followed and a series of factors which should be considered before making the decision to close.

## **Aim of the Plan**

To assist the School in responding appropriately to an incident which may give need to close the school for a period of time.

## **Objectives**

The Plan's priority objective will be:

- To maintain the health, safety and welfare of the whole school community
- To effectively manage the decision to close the school
- To co-ordinate the actions of key staff
- To effectively manage the communication of the closure to parents
- To take positive steps to avert any adverse publicity

## **Reasons for Closure**

Reasons for closure where the plan may be required include, but are not limited to, the following:

**Adverse weather** – Severe snow or ice, flooding, other serious adverse weather conditions could make the site, or the journey to and from the site too dangerous to allow the school to open.

**Loss of Gas** – The school is heated with gas fired boilers and the kitchens require gas to cook hot food. If the gas supply to the school is interrupted for a long period of time, especially during cold winter months, the school may not be adequately heated.

**Loss of Electricity** – Power is required to maintain lighting which is necessary for safe access and egress. Power is also required to pump the water supply throughout Main school, Little Pilgrims and Kindergarten. Mains water is available in Pre School only.

**Loss of Water** – The school community requires water to drink as well as to maintain hygiene facilities across the site.

**Fire** - A fire in any of the School buildings could give cause to close the school, depending on the size of the fire, amount of smoke damage and advice from the fire brigade.

**Armed Intruder or Hostage Situation** – following the resolution of such event, the school may wish to consider closing the school

**Outbreak of Communicable Disease / Pandemic** - In the event of a local or national outbreak of a communicable disease which has been contracted by some pupils, if the school cannot

contain the outbreak, the decision to close may be prudent to protect the health, safety and welfare of the school community.

**Food Poisoning** - The school dining hall plays a central role in the life of the school. Food contamination on a broad scale would have a major effect on the school's ability to operate in the short term.

## **Stage 1. Establishing the extent of the situation**

Depending on the situation it may be completely apparent that the only option is to close the school, for example if the school is within a police cordon and no access is allowed. However, in most instances a judgement call will need to be made.

The most important factor to consider is the Health, Safety and Wellbeing of the school community. If this cannot be maintained to an acceptable standard then the school must close.

Some examples:

- The school loses water or power, with an estimate from the provider that the supply will be returned within an hour – the school should remain open
- The school loses water or power, with an estimate from the provider that the supply will not be returned for several hours – the school should close as there is no water for flushing toilets or handwashing which are imperative to the health, safety and wellbeing of the school community.
- Loss of gas in the summer – the school kitchen will not be able to cook, but a cold lunch can be provided – the school should remain open
- Loss of gas during a particularly cold period in the winter – if the school cannot arrange sufficient heating
- Outbreak of Noro-virus affecting a significantly large percentage of the school community affecting staffing to the degree that staff ratios cannot be maintained even with the use of supply staff – the school, or parts of it may need to close

It will not always be a straightforward decision on whether to close the school. The responsibility ultimately rests with the headteacher who should work with members of the SLT to come to the considered decision about closing. Pilgrims should always strive to stay open and must only close in the event that the school community would not be safe on site.

In some circumstances, such as loss of water, the school may need to close as soon as possible. In other situations it may be decided that the school can continue until the end of the school day, but that all afterschool care and clubs will be cancelled. It may also be possible to make different decisions about Little P's and main school if the buildings are affected in different ways.

If the decision is made to only partially close the school, consideration must be given to the staff and how this will be viewed. All staff are paid to work their full hours, however, if half the staff body are able to leave work early and the other half are not, this could cause a divide in the staff team and must be dealt with sensitively.

Consideration must be given to all of the services that the school provides to its stakeholders. This includes Larks / Owls, Swimming, Clubs, and school dinners.

## **Stage 2. Communication**

Once the decision to close has been made, the next phase is to communicate with staff and parents on how this will happen.

We must expect, and be prepared for some parents being unable to collect their child for several hours after the decision has been made.

In all cases, the safeguarding of the children is of paramount importance.

Suggested wording for emails, text messages and Facebook posts are included in Annex A.

It is important that any communication sent to parents reassures them of the safety of their child, whilst still containing the message strongly that they should make arrangements for their child(ren) to be collect as soon as possible, or at the given time. It should allow them to be flexible with making alternative arrangements, whilst still putting the emphasis on them to make the school aware of who has permission to collect their child on this day.

The school has the facility to text and email parents as well as use Facebook and the Pilgrims Parents have class reps and WhatsApp groups.

We must keep parents up to date with any changes as they happen, for example, if the school community must leave the site, we must inform parent of where their children are located. This should be done by text, email and social media as well as leaving clear signage at the front of the school.

Where power has been interrupted the school need to think carefully about providing parents with details on how to get this information to us – they could send us a message through Facebook or be given a mobile number to call.

All information that is sent to parents will be emailed (if possible) to staff members so that they are aware of what has been said. Where this is not possible, for example due to a prolonged power cut, the message must be made available to staff by other means. For example, notes placed in the staffrooms and a short verbal message to that effect delivered throughout the school by members of SLT or the office team.

If the school is to remained closed for more than one day, communications must be sent to staff and parents on at least a daily basis.

### **Stage 3. Coping with children and staff on site post closure**

Pilgrims recognises that many of our parents work in London, or are otherwise unable to collect their child immediately should the school decide to close.

We must be supportive of parents who make alternative arrangements to have their child collected, but we must always ensure the safety of the child and check that the adult who is collecting has been approved by the parents.

As more of the children have been collected it will become easier to manage the children remaining. Thought should be given to condensing children into fewer rooms by combining classes together.

Depending on the reason for the closure the Headteacher, with support from SLT may decide to keep remaining children in the dining room or main hall, or in their classes with their individual teachers / room leaders.

If the reason for closure is due to the worsening of extreme weather, staff who live a considerable distance away should be given the opportunity to leave as soon as possible.

Pilgrims School has an excellent relationship with the Pilgrims Centre and it may be considered as an option to keep children safe and warm in their buildings if the school buildings have to

be closed. Bedford School and Bedford Modern School are both within walking distance so if we must completely leave site these would be our first options to fall back to.

## **Stage 4. Re-opening the school**

Once it is safe to re-open the school, we must communicate this to parents at the earliest opportunity through all available platforms.

The estates team will complete a full check of the premises to ensure they are in a safe and operational state before the children and staff return.

**Jonathan Bennett**

Estates and Facilities Manager

## **ANNEX A**

### **Suggested wording for communications**

#### **Text Message**

Pilgrims has closed due to power failure & loss of water. Please arrange to collect your child(ren) as soon as possible. See email & facebook for further info

#### **Facebook post / Email**

To all parents

We are sorry to inform you that we have had a burst water-pipe on site this afternoon. As a result there is currently no running water to the school. Although we anticipate the issue will be rectified in time for opening tomorrow morning at 8am, this may not be the case. We would, therefore, advise parents to make emergency childcare arrangements should we, subsequently, have to ask you to collect your child from school. Work will begin on-site at 7am tomorrow morning so we will be able to inform parents quickly afterwards whether the water is back on.

Should it be easier, you may wish to keep your child at home until we have confirmed whether the water is back on and working. Please call us to let us know if your child is not coming in at the usual time.

Please check this FB page and/or emails for updates.

Thank you for your understanding.

Dear parents

SNOW UPDATE! The school is open today (Friday). However, due to the experiences of yesterday evening when the roads came to a standstill around Bedford, and with the forecast of more snow to come this afternoon, we have taken the decision to close at 4pm . Main school children can be collected at 3.30pm (end of the school day) via the dining room. Little Pilgrims and Pre School parents should collect their child from their rooms, as normal, by 4pm. This should allow parents and staff time to travel home safely, and hopefully avoid a repeat of last night's traffic chaos. Of course, should any parent wish to collect their child any earlier than this please do so.

If you are making alternative arrangements for someone else to collect your child(ren) please let us know.

Thank you for your support and understanding.