



Extreme weather conditions and school closure

Dear Parents / Guardians

I thought I should write to explain the reason for the recent closures just before Christmas on Friday 18th December and today, Wednesday 6th January 2010 and to also explain the way in which we make our decisions.

You will appreciate that any decision to close the school is not taken lightly but it has to be based on the health and safety of staff, students, and parents/guardians.

The health and safety issues arise in terms of how staff and students get to and from school and then the school site itself. I need to feel that it is safe to ask staff to drive to school and that parents and carers can also get their children to school safely. I also have to consider what the day will be like to see if people will be able to get home safely at the end of the day. Of course, if sufficient staff cannot get into school then that also represents a major problem as we cannot look after the students, let alone give them an appropriate learning experience.

In the case before Christmas, it was really quite an easy decision to make as the conditions were appalling. The road conditions were such that too many staff were unable to get into school either being snowed in or stuck in traffic on impassable and dangerous roads. The school site was also unsafe.

Today was a more difficult decision, as although the weather was better, the school site did have a covering of snow, and you can imagine how difficult it is to run a school with 1200 children who want to play in the snow. The forecast was also causing more concern. The forecast was for light snow to fall Tuesday evening until about 3.00 am Wednesday morning. However, at the time of making my decision at 6am this morning, my main concern was for the further predictions of heavy snowfall throughout the day on Wednesday (starting probably mid morning) with some possibility of drifting because of the strengthening winds. This means that both road conditions and the condition of the school site are likely to change markedly during the day. Of course, I cannot predict the exact weather and did take the risk of looking rather foolish if the snow did not arrive but the BBC site has served us very well in the past.

I do not know what we will do on Thursday 7th January as yet but the problem will not only be in clearing the snow on the school site but also the freezing conditions that will still make driving to and from school a risk, not to mention what it will be like on foot around the school. The site team will work incredibly hard to get the site ready for Thursday and we may ask a small team of 6th form students to help if possible. We will let you know through the usual channels including the website, schoolcomms for those parents/guardians who have given us their mobile numbers, the local radio stations and the answering machine at school.

It is important that I also let you know how we make the final decision which is based on the following system:

1. As the Headteacher, I telephone various Headteacher colleagues from around the Hemel area and the County at about 5.30am to hear their views.
2. The Premises Manager, Mr Jay arrives at the school site at 5.30am and I telephone him to discuss the state of the site. I also have the various weather web sites in front of me to help make the decision.
3. Once we have made the decision to close, Mr Jay leaves a message on the answering machine and he also contacts the appropriate radio stations via a single text.
4. I then send a text via schoolcomms and an e-mail to all the staff and we place the information on the school website.
5. If that technology lets us down then I contact each member of the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) who in turn contact about 15 members of teaching and support staff who are on their 'contact tree'.
6. I then inform the Governing Body, the Local Education Authority and our School Improvement Partner.
7. I then consider the implications in the school diary and discuss them with the SLT before we make any more decisions. In this case, we are starting to turn our minds to post 16 exams and have decided that the exams will go ahead whatever the conditions next week. The forecast is more positive but we do have a plan that will support the exams and importantly give students the confidence required before sitting an exam.

The current weather conditions are the most severe that I have experienced and I trust parents and guardians will appreciate the difficulties that result from this and recognise that the health and safety of your child and the staff of the school are the most important considerations at this extremely difficult time.

I would like to thank the site team in particular as I know this causes them a great deal of work under a great deal of pressure as they try to clear the snow, put salt down and make the site as safe as possible.

In the mean time, I hope you will agree that we have to make the most of it, enjoy the snow and maintain our sense of humour in a difficult time.

Yours sincerely

Rhodri Bryant

Headteacher

Rumballs Road, Hemel Hempstead, Herts HP3 8JB

Tel: 01442 217277 Fax: 01442 233098
PE Dept Direct Line: 01442 205736
PE Dept Fax: 01442 405180

First Day Response: Yrs 7-9: 01442 205760
Yrs 10-13: 01442 205773
admin@longdean.herts.sch.uk
www.longdean.herts.sch.uk
Headteacher: R D Bryant, B.Ed.