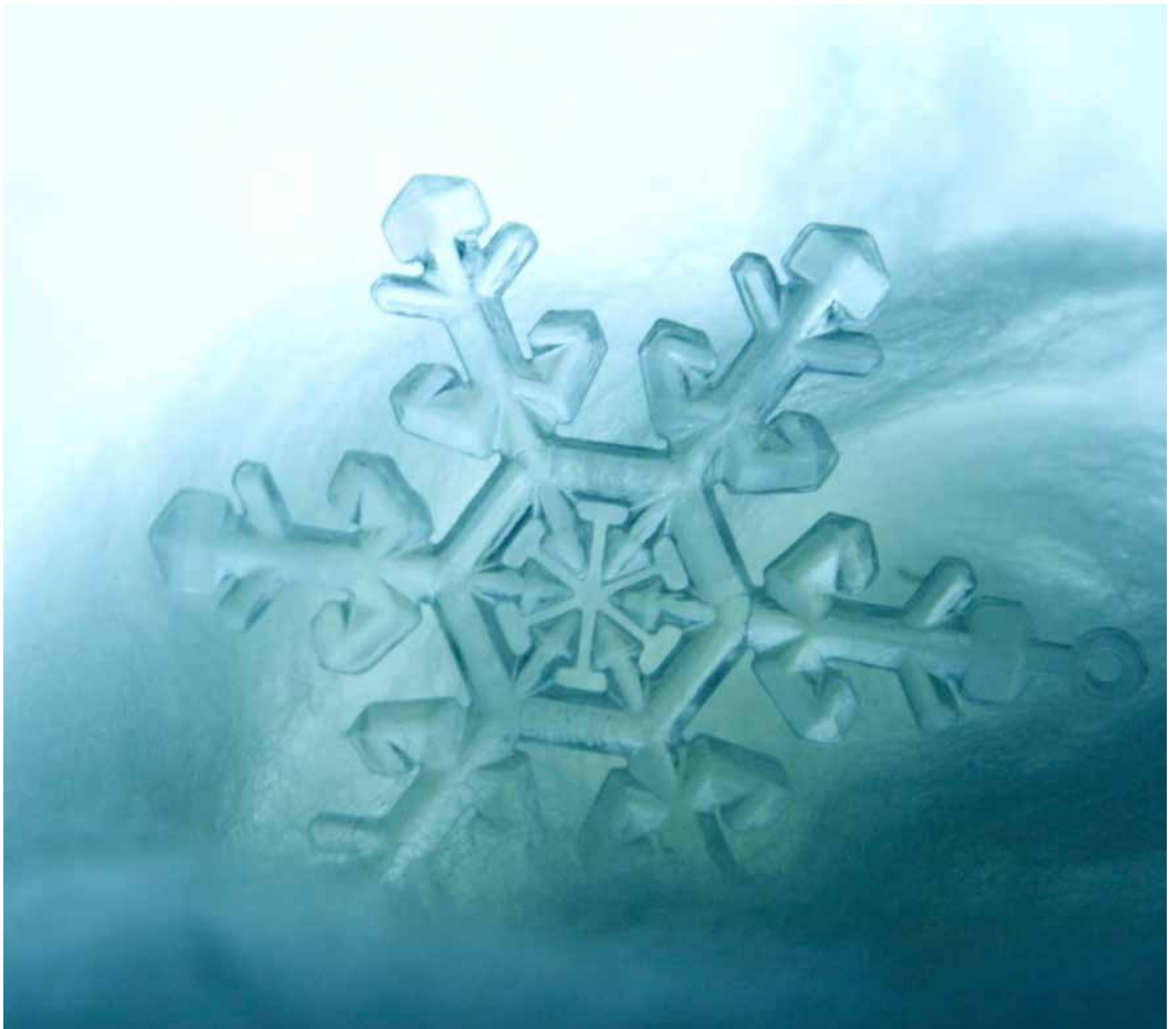


# Winter Planning Guidance for Kent Schools

Winter 2011/2012





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*“In the Department’s view, essential travel includes pupils going to school to keep learning and school staff going to work. The Department is confident that headteachers and parents will support this” – Department for Education*

Every winter brings the possibility of snow and ice. Extreme bad weather can cause widespread and prolonged disruption. Schools are often affected and it can be difficult to maintain an education service.

This guidance provides advice for headteachers about risks schools may face, preventative strategies and advice on how to communicate a school closure to parents, stakeholders and the Local Authority.

This guidance aims to be a useful touchstone and offer reassurance that acting reasonably and sensibly, and applying sound risk assessment principles, will enable headteachers to determine risks and to confidently make the best decisions for schools.

This guidance is split into the following sections:

- *Preparing for severe snow and ice – short and long term actions*
- *School Staff*
- *Risk assessment/management*
- *Communication with Parents and Staff*
- *Appendix 1: Useful Websites*
- *Appendix 2: Contact Details*
- *Appendix 3: Risk Assessment Template*

As a fundamental principle every effort must be made to keep schools open, even if only limited numbers of pupils can attend. There is a legal requirement to keep schools open for children to attend for 190 days per year (380 sessions). However schools may close due to “unavoidable” circumstances. Those circumstances being that it is no longer safe for staff or pupils to be onsite. The cancellation of public transport or the inability to run a normal timetable due to staff absence are not considered unavoidable circumstances.

The government has stressed the importance of schools remaining open, wherever possible, as closures have a knock on effect on parents/carers who are key workers in other areas of the public sector, e.g. Health Services, thus undermining crucial service delivery. The overriding principle is, therefore, for schools to remain open to the maximum degree possible, as is consistent with health and safety requirements, even if it is not possible to run a full timetable.

## Preparing for Severe Snow and Ice

There are long and short term actions you can take that will increase your ability to remain open during times of severe snow and ice.

**Long term** – consider these actions **weeks** in advance of the winter months:

- Develop a written school policy for extreme snow and icy conditions and ensure it is fully communicated to staff and parents/carers.
- Ensure stocks of salt/grit/sand are adequate for the time of year and foreseeable weather. Consider alternative local suppliers such as your Parish Council. Please remember salt stocks should be sourced well in advance of winter NOT days before predicted snow as transporting salt may be inhibited by bad weather.
- Pre-identify the outdoor areas used by pedestrians most likely to be affected by ice, for example: - building entrances, pedestrian walkways, shortcuts, sloped areas and areas constantly in the shade or wet.
- Ensure water, boiler and heating systems are regularly maintained.
- Inspect windows and exterior doors for draughts. Consider repairs and draught-proofing.
- Check that pipes are appropriately lagged.
- Consider making arrangements with a contractor to clear the school site (as supermarkets do) and possibly work with other schools to share this service.
- Talk to local community groups that may be able to support during heavy snow and ice. Perhaps put an agreement in place in advance of severe weather.

**Short term** – consider these actions **days** before forecast severe snow and ice:

- Regularly check weather forecasts via news and websites. Take action whenever freezing temperatures are forecast. A designated member of staff could do a regular check on:

The Weather Channel	<a href="http://uk.weather.com">http://uk.weather.com</a>
BBC Weather	<a href="http://news.bbc.co.uk/weather">http://news.bbc.co.uk/weather</a>
Met Office	<a href="http://www.metoffice.gov.uk/index.html">http://www.metoffice.gov.uk/index.html</a>

- Consider leaving heating on a low setting overnight.
- Where curtains or blinds are fitted these should be closed at night to retain heat.
- Doors between areas of differing temperatures should be kept closed as much as possible.
- Radiators should be kept clear of obstruction to enable a proper circulation of warmed air.
- It is not always necessary to clear the car park of snow as it can be taken out of use until such time as it is safe to be used, with staff making alternative parking arrangements providing it is safe to do so.
- Put plans in place to restrict the movement of pupils and staff around the school.
- Put a procedure in place to prevent any icy surface forming and/or keep pedestrians off the slippery surface.
  - Use grit or similar, on areas prone to be slippery in frosty, icy conditions. Gritting should be carried out when frost, ice or snow is forecast or when walkways are likely to be damp or wet and the ground temperatures are at, or below freezing. The best time is early in the evening before the frost settles; if this is not possible, (or additional salt is required) use it early in the morning before people arrive. Salt doesn't work instantly; it needs sufficient time to dissolve into the moisture on the ground. Please remember, if you grit when it is raining heavily the salt will be washed away, causing a problem if the rain then turns to snow.

- Consider covering walkways e.g. by an arbour high enough for people to walk through, or use an insulating material on smaller areas overnight.
- Divert pedestrians to less slippery walkways and barrier off existing ones.
- Ensure access points into buildings have the means for persons to wipe off water, snow or ice from their shoes, boots, etc.
- Consider the governments “snow code” that states “there’s no law stopping you from clearing snow and ice from the pavement outside your home or from public spaces”. See Directgov for more information and for more tips on clearing snow and ice: [http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/NI1/Newsroom/DG\\_191868](http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/NI1/Newsroom/DG_191868)

## School staff

Please remember you cannot direct a member of staff to drive. However the expectation is that staff will make every effort to attend school during severe snow and ice except in the most extreme cases where they can demonstrate a high degree of risk or by virtue of distance or terrain and absence of transport that it’s simply not possible for them to attend.

- The headteacher should be aware of the location of their staff and be able to communicate with them to determine attendance.
- Consider asking staff what alternative arrangements they intend to make to get to work: walk, bus, train, car sharing. Please also consider planning for staff such as county clearance/gritting plans/routes etc. (Information about planned gritting routes can be found on [www.kent.gov.uk/winter](http://www.kent.gov.uk/winter)).
- If possible, arrange for staff to accommodate each other locally in severe conditions if returning home is impossible.
- An agreement may be reached for certain staff not to be expected until later in the morning or to be released early.

## Risk Management/Risk Assessment

This section will look at risk management and assessment. It aims to help schools identify potential risks in advance of severe snow and ice and ensure appropriate control measures are implemented. This section will also assist headteachers in making the right decision on the day and in adopting an approach that is grounded in common sense and being proportionate.

*“You need to be clear who will make any decision about closure. In most cases this decision is delegated, rightly in the Department’s view, to headteachers, who will know local weather and ground conditions, and the likely impact of the weather on the numbers of staff and pupils who will be able to get into school.”* – **Department for Education.**

The decision to close or restrict attendance should be taken by the headteacher of the school, or in their absence by the most senior member available of the teaching staff and after the completion of a suitable and sufficient risk assessment.

Please see the risk assessment template in Appendix 3.

The following should be considered and management systems put in place:

- Is the school building accessible?
- Are pedestrian routes on the school grounds passable?
  - Is there means to clear these routes, e.g. salt/grit?

- Can priority be made in respect to slopes, steps or ramps, or can these areas be restricted from use? Outside metal staircases should also be avoided unless appropriately treated.
- Can the headteacher gain enough teaching and/or supervisory staff to operate safely?
  - The emphasis would be to operate safely, not whether a full or normal curriculum could be followed.
  - There are no supervisor ratios for non-teaching periods. Internal management should decide staffing numbers depending on risk and by considering the type of pupils (age, behaviour, disabilities) and the type of activity they are doing.
- Is the school appropriately heated?
  - Is there enough fuel for the day?
- Are water systems working appropriately?
- Is it possible to restrict outside play to limit the snow/ice becoming compacted, and therefore more dangerous.

It is vital a risk assessment is completed prior to the decision being taken to close, in order to ensure all the safety issues have been considered and control measures implemented. It will also serve as evidence should justification be needed to defend the school closure.

During each day headteachers will want to review their risk assessment. It is expected that a school will remain open until the normal time for the end of the school day. However if the revised risk assessment indicates that circumstances have changed to such an extent that the headteacher believes conditions are now unsafe, early closure may be necessary. In such circumstances the school should register their closure online at [www.kentclosures.co.uk](http://www.kentclosures.co.uk) (see 'Communication with Parents and Staff').

If you have any questions about completing a risk assessment, please contact Kent County Council's Health and Safety Unit on 01622 694476.

## Communication with Parents and Staff

### Early Communication with Parents

You may already do this but consider communicating with parents in advance of severe snow and ice via the school newsletter to aid preparation and ensure they know how to find out if the school is closed. Consider including the following, as well as any other necessary information:

- Re-iterate the advice from the Department For Education about 'essential travel' (see page 1)
- Remind parents about the preparations the school will be undertaking to ensure the school remains open as far as possible.
- Remind parents they can go online to see if their school is closed ([www.kent.gov.uk/winter](http://www.kent.gov.uk/winter)). They can also visit KMFM, BBC Radio Kent and Heart FM.
- Remind parents they can hear about school closures by listening to KMFM, BBC Radio Kent and Heart FM.
- They can also visit [www.kent.gov.uk/winter](http://www.kent.gov.uk/winter) for more information about gritting routes and other KCC closures.
- Suggest parents might want to sign up for text message alerts on [www.kentclosures.co.uk](http://www.kentclosures.co.uk). Please be aware there is a charge of 20p plus standard network charge.
- Suggest visiting the BBC or [direct.gov.uk](http://direct.gov.uk) websites for home learning resources to support children's learning while the school is closed. (See Appendix 1).
-

## Announcing your School Closure to Parents and Staff

After the decision has been made to close or partially close the school you will want to communicate that closure to parents and staff as soon as possible.

**Please note:** an improved online process for communicating your school closure is now in place. This new process is intended to be used to communicate emergency closures during term time only.

A full, consistent and reliable list of all school closures will now be published on the Kent County Council Website ([www.kent.gov.uk/winter](http://www.kent.gov.uk/winter)).

### In advance of winter and the chance of severe snow and ice:

**Please register your school** (if you haven't already) to create your schools' password, which you will need to log your closure on the morning of severe snow. This school specific password ensures the announcement of your school closure is secure.

You can do this by visiting [www.kentclosures.co.uk](http://www.kentclosures.co.uk) and clicking 'school admin' (**blue tab on the right with a mortarboard icon**). Here you can find your school using the drop down menu. When you click on your school you may see a message on screen saying you've already registered. Use the email detailed within this message to log on in the future. However if you do not remember your password please click 'school admin', type in the email address detailed in the message under 'school log in' and click 'forgot password'.

If you do not receive a message to say you have already registered you will be taken through to another page to confirm your registration. Simply confirm the address details, complete your name/email and create a password (this will be needed to log your closure on the morning of bad weather). You will then receive an email that requires you to click on a link to validate the email address. When you have registered please log into your account and initially set your status to open.

### On the morning of severe snow:

Once the decision has been made to close your school, visit [www.kentclosures.co.uk](http://www.kentclosures.co.uk) with your password ready. Click 'school admin' (blue tab on the right with a mortarboard icon) and log on using your school email address and password.

You will be asked to update your status to either open or closed. (Your status will stay the same until you change it. So please remember to 're-open' your school if you close it).

You will also be asked the following:

- Message: there is a default message but you can change this and can include further information such as the cancellation of parents evening or the continuing of Year 10 exams etc
- Year groups affected
- Approx. number of children affected.

Within minutes this information will be published on the Kent County Council website ([www.kent.gov.uk/winter](http://www.kent.gov.uk/winter)) and the KMFM website ([www.kentschoolclosures.co.uk](http://www.kentschoolclosures.co.uk)). BBC Radio Kent, Heart FM and KMFM will use this list to broadcast closures over the radio.

It is no longer necessary for your school to call 3 radio stations and the Local Authority to announce your school closure. **However, if advice is needed prior to closure then please contact your Area Education Officer.**

If you can not get online on the morning of severe snow, you can call KMFM (see Appendix 2 Contact List). They will note the above details on your behalf. If you are unable to reach KMFM via telephone, you can call your Area Schools Organisation Officer (ASOO) and give them the same details. They will complete your online form on your behalf.

It is also essential to let other agencies know of the school closure, e.g. school transport, catering and cleaning contractors, road crossing patrols, mid-day supervisors etc. A school must never close completely unless the headteacher is certain that no child will present his/herself. A member of school staff must remain on site in case any students or staff arrive at the school after it has announced it is closed. Arrangements must always be made for the security of children and parental assent must be sought if sending them home.

## Radio Stations

Please encourage parents to visit [www.kent.gov.uk/winter](http://www.kent.gov.uk/winter) or visit/listen to the 3 Kent radio stations:

Radio Station	Frequency	Website
KMFM	Ashford	107.6 fm
	Canterbury, Whitstable and Herne Bay	106 fm
	Maidstone	105.6 fm
	Medway	100.4 / 107.9 fm
	Shepway & White Cliffs Country	96.4 / 106.8 fm
	Thanet	107.2 fm
	West Kent	96.2 / 101.6 fm
BBC Radio Kent	96.7 / 104.2 fm	<a href="http://www.bbc.co.uk/kent">www.bbc.co.uk/kent</a>
Heart FM (was Invicta)	103.1 / 102.8 fm	<a href="http://www.heart.co.uk/kent">www.heart.co.uk/kent</a>

## Text Service

Parents (and school staff) can register for alerts via email for free or SMS for 20p and the standard network charge on [www.kentclosures.co.uk](http://www.kentclosures.co.uk). This means that as soon as you have registered your school closure via the process above the parents and staff who have registered your school will be notified via SMS or email almost immediately.

## BE PREPARED

Before the winter and the chance of severe snow and ice, please ensure:

1. A member(s) of staff has been nominated to complete the online form should the school need to close.

2. The password has been kept safe and is easily accessible/known by the person(s) nominated to complete the online form.
3. [www.kentclosures.co.uk](http://www.kentclosures.co.uk) is easily accessible/known – either written down with the password or saved as a quick link on a school/home computer.
4. The number for KMFM or your ASOO is easily accessible/known should you be unable to get online.

## Appendix I: Useful websites

<b>Kent County Council</b>	School closures, gritting routes	<a href="http://www.kent.gov.uk/winter">http://www.kent.gov.uk/winter</a>
<b>Kent Health and Safety Unit</b>	Asbestos policy, event Safety, Food Hygiene Policy etc	<a href="http://www.kenttrustweb.org.uk/Policy/health_safety_home.cfm">http://www.kenttrustweb.org.uk/Policy/health_safety_home.cfm</a>
<b>Department for Education</b>	Planning for, and responding to, severe weather	<a href="http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/adminandfinance/emergencyplanning/a0069425/advice-on-severe-weather">http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/adminandfinance/emergencyplanning/a0069425/advice-on-severe-weather</a>
<b>Highways Agency</b>	Conditions on motorways and trunk roads	<a href="http://www.highways.gov.uk">http://www.highways.gov.uk</a>
<b>Direct gov</b>	In extreme weather – travel and transport	<a href="http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/TravelAndTransport/Usingmotorwaysandroads/Roadsafetyadvice/DG_185021">http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/TravelAndTransport/Usingmotorwaysandroads/Roadsafetyadvice/DG_185021</a>
	Home learning – developing reading, writing and spelling for 5-11 year olds	<a href="http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/Parents/Schoolslearninganddevelopment/HelpingYourChildToLearn/DG_4016579">http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/Parents/Schoolslearninganddevelopment/HelpingYourChildToLearn/DG_4016579</a>
<b>BBC</b>	Online educational resources and activities to support children’s learning	<a href="http://www.bbc.co.uk/learning/subjects/childrens_learning.shtml">www.bbc.co.uk/learning/subjects/childrens_learning.shtml</a>
<b>Traveline</b>	Public transport information for journeys within South and East England	<a href="http://www.travelinesoutheast.org.uk/se/XSLT_TRIP_REQUIREMENT2?language=en&amp;timeOffset=15">http://www.travelinesoutheast.org.uk/se/XSLT_TRIP_REQUIREMENT2?language=en&amp;timeOffset=15</a>

## Appendix 2 - Contact List

### KMFM

### Telephone number

General	0844 967 1000
Ashford	01233 610761
Canterbury	01227 786106
Maidstone	01622 691056
Folkestone	01303 240402
Thanet	01843 231072
Tonbridge	01732 773000

### Area Schools Organisation Officers

Area Schools Organisation Officer	Contact Details
East Kent – Jane Wiles	Office: 01227 284614 Mobile: 07824 306242
Mid Kent – Jill Clinton	Office: 01233 898547 Mobile: 07795 036711
West Kent – David Hart	Office: 01732 525105 Mobile: 07917 848612

## Appendix 3 - Risk Assessment Template for Snow and Ice

- In accordance with government policy every effort should be made to keep a school open and the closure of the school must be justified. In order to determine a decision, work through the following risk assessment. If your site has specific issues that are not listed, these should be added. Any pre-planning controls not in place must be transferred to your action plan at the end.

*This assessment should be carried out:*

- Before any bad weather arrives - make sure identified control measures are implemented: refer to your action plan at end
- At the time of the emergency - consider and complete last header column
- After the event - does the risk assessment need review?

?	Are the following control measures in place?	State what risks are involved and the consequence of the risk	State which control measures are in place to reduce the risk	Are the controls in place? (Pre-planning)		Are the controls in place? (On the day)	
				Yes	No	Yes	No
1	Is there enough salt/grit available on site to keep a clear path for safe access and egress around the school site?	Slip/Trip of pupils, staff, 3 <sup>rd</sup> party visitors, causing a twist, strain or fracture	Maintain stocks of salt/grit.  Identify which walkways or areas need to be kept clear to allow people to get around the premises safely  Allocate a responsible person to watch weather reports and grit/salt prior to snow/ice forming  Reduce the movement of people around the premises				
2	Is there an acceptable ratio of staff to pupils to attain adequate supervision?	Staff not being able to attend school, leaving pupils without adequate supervision	Estimate how many staff members need to get in for the school to operate safely by identifying how many pupils could attend.  Identify how many staff would be safe to travel to work in severe conditions.  Inform staff to listen to Road Safety (AA) to see if the roads are safe to travel on. Remember: Travelling to school is considered 'essential travel'.  Devise a system where staff can report to head-teacher by 7.45am and contact number given.  Contact Property Group to have emergency heaters delivered.  Consider only using the parts of the school that has heating.  Keep doors, curtains and blinds closed during the night to retain the heat.				
3	Are there procedures in place for heating failure?	Unable to sufficiently heat school to the minimum working temperature 18°C, causing staff and pupils to suffer from the cold.					

4	In the event of a closure, has it been identified which pupils are safe to be sent home?	Pupils unable to get into their homes, left stranded	Identify which pupils have alternative arrangements if they were to be sent home. Consider if enough staff can stay on site to supervise the pupils unable to return home, and that those staff will be able to get home at a later time.		
5	Will the school have got adequate welfare facilities?	Staff and pupils are unable to wash their hands, flush the toilets, or have access to drinking water	Ensure that there is anti-bacterial wash on site. Reserve supplies of bottled water.		
6	Would the school have provision for the pupils to cross the road safely?	Pupils involved in a vehicle collision	Consider if all toilets are un- operational or whether alternative toilets can be used. Consider if the road patrol officer is able to get to the school. Consider if alternative arrangements need to be made if the road patrol officer can not get to the school.		

All actions, where possible, should be completed before the bad weather arrives.

Action Plan			
Pre-planned control measures that are not in place:	Actions to be taken:	By Who:	Date Completed:

Completed by:	Position
Signed:	Date of completion of risk assessment:

Review dates:	Signature:

To be completed if the school is closed:

The decision for closing the school has been based on the following: (highlight relevant question number). 1 2 3 4 5 6

Signature of Head:

Date:

Signature of Chair of Governors:

Date:





This publication is available in other formats and languages.

Please contact us for further information on 08458 247 247 Or textphone 08458 247 905.