

Subject:**School Optional and Exceptional Closures****Circular Number:
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- Principals and Boards of Governors of all grant-aided schools;
- Education and Library Boards;
- Council for Catholic Maintained Schools;
- Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education;
- Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta; and
- Teachers' Organisations.

Summary of Contents:

Advice and guidance on the use of optional and exceptional school closures.

Status of Contents:
Advice
Information for Schools**Related Documents:**
Circular 2005/3**Superseded Documents:**
Circular 1965/7**Expiry Date:**
None**DENI Website:**
<http://www.deni.gov.uk>**Enquiries:**

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SCHOOL OPTIONAL AND EXCEPTIONAL CLOSURE DAYS

Introduction

1. This circular provides advice on the use of optional days and the circumstances in which the Department will consider a request from a school for an exceptional closure day.

Optional days

2. School authorities have discretion to close a school for up to 5 days. The school authority is the education and library board in the case of controlled schools in its area and the school Board of Governors in the case of other grant-aided schools.

3. The 1973 Primary Schools: General Regulations and the Secondary Schools (Grant Conditions) Regulations, require schools to be in operation for 200 days. Regulation 4(a) of Schedule 3 to the Teachers' (Terms and Conditions of Employment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1987 requires a full time teacher to be available for work on 195 days in any year of which not more than 190 days should involve teaching children in a classroom situation. One of the effects of the 1987 Regulations is that schools can take a maximum of 5 optional closure days representing the difference between the 200 days when they are required to be in operation and the 195 days when a teacher must be available for work.

4. Optional days are intended to cover closings throughout the year in special circumstances such as:

- the death of a person connected with the school (other than a teacher or pupil); or
- when a school will have planned for a specific event, for example, the need to move premises, the start of building work, a Church holiday etc.

School authorities are therefore expected to hold a number of optional days in reserve for such purposes and may use any unused days by earlier closing at the end of the summer term.

5. Circumstances prevalent in individual schools will have a bearing on the number of days to be held in reserve and on the question of using them later in the school year. Any of the 5 optional days may be taken as occasional closings during the terms, or as an extension to the Easter, Christmas or summer holiday periods, according to the circumstances of individual schools.

6. Education and library boards are responsible for approving the Easter, Christmas and summer holiday closures for schools situated in their respective areas and for approving closures for optional days in controlled schools. In fulfilling these responsibilities, Education and library boards are expected to ensure that all schools are able to meet the statutory requirements in relation to days of operation.

Exceptional closures

7. The Department will consider an application for a reduction in the days on which a school must be in operation to take account of exceptional circumstances or where the closing of the school is outside the control of the school authorities, for example, due to:-

- the death of a teacher or pupil at the school;
- flooding or burst pipes;
- electricity failure;
- an exceptionally heavy snowfall;
- use as a polling station for parliamentary/local government elections.

8. Schools should apply in writing to the Department's School Administration Branch requesting permission for any exceptional closure (EC) days, together with detailed background information about the need for an EC and give as much prior notice as possible for requests to be considered. Schools may wish to consider faxing the request direct to School Administration Branch on 9127 9319.

School Development Days

9. Schools may avail of School Development Days during the school year which provide additional non-contact time to devote to school improvement and school development matters. A separate circular issues each year about these days and any related enquiries should be directed to the Department's School Improvement Branch.

BRIAN HILL