

Mr Parker
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Date: 15th December 2009
Our ref: JW/FS
Your ref:

Dear Mr Parker

WASHINGTON AREA COMMITTEE

I am replying further to your written question submitted to Washington Area Committee on 5th November 2009 in which you asked :-

My Sons school closed due to the fact the car park could not be cleared of snow on all three occasions of snowfall last year. Not once did it manage to stay open when EVERY other school in the whole of Sunderland managed to open on at least two of those occasions. When I questioned this I am only told that schools are autonomous institutions and can do as they please and since other schools in the country (not NOTcounty) closed they cannot single out one school. Why with the Government preaching EVERY SCHOOL DAY COUNTS, does this not apply to the schools themselves, **Why can't the education department look at how all other schools managed to stay open and implement best practice at all schools to ensure my son does not loose any further education.**

To address your question as explicitly as I can, I would respond as follows;

Children's Services annually give advice and support in assisting all schools to plan for severe weather events. Advice is drawn from a range of relevant sources, including lessons learned from previous experience of the impact of winter conditions across the city, all with the intent to reduce the risk of potential school closure.

However varying circumstances may occur from year to year, as a result of severe snowfall at any school sites and surrounding areas, which could force individual schools to consider closure. The decision to close any school is taken in the light of prevailing conditions, and other relevant considerations, including this local authority advice and support, and with regard to the need to balance the education and welfare needs of pupils.

To summarise, the council regularly reviews the annual advice it gives to schools and as part of this process would include any emerging good practice which may be useful, and possible, for other schools to adopt. It is, however, sometimes both reasonable and necessary for a school to take the decision to close to pupils in severe weather conditions.

Yours sincerely

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