



"We are all here to learn"

# Longdendale Community Language College

8<sup>th</sup> January 2010

Dear Parents and Carers

I do hope you have had a great Christmas and on behalf of the governors, my colleagues and myself please accept these good wishes for a productive and happy New Year.

I would like to thank you for your swift response to the decision to close the college on Monday 21<sup>st</sup> December 2009 and again this week. The first decision was made partially in response to the weather endured on the Sunday – which I understand included blizzard conditions in parts of Tameside and the surrounding area – and the ensuing difficulties this was going to cause both students and staff regarding safe transportation to college on the Monday morning. By early Sunday evening severe weather warnings had also been issued for the area for the Monday itself, making the decision to close inevitable on health and safety grounds.

The closures for this week were needed because the site could not be made accessible any earlier due to the sheer amount of snow and the following frost.

I understand the anxiety that unexpected school closures cause and I do hope you were able to make any necessary arrangements regarding the care of your child(ren) without disruption to yourselves. I would like to reassure you – particularly if your child has joined our Year 7 this year - that the decision to close is never taken lightly at Longdendale. In the last academic year, the college closed for one day in response to severe weather and warnings of further severe weather. Prior to that, our last enforced closure for a day was several years ago and was in response to a fault in our fire alarm system which would have placed students and staff in unacceptable jeopardy in the event of a fire. We do not routinely shut because of the routine difficulties of staying open in snowy weather. We only shut when to open would give a great likelihood of placing students and staff in an unsafe situation, either on the way to college or in college itself.

The messages regarding closures relayed via text messaging/ email, the college website and local radio stations appear to get through to 100% of families Please do make sure the college has up-to-date telephone numbers with which to contact you as the most comprehensive way of getting urgent news out to you is via a phone call, text message/email. If notice can be given of an unplanned college closure it will be notified on our college website as well.

Of course, we have to have plans in place for the worst of scenarios, including what would happen if the college had to shut during the college day. That has never happened in the five years I have been at Longdendale; nevertheless, I know this will be an area of concern for some parents and I would like to take this opportunity to clarify the procedures in place, with particular regard to severe weather. If extreme weather sets in during the college day and you are concerned about how your child will get home you or an authorised person such as a close relative may collect your child early from college during the afternoon session. I must stress that students will be allowed to leave early ONLY if the weather conditions warrant it and ONLY if collected by a parent, carer or similarly authorised person.



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MANCHESTER CHAMBER OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY

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Regarding severe weather, once the college is open it will STAY open to students until 3.15pm when buses are due. During the normal run of things there have been some occasions when buses have broken down or turned up late - in the event of extreme weather it is possible that services may be withdrawn without notice, though this is a very rare event. Partly to cover such a contingency all students should have written on the first page in their planners the emergency procedure their families want them to follow in the event of the college having to shut or – if they use the school bus service – buses being cancelled without warning.

Rarer still is the situation whereby the college has to shut early without notice because conditions within the college grounds and buildings make keeping the college open unsafe. Whilst I take no pleasure in contemplating such a situation, safety must always come first – an example would be if the building was flooded during the day, or subject to a power failure, for example. In such a situation can I assure you that we do have contingency plans about how best to ensure safety. That idea of safety does not just apply to how we keep students safe whilst in college – it has to take into account emergency arrangements for getting students home in the event of an unforeseen closure.

For this reason, as well as ensuring that arrangements are written in the Student Planner, so that we have centrally-held, up-to-date information regarding this can I ask all parents and carers to:

- 1] Return the slip at the bottom of this letter specifying the arrangements you wish your child to follow in the event of an emergency closure.
- 2] Ensure that your child is aware of the arrangements.

Thank you for your help with this – it is appreciated.

We took a number of calls from parents on Monday to report that the snow has caused particular difficulty for getting students to college and this is likely to have caused difficulties today too. I know that some service buses have not turned up at the usual time and, obviously, some areas have had more snow than others. Our standard advice in such circumstances is that, on days when the college is open, it remains the duty of parents to make every effort to get their child(ren) to college. We understand that in some cases this will mean students arrive late and in some cases, where parents judge that the journey into college would pose a real danger to a child, a child might be left at home. We expect parents to use their common sense and discretion regarding this. Where a student's attendance is normally good such an absence for the day would be authorised by the college. However, the college would not authorise extended absences for such a reason where the college is open.

In the meantime, I'd also like to give you some further brief information about how we handle severe weather here at Longdendale. If you could reinforce some of these points with your child, it would be very helpful to us. I like to think that the arrangements we have in place follow common sense. The rules we put in operation at such times are to further ensure the safety and comfort of all – both those who want to enjoy the snow and those who do not. ALL the following rules have the expectation that all students will take responsibility for their own actions and put safety first.

- The member of the Senior Leadership Team on morning duty from 8am who usually goes down to the village will pay particular attention to the supervision of students' arrival on the premises to reinforce the need for students to act sensibly on the way into college. Students will be encouraged to go into the building where they can be supervised.
- During normal snowy conditions snowballing will ONLY be allowed on the front field. This is because it ensures that ONLY those who want to be involved in snowballing get caught up in it and because this area is the supervised area for this at break and

lunchtime. For this purpose, access at the front of the building on snow days will be limited to the FIELD and Astroturf ONLY. Students are not to congregate around the paved areas to 'watch' the snowballing and should not be on the field unless they wish to participate. In other words, students are expected to make a decision: either go on the field and participate where you can be supervised or be indoors. Snowballing is expected to be a 'fun' activity – students are expected to exercise control and judgement about how they play in the snow – no one should be getting hurt and irresponsible behaviour will not be tolerated.

- The only door students should use in the event of snow is the FRONT ENTRANCE which is supervised. This is particularly important as snow should not, of course, be brought into college, or games of 'chase' involving snowballing put those inside the building at risk. We are proud of being a secondary school where students have access to the building at social times and are not forced to go out. The building should be a haven for those who want to stay inside.
- 'We are all here to learn' – students must make sure that any action they take does not impede this for either themselves or others. For example, students should not use the snow as an opportunity to make their clothes soaking wet as this will lead to discomfort for them in their lessons. Students will not be excused lessons due to wet clothing!! Similarly, students should not go out of the building during lesson changeover – it is not an opportunity to play in the snow.
- The co-operation of each and every student during severe weather is of paramount importance. Students who do not conform to these expectations may well risk bringing the safety and learning of both themselves and others into question. That is not acceptable and such actions are likely to have consequences, some of which may have immediate effect such as having their social time taken away.

These general guidelines have been and will continue to be reinforced with students here at college; your support in reinforcing these messages is vital. I know that you take safety as seriously as the staff team here at Longdendale do – by working together I hope we can ensure that all reasonable steps are taken so that everyone's child is safe at college and gets home safely at the end of the day, whatever the weather. Can I stress that, on days of extreme weather, emergency arrangements for some supervision of students can be arranged whilst students await collection by parents.

As you will know from our website message, conditions are so extreme today that no student has been allowed out during social times. This is because the site is still snowbound and is therefore posing a risk to safety. Students are expected to behave sensibly at all times in such conditions

I would welcome any responses from parents and carers on the issues raised in this letter – space to write responses is included in the reply slip.

Regards

Jen McIntosh  
**Acting Headteacher**

## REPLY SLIP

Child's name: \_\_\_\_\_ Form: \_\_\_\_\_

In the event of an emergency closure I would like my child to do the following:

- My child lives within easy walking distance and should walk home from college.
- I have an arrangement for my child to go to a friend's home (or similar) in this situation.
- Get a service bus from the village.
- Be supervised in college until the school bus arrives.
- Wait in college until collected by myself or another authorised person.

My child gets a school bus and if that service is cancelled or does not arrive my child is to:

- Walk home from college using a route I have agreed with him/her.
- I have an arrangement for my child to go to a friend's home (or similar) in this situation which is in walking distance.
- Wait in college until collected by myself or another authorised person as close to 3.15pm as is possible.

**Up-to-date Emergency Contact Numbers are as follows:**

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)

**With regard to the contents of this letter I would like to make the following response:**

SIGNED: \_\_\_\_\_ (parent/guardian)

Dated \_\_\_\_\_

**Please ask your child to return this information to the School Office as soon as possible but no later than Wednesday 13<sup>th</sup> January 2010**