

**REPORT ON THE REVIEW OF THE PROCESS LEADING TO THE CLOSURE OF
SCHOOLS IN THE CONTEXT OF STORM AMY**

November 2025

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1. Context

The Minister of Education commissioned a review of the processes in regard to the emergency school closures across Counties Antrim, Londonderry, Fermanagh and Tyrone on Friday 3rd October.

While the decision was made in the interest of public safety, concerns were raised regarding the decision-making process, the timing and communication of the announcement and the proportionality of the closures. This review seeks to assess the rationale, process, and impact of the decision. Terms of Reference for the review are attached at **Annex A**.

2. Methodology

The following methodology has been used to take forward this review:

- i. Desktop research of evidence including timelines from both the Department of Education (DE) and the Education Authority (EA), media and social media coverage, AQWs, minutes of emergency planning meetings including the Local Impact Assessment Calls, and evidence supplied by DE and the Education Authority; and
- ii. One-to-one interviews with 18 school leaders in affected counties.

3. Background

Due to increasing confidence in the expected period / core of strongest winds associated with Storm Amy, the Met Office issued a yellow wind and heavy rain warning for the north and west of Northern Ireland, valid from 03.00pm until 08.00pm on Friday 3 October. Records show that officials were first notified about the storm at 10.57am on Wednesday 1 October, although at that stage there was uncertainty about the exact track of the storm. Further updates were received by the Met Office at 20.09pm and 20.11pm on Thursday 2 October. It was only at this time that the warning had been increased to Amber. This was assessed as a Medium Likelihood of Medium Impacts. The warning covered counties Fermanagh, Londonderry, much of Tyrone and the north and west of county Antrim. No further detailed analysis of the geographical position was produced by the Met Office other than this statement and therefore, seeking to adopt a differential approach across County Antrim would have been challenging.

The Met Office advised of the following potential impacts:

- Likelihood of power cuts may occur, with the potential to affect other services, such as mobile phone coverage.
- Probably some damage to buildings, such as tiles blown from roofs.
- Longer journey times and cancellations likely, as road, rail, air and ferry services may be affected.
- Flying debris is likely and could lead to injuries or danger to life.
- Some roads and bridges likely to close.

- Injuries and danger to life likely from large waves and beach material being thrown onto coastal roads, sea fronts and properties.

4. Department of Education's Timeline

Wednesday 1 October

- Met Office advice received indicating that Storm Amy would bring about significant levels of wind and rain, and that a Yellow Warning was issued for the period between 16:00pm on Friday 3 October 2025 and 06:00am on Saturday 4 October.
- A Local Impact Assessment Call (LIAC) took place at 02.00pm in relation to the Yellow Wind Warning, with a very low likelihood of medium impacts. No recommendations or actions were recorded relating to education and attendees were advised that a further meeting would be held on Friday 3 October.
- The LIAC is a local level arrangement used to gain shared situational awareness across partners in relation to the potential impacts of an emergency. The process for activation is outlined within the Severe Weather Framework and is overseen by the Local Government On-Call Resilience Manager. DE and the EA are not members of this group, but the EA will attend on request when impacts are deemed likely to impact upon education services. LIAC brings together operational partners (PSNI, Councils, DFI Rivers, Translink, DAERA etc) to ensure consistency in approaches. It is not a decision-making body. The decision to close schools was an internal decision taken by the EA rather than LIAC.

Thursday 2 October

- A Yellow warning of wind/rain affecting Northern Ireland was circulated at 10.31am to DE staff and key Arm's Length Body (ALB) contacts for information and awareness.
- Shortly after 8.00pm, the LIAC meeting scheduled for Friday morning was brought forward to 9.30pm on Thursday 2 October due to the Met Office upgrading to an Amber wind warning from 3.00pm to 8.00pm on Friday 3 October affecting western and northern parts of Northern Ireland. DE is not a participant of LIAC meetings, with EA in attendance.
- The EA was represented at this meeting by the EA Chief Operations Officer and the EA Emergency Planning Manager. The summary of the LIAC meeting at 9.30pm on Thursday 2 October issued at 23.59pm that evening. The summary states that "*EA to make a decision on the status of school opening tomorrow*". The decision was subsequently taken by the EA to advise schools to close at noon on Friday 3 October due to the Amber warning and the uncertain trajectory of the storm. Recommendations stemming from the meeting note, also state that "*EA advised Translink on decision to close schools*".
- Clarification on the minutes was received at 00.03am on 3 October advising of an update that the '*EA have taken the decision to recommend schools close at 12 noon tomorrow due to the Amber and uncertainty of the track of the storm and this will be communicated out to schools in the morning*'.

- DE officials were not aware of the LIAC meeting, nor were they made aware of any discussions regarding school closures as a result of the storm.
- A DE nominated contact, Departmental Business Services Team, (DBST) received a missed call from an unknown number at 22:39pm. This call was from the EA Emergency Planning Manager, but the caller's ID was not known at the time. A voicemail was left but did not appear on the DE nominated contact's phone until the following morning.
- The EA sent an email at 23:32pm to DE's Director of Corporate Services and Education Governance, Head of DBST and the DE nominated contact, DBST to advise that they had taken the decision to recommend schools close at 12 noon on Friday 3 October. The EA's Chief Operations Officer was copied in on this email.
- Minutes of the LIAC meeting followed and recorded the recommendations listed above, clarifying that school closures would be confined to the area bounded by the Amber warning. The LIAC minutes were distributed to all attendees (which includes a number of Councils, some ALBs, some Departments, PSNI, Met Office, NIE Networks), in addition to the Northern Ireland Emergency Planning Group and Emergency Planning Group members. (The Department subsequently circulated the notice at 09.25am on Friday 3 October to the Emergency Management Steering Group - Chaired by DE with membership from the EA, the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS), the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA), the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education (NICIE), the Governing Bodies Association (GBA), the Middletown Centre for Autism (MCA), the General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland (GTCNI) and the Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta (CnaG). The LIAC minutes did not accompany this, but the note advised of the areas affected and the EA's intent to close schools within the areas covered by the Amber warning.

Friday 3 October

- **07.45am** DE's nominated contact, DBST, received a notification indicating a voicemail (received from an unknown number at 10.39pm the previous evening). This was first attended to at approximately 07:45am and highlighted the EA's intention to advise schools to close and to cancel services beyond noon. The DE nominated contact subsequently checked emails and alerted the Head of DBST as per the Business Continuity Plan.
- Tactical Co-ordination Group (TCG) meeting takes place facilitated by the PSNI. No actions were recorded for education.
- Emergency Management Steering Group (EMSG - the network of representatives from DE's ALBs which was stood up after Storm Eowyn) members were advised of the EA messaging, and subsequent emails issued to DE staff both in Orchard House and Rathgael House to advise of the risks.
- **08.11am** The First Minister's Office phoned the DE Minister's Private Secretary, and a follow-up email was sent at 08.16am regarding the fact that they had been informed that 'EA plans to close schools from 12noon today in the Amber

storm area, yet there doesn't seem to any comms out. Can you advise re informing parents etc'.

- **08.21am** The Acting Head of the Executive Information Service, TEO, phoned the DE Head of Communications to ask why DE had not issued any communication regarding school closures.
- **08.27am** The DE Minister's Private Secretary sent an email to DE's Top Management Group (TMG) asking for information.
- **08.27am** DE's Head of Communications sent an email to TMG to ask if anyone was aware of a decision to close schools and then spoke to the EA's Head of Communications at 08.32am to ask for clarification on what was happening. The EA confirmed a decision had been taken to close schools. DE's Head of Communications phoned the DE Acting Permanent Secretary, at 08.35am to make him aware.
- **08.39am** DE's Acting Permanent Secretary sent an email to the EA's Chief Executive, asking for clarification and confirmation of school closures.
- **08.41am** The EA's Chief Executive responded: 'It is - I specifically asked last night if DE had been made aware and was assured DE was represented at the cross departmental group where it was discussed.' Within 10 minutes the EA's Chief Executive confirmed that DE had not attended the meeting.
- **08.45am** The EA's Chief Executive spoke with DE's Acting Permanent Secretary by phone to update and shared a draft press release at 08.50am.
- **08.56am** A note from the EA to schools was issued to advise of emergency school closures due to the Amber weather warning. Schools were advised that the alert covered counties Antrim, Londonderry, Tyrone and Fermanagh. DE was not copied into any correspondence relating to this.
- **09.04am** DE officials contacted the EA to gain clarity on events, with the first email to the EA issuing at 09:04am. EA officials were attending a PSNI-led Tactical Coordination Group (TCG) meeting from 8.45am, followed by an internal EA TCG meeting. Several reminders from DE to the EA also issued, with an EA response arriving at 10:49am to advise that a list of schools in counties affected by the storm would soon be made available on the EA's website. At the time of receipt, the EA website was non-operational. The DE Emergency/Civil Contingency Team (DBST) was urgently trying to establish what information had been communicated and who had been informed. It became clear that schools had not been informed until 08.56am.
- **09.20am** The Head of DE Transport Team took a phone call from the Assistant Director in EA transport. The EA's Transport Office was informed that a school advised it had received DE correspondence and were requesting a copy it. (the Assistant Director in EA transport was contacting DE to clarify that point only). The Head of DE Transport Team advised the Assistant Director in EA transport that it was the EA who had issued the press release rather than DE.
- **09.30am** DE's Acting Permanent Secretary took a phone call from the Personal Assistant (PA) to the CCMS Chief Executive, just before 09.30am, asking for clarification as no one had notified them. To note, as per the Major Emergency

Response Plan (MERP), horizontal communication between the EA and ALBs is expected. CCMS was emailed (by DE) for awareness as part of the communication to Emergency Management Steering Group Members at 09:25am (notably the email address for the Chief Executive was no longer current due to the former Chief Executive's departure from the role, however, the message was copied to both the current Chief Executive (via a DE address) and his Personal Assistant).

- **09.45am** DE's Director of Corporate Services and Education Governance spoke with the EA's Chief Operations Officer and stated that he assumed a conversation with the Minister would have taken place before the decision was made to close schools. The EA's Chief Operations Officer advised that the EA had made attempts to contact DE to relay the decision. However, only the DE nominated contact had been contacted by telephone, with a follow-up email sent to DE's, Director of Corporate Services and Education Governance, the Head of DBST and the DE nominated contact, DBST at 23:32pm.
- **11.29am** A further update to schools issued from the EA. DE was not copied in.

5. Education Authority's Timeline

EA's overriding priority was the safety of children, families and school staff.

Emergency school closure decisions are always a last resort and will inevitably cause disruption. Given Met Office advice, the EA was concerned about the risks from storm damage in and around school premises and on school/pupil transport routes in the afternoon.

A timetable for the EA's decision making is set out below. No decision in these circumstances will ever achieve perfection. The core objective of getting children home safely was secured, with no significant incident reported.

Thursday 2 October

- Following the upgrading on Thursday night of the Met Office warning to Amber (20.11pm) for parts of Northern Ireland, the EA attended a 21.30pm meeting of the Local Impact Assessment Group. A Yellow warning of medium impacts came into effect from 14.00pm for the whole of the province. The Amber warning was to come into effect at 03.00pm with wind gusts widely expected for 60-70mph (and potential for 80mph gusts along the North Coast on Friday), coinciding with the peak home time for schools. At this point, there was potential in the forecasting for the storm to track further north, meaning impacts could change.
- EA officials held further discussions following the Local Impact Assessment Group meeting, with a focus on transport safety. It was provisionally agreed that homeward transport should operate earlier in the Amber warning counties. The option of full day closure on Friday was discussed but this was ruled out – given the late hour and the fact overnight messages to schools could lead to some pupils attending unaware of the situation.

- It was also the case that an overnight message on an afternoon closure for the Amber warning areas could be overtaken by events, with projected storm risks subsequently extending to other localities.
- It was therefore decided to consult further with the Met Office in the morning, before a final decision was made.

Friday 3 October

- Following further discussion with the Met Office at circa 08.00am, the option of an afternoon closure for the Amber warning counties was confirmed. Communications to schools were issued shortly before 09.00am, followed shortly after 09.00am by a press release and social media posts.
- A further update to schools was issued at 11.30am, along with another press release. A third communication to schools was issued in the afternoon, thanking them for their co-operation and listing contact details of the EA services available over the weekend. A further press release was issued on the same theme.

EA Conclusion

The EA would like to place on record its appreciation for the cooperation of schools, pupils, families and the general public, and thank its staff across different services for their hard work in response to the emergency.

Extreme weather conditions are inevitably highly unpredictable, as evidenced by the fact that storm damage, power cuts and severe disruption to public transport extended far beyond the Amber warning area.

Based on DE guidance provided for Storm Eowyn, decisions on school closures of this nature are treated as operational matters for the EA.

In line with the EA's Major Emergency Plan, the EA will be conducting its own internal review of the Storm Amy response. The EA would welcome a wider review, and further collaboration in harmonising emergency arrangements across the education sector.

The EA's overall assessment is that balanced decisions and actions on the day came together to deliver the outcome that all children got home safely from school.

There are always learnings from these incidents. It is accepted that the albeit brief collapse of the EA's website on Friday morning complicated public communications, as did the fact that the Amber warning and closure decision did not cover the whole of Northern Ireland. (In relation to the website, information continued to be carried live on social media.)

Speed is always a priority in communications, but this must be balanced against the need for accuracy in an unpredictable and potentially changing context.

There are additional challenges – logistically and for public communications – when school closures are for part of a day.

While the EA is aware of some criticism of its decision making and its timing, there has also been praise. For instance, BBCNI Newsline coverage on Friday evening

included the Principal and staff/parents from Ebrington Primary School thanking the EA for the early decision and the time given to get children home.

Similarly, a BBCNI online report quoted the Principal of Mercy College saying the EA's directive was "well received". He added: "When there's a collective decision made across the board it allows everybody to make that move together in the best interests of children and their safety."

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c3rvyj0yr2po>

Additional Information Supplied by the EA in relation to its timeline and rationale to close schools

The Met Office escalated the weather warning for Storm Amy from a medium impact Yellow warning to a medium impact Amber warning at approximately 20:11pm (time of receipt of the Amber warning).

The EA received this update from the Met Office and was contacted by the Emergency Preparedness Northern Ireland Resilience Team via the out of hours emergency contacts directory and invited onto a Local Impact Assessment Call at 21.30pm. The EA Chief Operating Officer and the EA Emergency Planning Manager attended this call.

During this call the Met Office updated on the Storm *From mid-afternoon through until the evening hours of Friday, a spell of particularly damaging / squally south to south-westerly winds is likely to lead to disruption as highlighted with gusts 60-70 mph inland and up to 80 mph along exposed coasts within the Amber warning area. Given this will coincide with the evening commute and school pickups in some areas, this may lead to some disruption. With the ground now saturated in many areas and trees mostly in full leaf, this enhances the risk of falling trees / branches and the associated risks to travel, along with power infrastructure.* Included in this assessment was a range of expected impacts which also included:

- Longer journey times and cancellations, as road, rail, air and ferry services may be affected.
- Some roads and bridges likely to close.
- There is a good chance that power cuts may occur, with the potential to affect other services, such as mobile phone coverage.
- Probably some damage to buildings, such as tiles blown from roofs.
- Flying debris is likely and could lead to Injuries or danger to life.
- Injuries and danger to life is likely from large waves and beach material being thrown onto sea fronts, coastal roads and properties.

The EA advised that it queried the expected time of worst winds as these were scheduled to coincide with the going home period of schools. The Met office had strong confidence in the timing of the storm. However, due to highly unpredictable nature of Storm Amy the pathway of the storm could change and confirmation of this would not be available from the Met office until the morning.

Following the LIAC an EA dynamic assessment was made based on the Met Office warning and information provided against School finishing time.

6. Options Considered by the Education Authority

Three options were available:

- i. Make no service changes and leave normal operations as is. Discounted due to risk to life posed at end of school operations.
- ii. Full school closures - disproportionate to impact a full day of education for an afternoon warning.
- iii. Close schools early in the medium likelihood area (Amber). 12 noon closure allows education to continue and provides window for children/staff to return home prior to the forecast winds to occur.

Option 3 was chosen with a caveat that a further check with the Met Office would be held on Friday Morning before 8.00am to gain an updated situation. During this call the Met Office confirmed the Amber warning remained and impacts were as discussed. (This decision was taken following a triangulation of discussions involving the Chief Executive Officer, Chief Operating Officer, Assistant Director of Transport and Emergency Planner.)

Following this call the decision was communicated to schools. The EA advised that for absolute clarity the decision was taken in interest of safety for all of the children attending school.

Risk Assessment and Meteorological Data used to inform the decision

Please see point 1.

- The Met Office highlighted wind speeds with gusts 60-70 mph inland and up to 80 mph along exposed coasts within the Amber warning area - the highest wind speed recorded during Amy was at Magilligan Point at 92mph - a new record for October and equal to the overall record set by Storm Eowyn.
- Despite the above some challenges existed as the Met Office map was not sufficiently accurate to make an informed choice about a closure line. To have tried to create a basis for a differential approach in Antrim would have delayed decision making by a significant time. In any event the Met Office confirmed that the difference for them on Yellow and Amber was that although the storm could have the same impact, they had a different confidence level.
- Actual storm damage clearly illustrates the problem was not restricted to west Antrim, and even schools in those counties not covered were subject to storm damage and power outages.
- The interaction and the coordination with other public agencies in the context of the Local Impact Assessment Committee.
 - 02/10/2025 – 21.30pm - LIAC - decision to revert to PSNI TCG coordination due to risk to life potential impacts.
 - 02/10/2025 – 23.10pm - Follow up to LIAC chair with the Early Closure decision
 - 03/10/2025 – 07.50am - Met Office - Confirmation of Weather Impacts
 - 03/10/2025 – 08.45am - Multi-agency Tactical Coordination Group
 - 03/10/2025 – 10.00am - EA Tactical Coordination Group
 - 03/10/2025 – 14.00pm - EA Tactical Coordination Group
 - 03/10/2025 – 14.30pm - Multi-agency Strategic Coordination Group

- 03/10/2025 – 19.00pm - Multi-agency Tactical Coordination Group
- 04/10/2025 – 09.30pm - Multi-agency Tactical Coordination Group
- 04/10/2025 – 11.00pm - EA Tactical Coordination Group

EA's Assessment of Communication and reporting arrangements between the EA, the Local Assessment Team, the Department of Education and the Minister of Education

Due to the nature of Storm Amy and the late escalation to Amber communication and reporting arrangements were challenging due to the timing of the LIAC meeting and decision to close schools post 11.00pm. Efforts to contact the DE Emergency Planning was made on the night of the decision both by phone and email. This failure needs to be considered as part of this review. Notably no DE rep was on the 9.30pm LIAC meeting. If that had been the case, then communication between DE and the EA after this could have readily taken place in real time to facilitate decision making.

EA's assessment of the communication strategy with schools, parents, and stakeholders

The decision on school closures crystallised at circa 8.00am on 3 October following a further meeting with the Met Office. A communication for schools was finalised, reviewed, and signed off. It issued to schools before 9.00am, followed within minutes by a press release and social media posts. Key media personnel were also contacted to help ensure immediate reporting. A follow up communication to schools was issued at 11.30am, updating on issues including school transport. A press release was issued on the same theme.

Following a meeting of the EA Tactical Co-ordination Group on Saturday 4 October 2025 concern was expressed that potentially not all storm damage had been reported. It was critical that the EA had this information if it was to provide repairs on time to ensure all schools could open on the Monday morning. The Group agreed to send out a further communication to schools which issued at 4.10pm, this both thanked them for their cooperation and detailed key out of hours contact details – eg for critical storm damage repairs over the weekend.

EA's assessment of the impact of the timing of closures on students, families, and staff

A key positive impact was that the decision ensured children could safely travel home in a relatively controlled way and not be subject to the potentially health and safety risk associated with the storm.

- By not choosing a full day closure maximised ½ day education.
- Loss of ½ day education.
- Positive signalling to staff in schools that alongside pupils the EA had the health and safety interests of staff in mind at this challenging time.
- The impact of the early closure to students, families, and staff while inconvenient resulted in the removal of journeys to and from school during the highest forecasted winds and in line with the EA's objective of safeguarding the health, safety and welfare of students, families, and staff. Having spoken

with the Met Office post event they confirmed Storm Amy resulted in a high-end medium/high impact storm.

- In addition, by removing this school traffic from the road network shortly after 12 noon this helped free up the road network for other users during the critical period.
- Met Éireann initially communicated an Amber warning for County Donegal but had to upgrade to a Red due to the unpredictable and deepening nature of Storm Amy.
- Regrettably there was one Storm related fatality caused by the Storm in County Donegal.
- DfI Roads - recorded over 1,200 storm related incidents with approximately 800 fallen trees/road obstructions including full road closures on the M1, M22 and A5.

EA's Assessment of Compliance with statutory obligations and emergency planning protocols

The EA complied with its Severe Weather Protocol, Regional Severe Weather Protocol and the Civil Contingencies Framework. The EA also complied with its statutory obligations to provide home to school transport. If decisions had been left to individual schools the EA would not have been able to guarantee that school transport would be available to those schools that may have chosen to close.

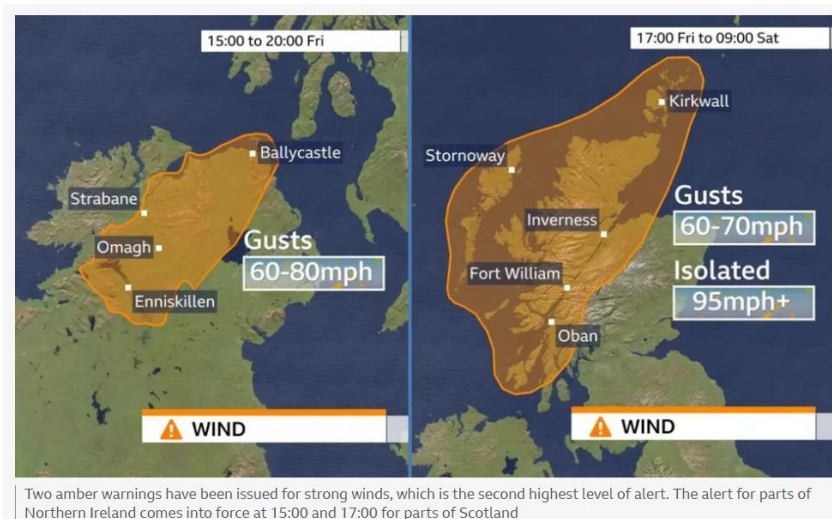
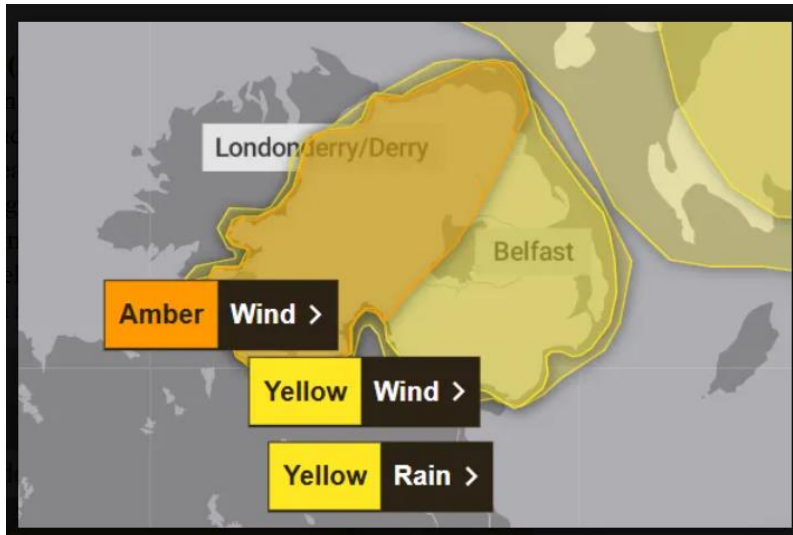
Supplemental Information from the EA

Storm Amy is the fourth named storm (Storms Isha, Darragh, Eowyn and Amy) that has had or potential to impact on education services since 2024. Storm Amy, similar to Storm Isha was a highly unpredictable weather event with risk to life potential which resulted in less than 24hrs notice of escalation. It is these reasonably worst-case scenario severe weather events which pose significant challenges to decision making and communicating in a reasonable time.

The EA notes that the education sector remains without an agreed DE Civil Contingencies Protocol. Responsibility for establishing a protocol rests with DE. The EA has advocated on a number of occasions for this to be developed and implemented at pace and will positively contribute to its development. The EA recognises that given the breadth of its remit for services to schools it will often be the key stakeholder in the decision-making process; nonetheless other Education stakeholders need to be involved as there are other factors which may need to be considered as part of that protocol. Without an agreed protocol decision making on civil contingency issues for Education will continue to be fragmented.

7. School Closures in County Antrim

On Friday 3 October, there was also confusion as to whether all schools in County Antrim should close, or whether only schools in County Antrim within the Amber zone should close (maps below refer).



Two amber warnings have been issued for strong winds, which is the second highest level of alert. The alert for parts of Northern Ireland comes into force at 15:00 and 17:00 for parts of Scotland

The EA communication (Chief Executive Officer Letter) to schools stated “Following further confirmation from the Met Office this morning that this upgraded warning will remain in place today I am writing to inform you that all schools located in the areas affected by the Amber warning in Northern Ireland are required to close at 12 midday today, Friday 03 October 2025, due to severe weather conditions.

The alert covers the western half of Northern Ireland - counties Antrim, Londonderry, Tyrone and Fermanagh.”

The press release also stated: “All schools located in the areas affected by the amber weather warning in Northern Ireland are required to close at 12 midday today, Friday 03 October 2025. This decision has been taken in the interests of the safety of children, young people and staff. The Amber warning covers the western half of Northern Ireland - counties Antrim, Londonderry, Tyrone and Fermanagh.”

However, the list of schools provided by the EA to DE contains all schools in County Antrim. This created confusion amongst some schools and resulted in some schools in County Antrim closing while others did not.

The decision to close schools and the geographic locations were made with the information available at the time from the Met Office. The absence of a more detailed analysis from the Met Office impacted directly on decision making and the EA has advised that as a direct result, they were unable to be more specific.

8. Feedback from School Leaders

Eighteen school leaders from counties Tyrone, Antrim, Londonderry and Fermanagh were interviewed by DE officials as part of this review. Overall, the school leaders understood the need to close schools and there was positive feedback that the decision had been taken on their behalf.

Key issues emerging from their feedback include timeliness of communication, with the majority highlighting the challenges arising from late notification provided; further clarity required on what was communicated by the EA; and a number of suggestions for the use of additional communications channels for any future incidents to ensure that those who need to respond are contacted as quickly as possible.

DE also received feedback during the Storm from a number of schools located close to border counties who relayed their frustration and confusion as they were not included in the list of school closures.

Positive:

- Agreement that there was clear messaging from the EA once a decision had been taken.
- Appreciation that schools did not have to take the decision themselves and that specific geographic regions were required to close (albeit some school leaders indicated that it may have been better to close all schools rather than specific counties).
- School leaders indicated that it was the right decision to close schools given the health and safety concerns and the severity of the storm in their area.
- All schools interviewed had clear and effective processes in place to communicate with parents, pupils and staff eg WhatsApp groups, Seesaw, text message system etc.
- The EA Helpline number and staff were praised. Phone calls were answered quickly, and EA staff were on the ground in schools quickly (ie over the weekend) to help survey and address storm damage.

Negative:

- **Timing of communication** caused significant disruption for schools, staff and parents with the majority of school leaders indicating that it provided insufficient time to respond.
- **The channel of communication** used by the EA was criticised. School leaders advised that the email sent by the EA to schools was issued to the general school email address. Many of these email addresses receive hundreds of emails every day and the majority of school leaders interviewed advised that they did not see the email and were advised of the closure by others.

- **Confusion about closures for schools located next to county borders** who were advised that it was a matter for individual schools to risk assess the situation.
- **EA Transport (school bus drivers) and EA School Improvement** had not been informed about school closures. This created logistical issues with ensuring that children were transported home. School leaders also advised that this also created potential safeguarding issues.
- **Additional complexities** - Some schools reported additional complexities particularly given the time pressures of relaying the message to others who use their site eg Community Playgroups and to parents whose first language is not English (requiring the use of interpreters).
- **Clearer messaging** was required from EA on whether:
 - the school closure also impacted on other staff eg cleaners who would normally stay after school hours/potential insurance implications; and
 - the provision of free school meals.

Suggested Improvements from school leaders:

- **Early alert system** - Most school leaders were very supportive of an early alert system a few days beforehand to enable planning. They indicated that this would enable them to have emergency plans in place earlier and advise parents and staff that they may have to close. Some school leaders indicated that any such alert system would need to be carefully worded to avoid confusion.
- **Communication channels** – EA should communicate urgent messages using a combination of communication channels including text messages to Principals, along with additional emails to Principals and Vice-Principals, as well as the general email address.
- **A pre-written text message** for parents could issue from the EA to school leaders which would enable all schools to communicate the same message externally.
- **EA Helpline** - While there was very positive feedback about the EA Helpline, a further improvement could be made by the EA in its communication with schools specifying exactly which helpline to ring (ie if there is structural damage ring Helpline A, if there are fallen trees ring Helpline B).
- **Stakeholders** - EA to ensure that all stakeholders are informed at the same time ie school transport and school improvement partners.
- **Model school closures policy** - EA could consider providing a model 'school closures policy' for events such as this eg storms, snow.
- **Blanket closures** (ie for a full county) would be preferable to reduce any potential confusion.

9. Media and Social Media Coverage

The EA took the lead in issuing communications to advise that schools should close (**Annex C**). DE was not advised in advance of the decision to close schools and the EA Communications Team did not share the press release with DE Press Office before issuing.

There was widespread coverage of school closures highlighting the impact that this had on schools and families.

BBCNI Newline teatime coverage on 3 October included the Principal and staff/parents from Ebrington Primary School thanking the EA for the early decision and the time given to get children home.

Similarly, a BBCNI online report quoted the principal of Mercy College saying the EA's directive was "well received". He added: "When there's a collective decision made across the board it allows everybody to make that move together in the best interests of children and their safety."

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c3rvyj0yr2po>

Sinn Fein and the Ulster Unionist Party also issued press statements. A summary of press and social media coverage is attached at **Annex C**.

10. Legal Authority for Closing Schools

While it is clear that the legal authority to close schools rests with DE for all exceptional closures, it would be prudent to seek further advice on where the legal authority rests for partial closures in exceptional circumstances. An Exceptional Closure is where a setting closes for a whole day without a morning registration being taken. (To note, the authority to close a school sits with DE under four sets of 1973 Regulations, for example [The Primary Schools \(General\) Regulations \(Northern Ireland\) 1973](#) which set out the number of days a school must be operational other than those granted by the Ministry in exceptional circumstances.)

11. Recording School Closures

Depending on the nature of the closure, schools are required to undertake a series of actions to notify and record the closure appropriately. For example, where there is an Exceptional Closure, schools are required to follow two steps, i) notify DE via the DE Exceptional Closure app; and ii) complete an action on C2k step which in turn automatically updates NI Direct.

(An Exceptional Closure is where a setting closes for a whole day without a morning registration being taken.)

In this instance, the closure did not fall into the category of an Exceptional Closure therefore, there was no requirement for schools to complete the above steps and notify DE. Unfortunately, the correspondence that issued from the EA did not advise schools as to how the Friday (pm) session should be coded for all pupils, nor did it advise schools that there was no requirement to apply for an Exceptional Closure in light of this announcement. In this case, the school closed at lunchtime, therefore the code would be attendance not required.

Tackling Educational Disadvantage Team fielded a significant number of queries from both schools and the EA which could have been avoided had the communication to schools been agreed in advance.

In addition, instructing schools to close within county boundaries created a number of issues for schools on county borders. In response to queries received by DE,

schools outside the counties affected were advised that: “It will be a matter for individual schools to risk assess the situation, however the advice from the Education Authority is that school closures are only for Counties Antrim, Fermanagh, Londonderry, and Tyrone.”

Future communications from the EA should be agreed with DE and clearly outline the nature of the closure and the steps required.

It was also noted that seven school names appeared on NIDirect as closures. This was due to those schools incorrectly logging this on C2k. Those schools have been contacted and provided with advice for future reference. Tackling Educational Disadvantage Team does however recognise that the process could be refined and is working with EA (C2K) and IT Assist to seek a resolution. The current process is effective, if followed correctly.

The Department annually updates both its Attendance guidance and Adverse Weather guidance. During Storm Amy, to avoid any further confusion, DE held off issuing the attached letter (from 3 October to week commencing 6 October) [Letter to schools re Action Plan due to Adverse weather 2025.26 - 3 October 2025.pdf](#). This letter sets out the procedures to be followed in the event of adverse weather.

AQWs

A total of six AQWs were received (**Annex B**), a number of which relate to communication with parents.

Key Issues and Considerations

It is clear from feedback from schools that those affected understood the need for schools to close on health and safety grounds. School leaders welcomed the ‘blanket’ approach to school closures, removing the need for local decision making. In addition, it is positive to note that within just over 12 hours of the Amber warning being issued, the EA facilitated a half day’s education and ensured every child was transported home safely, despite the serious weather conditions.

It was also reassuring to note that all schools interviewed have robust and effective communications processes in place to communicate with parents and staff in the event of storm related events.

However, there are a number of significant concerns which arise from the chronology of events, detailed as follows:

- i) **Lack of early Departmental Involvement and representation**
 - DE was not represented at the LIAC on 2 October, despite its relevance to school operations. This absence meant DE was excluded from real-time decision-making and unable to influence or prepare for the school closure recommendation.

ii) Communication Failures

- Notification to DE officials (e.g. missed call at 22:39pm, email at 23:32pm) meant DE only became aware of the closure decision on the morning of 3 October.
- No coordinated messaging between the EA and DE led to confusion among schools, parents and stakeholders.
- DE was not copied into the EA's communications to schools, nor consulted on press releases or social media posts.
- DE was unprepared to respond to media inquiries due to lack of prior notice.
- Numerous school leaders advised that internal stakeholders within the EA, such as School Transport (ie bus drivers) and School Improvement teams, were not aware of closures.

iii) Timing and Impact on Schools

- Schools received closure notifications as late as 8:56am on the day of the storm, causing significant disruption.
- While the EA issued the school closure advice to schools via email, many school leaders advised that a) due to the timing of the communication from the EA and b) due to the generic email issued for distribution lists, they first learned of the closure via third-party channels.
- The short notice created logistical and safeguarding challenges, especially for:
 - Transport arrangements
 - Communication with parents (including those needing translation)
 - Coordination with site users like playgroups

iv) Legal and Procedural Ambiguity

- The closure did not qualify as an "Exceptional Closure", yet schools were not advised how to record attendance or whether to apply for closure.
- EA's communication did not clarify:
 - Implications for free school meals

v) Geographic Confusion

- EA's messaging referenced closures in "amber warning areas," but the list of schools included all of County Antrim, not just the affected zones.
- This led to inconsistent closures within the same county and confusion for schools near county borders.

vi) Governance and Authority Concerns

- The EA made the closure decision without prior consultation or approval from the Minister or senior DE officials.
- There is uncertainty over legal authority for partial closures, especially when initiated by the EA rather than DE.
- The review highlights the absence of a formal Civil Contingencies Protocol for education, which contributed to fragmented decision-making.

It is clear that these issues must be addressed as a matter of priority going forward to avoid a repetition of the events surrounding Storm Amy. A detailed list of recommendations has been developed.

12. Recommendations

Recommendation	Actioned by
<p>An Education Civil Contingencies Protocol is currently being developed. However, work on this should now be expedited and completed no later than 31 December 2025. The protocol should clearly outline roles and responsibilities for DE and EA, processes to be followed and approvals to be sought. This will include providing clarification of the legal position as per Section 10 of this Review. The Protocol should also set out a communications framework.</p>	DE
<p>The Protocol should include changes to the Terms of Reference for EA Silver and Gold meetings requiring membership of a DE representative.</p>	DE & EA
<p>DE should engage with the Resilience Team to consider how best the education sector is represented at LIAC meetings.</p>	DE
<p>In the event of school closures, and following the Minister’s approval of these, the EA must seek approval of all communications through the DE Press Office.</p>	DE & EA
<p>The Protocol should also include a process whereby the EA provides an early alert to DE where there is consideration of school closures. This alert should be sent to the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - DE Permanent Secretary - TMG - Special Adviser - Press Office (Grade 6 & Principal Information Officer) - Minister’s Private Secretary - Director of Corporate Services and Education Governance - Head of DBST - Director of Raising Aspirations and Supporting Learning (responsible for Attendance and Exceptional Closures) <p>This alert should include appropriate Met Office forecasts with a risk analysis.</p> <p>The Protocol should also outline processes for internal communication in DE including between policy branches, DBST, Press and Private Offices.</p>	DE & EA
<p>Where circumstances allow, decisions on school closures should be communicated to schools no later than 8.00pm the night before the proposed closure and earlier if possible. An early alert system is</p>	EA

also recommended so that schools are advised several days in advance of possible closures if practical.	
EA to establish a group-all text/whatsApp/email messaging service to school Principals (opt in service)	EA
In the event of a direction for school closures, EA should supply a pre-written text message which school leaders could issue to parents.	EA
EA to review internal processes to ensure that EA School Transport (ie bus drivers) and School Improvement stakeholders are advised of school closures	EA
EA to develop a model 'school closures policy' for schools to adopt for similar events.	EA
<p>Communication from EA to schools about closures should provide clear information on the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Clear information on what helpline numbers should be used; for specific issues eg fallen trees or structural damage. - Advice on whether free school meals should be provided. - Advice on whether the closure affects other school staff eg cleaners. - Future communications from EA should clearly advise how the closure should be recorded. - Details of how to apply for an exceptional closure (should schools need it). 	EA
There is an urgent need for a roundtable discussion involving DE, EA, C2K & IT shared services to establish how the electronic recording/notification of school closures is carried out in future. This would require communications teams and policy teams to be present.	EA/DE

**TERMS OF REFERENCE
REVIEW OF THE PROCESS LEADING TO THE CLOSURE OF SCHOOLS IN THE
CONTEXT OF STORM AMY:**

1. Background

In response to an Amber weather warning issued on Thursday, 2 October by the Met Office in relation to Storm Amy, the Education Authority for Northern Ireland noted the potential impact of the storm, before deciding to implement emergency school closures across Counties Antrim, Londonderry, Fermanagh and Tyrone.

While the decision was made in the interest of public safety, concerns have been raised regarding the decision-making process, the timing and communication of the announcement, and the proportionality of the closures. This review seeks to assess the rationale, process, and impact of the decision.

2. Purpose of the Review

To evaluate;

- the decision-making process;
- the interaction with Local Impact Assessment Committee in accordance with "Framework for Civil Contingencies Northern Ireland";
- the timeliness of communication with school leaders and parents; and outcomes of the school closures.

The evaluation is to identifying lessons learned and make recommendations aimed at improving future emergency response protocols.

3. Scope

The review will cover:

- The timeline and rationale behind the decision to close schools.
- The risk assessment and meteorological data used to inform the decision.
- The interaction and the coordination with other public agencies in the context of the Civil Contingencies Northern Ireland Local Impact Assessment Committee.
- Communication and reporting arrangements between the EA, the Local Assessment Team, the Department of Education Northern Ireland and the Minister of Education.
- The communication strategy with schools, parents, and stakeholders.
- The impact of the timing of closures on students, families, and staff.
- Compliance with statutory obligations and emergency planning protocols.

4. Methodology

The review will include:

- Document analysis of internal communications, risk assessments, and weather reports.
- Interviews with key decision-makers, school leaders, and emergency planners.

5. Governance

The review will be led by the Permanent Secretary for the Department for Education Northern Ireland who will report to the Minister of Education within two weeks, i.e. by 20 October 2025.

6. Deliverables

A final report outlining findings, conclusions, and recommendations and a set of proposed guidelines for future emergency school closures.

AQWs RECEIVED

<u>AQW 32789/22- 27</u>	21/10/2025	To ask the Minister of Education to outline any support his Department can provide to schools, who have had facilities damaged following Storm Amy.
<u>AQW 32788/22- 27</u>	08/10/2025	To ask the Minister of Education, in light of the issues caused by Storm Amy, will he consider developing a mobile communication platform for the Education Authority, to enable agile and fast communication with schools across Northern Ireland, when it is required.
<u>AQW 32787/22- 27</u>	20/10/2025	To ask the Minister of Education, in light of the late communication by the Education Authority with schools in relation to closures due to Storm Amy, will he consider conducting a review to identify lessons in contingency planning and timely communication.
<u>AQW 32771/22- 27</u>	20/10/2025	To ask the Minister of Education to detail (i) any contingency plans in place for schools and pre-schools in response to weather warnings issued by the Met Office; and (ii) whether the Education Authority will complete a review of their communication policy following Storm Amy.
<u>AQW 32686/22- 27</u>	20/10/2025	To ask the Minister of Education to outline a timeline of the planning meetings (i) organised; or (ii) attended by (a) his officials; (b) or members of the Education Authority, in relation to Storm Amy
<u>AQO 2593/22- 27</u>	21/10/2025	To ask the Minister of Education for his assessment of the Education Authority's handling of school closures, and the associated communication, during Storm Amy.

MEDIA COVERAGE SUMMARY

<p>BBC Radio Ulster</p> <p>Nolan</p>	<p>09.20am – DE</p> <p>A statement has been supplied by the Education Authority in regard to school closures due to the bad weather approaching:</p> <p>‘all schools located in the areas affected by the amber weather warning in Northern Ireland are required to close at 12 midday’...</p> <p>10.05am – DE</p> <p>Back to the statement by the EA about the closure of some schools due to the impact of Storm Amy; there appears to be some inconsistency in the areas affected.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weather Update • School principal
<p>BBC</p>	<p>📄 Schools in counties affected by Storm Amy will close on Friday afternoon . Our education and arts correspondent, Robbie Meredith has more 🖱️ Read here: <u>https://bbc.in/3Kytxkf BBC News NI Facebook</u></p> <p>The instruction to close schools early came from the Education Authority this morning. It affected schools across counties Antrim, Derry, Fermanagh and Tyrone, as our Education Correspondent Robbie Meredith reports. BBC Newsline Facebook</p>
<p>Online</p>	<p>Storm Amy: NI schools ordered to close early amid amber weather warning Belfast Live</p> <p>Storm Amy: The full list of the 769 schools in Northern Ireland which have closed or are closing early due to the impact of Storm Amy – News Letter</p> <p>Schools to close at midday in four counties due to weather - BBC News</p> <p>Schools closing at midday as Storm Amy prepares to hit – Belfast Media Group</p> <p>Education Minister orders communications review after Storm Amy school closure chaos BelfastTelegraph.co.uk</p> <p>Storm Amy sparks school closures in Northern Ireland as Republic extends warning - Q Radio</p> <p>Storm Amy: Education Authority issue update on emergency early school closures Belfast Live</p> <p>'Parents were left scrambling last minute': Ulster Unionist MLA slams handling of Storm Amy school closures – News Letter</p>

	Storm chaos: Burrows demands urgent review of school closure comms after parents left scrambling – Love Ballymena
DE X Posts	https://x.com/Ed_Authority/status/1974030264008372451
EA X Posts	https://x.com/metoffice/status/1973335494952943763 https://x.com/metofficeNI/status/1973675481024385360 https://x.com/nidirect/status/1973726954290639317 https://x.com/Ed_Authority/status/1974030264008372451 https://x.com/Ed_Authority/status/1974071609028661307 https://x.com/deptinfra/status/1974056816976814084 https://x.com/nidirect/status/1974063675150418269 https://x.com/Ed_Authority/status/1974131058653217045 https://x.com/Ed_Authority/status/1974435546941251968 https://x.com/Ed_Authority/status/1974839626184499291
DE Facebook	https://www.facebook.com/Educationni/posts/pfbid02583sCMXXoWriKQzWkJThSf4jnNTpbjWrHGEm5o54gSA8gp3ihz1KNFAPBHJzwrN2l
EA Facebook	https://www.facebook.com/educationauthorityni/posts/pfbid02eQtHBXEwNe5C7BC1PppfjKv46naxTZiZjqnsajYix1kC57ZU3YBDezUGs4re9XZVl https://www.facebook.com/educationauthorityni/posts/pfbid02eDkDa5u2XH3ZkJGPK5Zi7iknhZjQrVwGzK7yHwxwHGpKahS6L578ABjBMmigKv1Bl https://www.facebook.com/educationauthorityni/posts/pfbid034UhWopW SsHVPJDhgra1Kte6v9nakc9aUWvH2zfvgyBdnngQXq22RMXvHT9mWKnEol https://www.facebook.com/educationauthorityni/posts/pfbid02FLxBssd5kuVLMCU2W5zNtG2UsPGgihZGGrXHMqPHrAiLdUhYRqBJ1t3Bfme44m33l https://www.facebook.com/educationauthorityni/posts/pfbid02agsHRT1puEXReUjMPMFRZDzwnkd7giNDciPrVaZMvLzJwWBBbHQ t3aL3zu8sHyvtl
EA Instagram	https://www.instagram.com/p/DPVw7e9DH4H/ https://www.instagram.com/p/DPWFkJHiDrK/

	https://www.instagram.com/p/DPWgnZaiJmu/ https://www.instagram.com/p/DPbkCzLCPAq/
DE linkedin	https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:activity:7379803300814143489
EA linkedin	https://www.linkedin.com/posts/education-authority-northern-ireland-emergency-early-school-closure-storm-activity-7379793452299079680-vs9T?utm_source=share&utm_medium=member_desktop&rcm=ACoAACpGz48Bo9t3ilx2qZuAmugZialPeR-f_I4 https://www.linkedin.com/posts/education-authority-northern-ireland-update-on-emergency-early-school-closure-activity-7379839065380257792-660d?utm_source=share&utm_medium=member_desktop&rcm=ACoAACpGz48Bo9t3ilx2qZuAmugZialPeR-f_I4 https://www.linkedin.com/posts/education-authority-northern-ireland-ea-thanks-for-support-over-school-closures-activity-7379896357970513920-bUn5?utm_source=share&utm_medium=member_desktop&rcm=ACoAACpGz48Bo9t3ilx2qZuAmugZialPeR-f_I4 https://www.linkedin.com/posts/education-authority-northern-ireland-as-of-1130am-this-morning-saturday-18-activity-7380201237377605632-C2Wk?utm_source=share&utm_medium=member_desktop&rcm=ACoAACpGz48Bo9t3ilx2qZuAmugZialPeR-f_I4 https://www.linkedin.com/posts/education-authority-northern-ireland-the-education-authority-has-not-been-notified-activity-7380605317560147968-R_Oc?utm_source=share&utm_medium=member_desktop&rcm=ACoAACpGz48Bo9t3ilx2qZuAmugZialPeR-f_I4
EA press Statements	https://www.eani.org.uk/news/emergency-early-school-closure-storm-amy https://www.eani.org.uk/news/update-on-emergency-early-school-closure-storm-amy https://www.eani.org.uk/news/ea-thanks-for-support-over-school-closures
Newspaper coverage	News Letter 4.10.25 Questions over school alert Fermanagh Herald 8.10.25 Frustration at last minute school closures

	<p>Tyrone Herald Fierce winds cause chaos as storm hits. Schools close early while thousands lose electricity</p> <p>Tyrone Courier Storm Amy causes chaos across Tyrone</p> <p>Ballymena Guardian Rethink school closure chaos policy urges MLA (Jon Burrows)</p>
<p>Party Political Statements</p>	<p>Sinn Féin</p> <p>Parents deserve answers on late decision to close schools – Brogan</p> <p>Sinn Féin MLA, Nicola Brogan, has called for answers from the Education Minister on why the decision to close schools today came so late. The West Tyrone MLA, who has tabled an Urgent Oral Question on the issue said: “Despite knowing that a storm was forecast from last night, the Education Minister and Education Authority (EA) delayed the decision to close schools until the last minute. Parents will be left wondering why? They deserve answers to this question. I am calling on the minister to provide clarity.”</p> <p>Ulster Unionist Party</p> <p>Jon Burrows MLA, Education spokesperson, has called on the Minister of Education to urgently review how school closure decisions are communicated, following chaotic scenes across Northern Ireland during Friday’s storm. Mr Burrows said, “While safety, especially the safety of our young people, must always come first, the lack of clear and timely communication from the Education Authority caused chaos for schools and families across the country. Classrooms in Antrim, Londonderry, Tyrone and Fermanagh were already filled when emails from the Education Authority landed in inboxes instructing schools to close from midday.</p> <p>“As a result, parents, pupils and staff were left scrambling with very limited time to make alternative arrangements. Had schools and families been notified even a couple of hours earlier, many of these chaotic scenes could have been avoided.</p> <p>“School leaders do an outstanding job under difficult circumstances, but they need sufficient warning to plan ahead. Last-minute notifications put staff under enormous pressure and leave parents struggling to arrange childcare and transport. There should have been much better communication and coordination between the Department of Education and the Met Office ahead of Friday’s storm. The severe weather had been forecast for several days, and it is understandable that many schools are angry about how this was handled.”</p> <p>Mr Burrows has called for a multi-agency debrief to identify lessons learned and strengthen contingency planning: “The Minister of Education should direct a multi-agency review so that in future</p>

	<p>information is communicated more quickly to schools, parents and partners such as Translink. In a digital era, critical information should not be delivered solely by email. The Minister should urgently explore the use of a mobile communication app to ensure vital updates reach schools and families faster and more reliably.”</p>
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