

Balmuildy Primary School Frequently Asked Questions

These Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) provide responses to the questions that are being raised with the Council following the evacuation of Balmuildy Primary School on Thursday 20 February. We will be update these regularly as new questions arise. We will start with the most recent update, and include all previous questions with the date when the responses were issued.

Friday 28 February Additional question arising today

Are the school and the council aware of the HSE bulletin in relation to storage of wood pellets for biomass boilers, and the advice within?

We are both aware of and fully compliant with this HSE safety advice, which can be found at the web address below.

Only the engineer enters the fuel store and takes appropriate precautions. It is a sealed store and fuel is loaded in through tubes outside the building. The storage capacity is only around 15-20 tonnes so vastly reduced when compared with the scale of the facilities referenced in the HSE guidance.

<https://www.hse.gov.uk/safetybulletins/co-wood-pellets.htm>

Thursday 27 February Additional questions arising since first FAQs were issued:

We've heard that a child required CPR on Thursday (20 February) before the school was evacuated. Is this true?

No. This is simply not true. No-one at the school has required CPR prior to the evacuation, during the evacuation or since the evacuation.

Have you tested for hydrogen sulphide, the sewer gas? It can lead to the same symptoms as carbon monoxide.

The monitors located throughout the school test a range of gases, including carbon monoxide, carbon dioxide, hydrogen sulphide and others. Monitor readings have been clear since Saturday 22 February. The independent monitoring report for Tuesday 26 February conducted by Glasgow Scientific Services, is published on the school website confirming the zero readings for all gases.

You said drinking water would be tested, when will that be done?

Specialist external contractors tested the drinking water at the school on Wednesday 26 February. That report is now on the school website.

This report includes the results of the water sample testing in Balmuildy Primary School, which was carried out on Wednesday 27 February at 4pm by specialist external contractors. The readings are within the parameters expected with the exception of item 16. This lower than expected temperature reading is as a result of the hot water system automatically switching off at its usual time while testing was still underway. As soon as this came to light, the hot water was manually switched on again for the testing to recommence, but for reassurance, the tests will be repeated again tomorrow, Friday 28 February and the results published when they are provided to the Council.

The testing for temperature is to ensure that the cold water is cold and the hot water is hot not tepid and the normal reading for temperature would indicate that we would not be expecting anything to be flagged up in terms of legionella. These tests take longer and we would expect the results in approximately 10 days. We will publish those results when we have them.

The water supply at the school was tested for lead back in April 2018, and all test results were within the legal tolerances, confirming there were no issues at this school.

Does the school have a different water supply for drinking and for cooking?

No. We can confirm that there is one water supply to the school.

What about Safety Certificates in relation to the school boilers?

The hot water and heating in the school is provided by a biomass boiler which was installed in March 2017. It has no gas supply, it is operated electrically and burns biomass pellets to provide the hot water and heating. It was last serviced in January 2020.

The backup gas boiler was last inspected in May 2019, and prior to that in June 2018, as part of our wider asset assessment through our external insurers. Copies of these inspection reports are available on the school website.

The Council has been unable to locate a copy of the current gas certificate for Balmuildy Primary school despite extensive searches. The Council's gas safety inspections are carried out by independent third party contractors. The Council is currently liaising with the relevant contractor with a view to securing a copy.

However, as a result of being unable to locate a copy internally, further investigations are ongoing and the Council has today made contact with the Health & Safety Executive given the seriousness of this matter.

In addition the Council would confirm that the gas boiler at Balmuildy Primary School was decommissioned on Saturday 22 February and monitoring has been underway at the school since that point. All monitors remain clear.

What will happen now to the decommissioned boiler?

Plans are currently being developed to replace the back up boiler in the coming months.

What contact has there been with External Agencies?

We had previously confirmed that following the evacuation at Balmuildy Primary last week we notified the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) in line with due process.

Having since confirmed that the Gas Safety Certificate could not be found, and given the seriousness of this, the HSE was specifically notified of this. The Council will meet with the HSE next week to discuss this further.

We can also confirm that there has been regular contact between the Council and NHS Greater Glasgow & Clyde Public Health Protection Unit.

We have requested the results of Scottish Fire & Rescue's report following Thursday's (20 February) incident and we await their response. The analysis of this report was conducted by Glasgow Scientific Services, which also conducted the follow-up testing commissioned by the Council on Tuesday 25 February.

Similarly, we are awaiting the provision of a report from Scottish Ambulance Service in relation to their attendance at the Leisuredrome.

We have also asked the specialist gas contractor to provide a report on their attendance at the school on Thursday morning.

Responses to questions addressed and circulated on Monday 24 February:

What about the report of a smell in the school on Thursday 13 February?

A smell at the school was reported to our Health & Safety team following the February mid-term break and in-service day on Wednesday 12 February. An investigation was carried out by Property Maintenance to identify the source of the smell and to look at ventilation in the building.

As a consequence, specialist contractors were organised to come out to the school over the weekend (15-16 February) to check any underground water stagnation or sewage contamination and if necessary to pump it clear. Their investigations showed that there was no stagnant water or sewage.

As a precautionary measure, air quality testing was requested on Monday 17 February and was carried out in the morning and evening of Tuesday 18 February which came back clear.

What happened at the school on Wednesday 19 February?

Over the course of the day on Wednesday 19 February 35 pupils and four members of staff became unwell. 11 pupils were sent home.

As a consequence, during the course of the day, the Head Teacher made contact with the Council's Health & Safety team to seek advice. Health & Safety and Property Maintenance arranged for specialist contractors to check the heating system on Thursday morning.

Why was the school evacuated on Thursday 20 February?

Specialist contractors carried out tests first thing on Thursday morning, which were clear. However, Scottish Gas Networks were also contacted and attended mid morning. Once Scottish Gas Networks attended and their carbon monoxide meters gave readings, the decision was immediately taken to evacuate the school and Scottish Fire & Rescue attended along with Glasgow Scientific Services.

Children were taken to the Leisuredrome and were supported by school staff and other senior Council officers. Parents were contacted and asked to collect their children.

The attendance of the Scottish Ambulance Service was requested at the Leisuredrome to check any child or staff member displaying any signs of being unwell and remained at the centre until all children were safely collected. No child or staff member was unwell or required treatment.

Scottish Fire & Rescue and Glasgow Scientific Services did a sweep of the school and Carbon Monoxide readings were detected in the Head Teacher's Office, the Bistro in the two storey block and in the first floor boys toilets in the two storey block. No readings of carbon monoxide were detected in the boiler room or in any of the classrooms.

What further investigations were then carried out?

As the three locations where carbon monoxide readings were detected have no gas supply, further investigations were required.

Heating is normally provided by a stand alone Biomass boiler. The backup gas boiler only fires up if the biomass boiler notifies of a fault. Investigations identified that the biomass boiler had experienced a fault on Wednesday 19 February and the backup gas boiler had automatically fired up. Specialist contractors were called out on Friday and a specialist licensed contractor was on site on Saturday to inspect the backup gas boiler.

A fault was identified in one of the seals of the backup gas boiler, which was immediately shut off and the gas disconnected and decommissioned. Plans are in place to install a new backup boiler.

The gas supply to the kitchen for cooking has been further tested and is sound, with no leaks and cooking facilities remain unaffected.

What about the Norovirus outbreak in November – was that related?

No. The school was impacted by Norovirus in November as were other schools in the local area. The closure at that time, during the Norovirus outbreak was due to there being no hot water in the school. This related to the biomass boiler and not to the backup gas boiler. It was re-opened as soon as the hot water was restored and the NHS public advice and procedures for dealing with a Norovirus outbreak were followed.

What assurances are there that the school is now safe?

The school was declared fully safe on Saturday afternoon but to ensure that appropriate time was given to continue to monitor the situation, a decision was taken to keep the school closed today (Monday) and we can confirm that the school is safe for the children and staff to return on Tuesday 25 February.

We have installed new air quality sensors which detect both carbon monoxide and carbon dioxide at various locations throughout the school to ensure that we are aware should any readings escalate beyond normal background readings. These automatically trigger an alarm if levels approach trigger levels. Our Biomass Boiler contractors are on standby for immediate repair should the Biomass Boiler fail and whilst the backup boiler is being replaced.

Have external agencies been advised?

Yes, NHS Public Health and the Health & Safety Executive have been advised. We have also advised Scottish Government.

Advice from Public Health NHS Greater Glasgow & Clyde is that if parents are concerned about their child they should contact their GP.

What about wider concerns about the school building?

We are aware of other concerns that have been expressed about the school including the windows, ventilation, and the condition of window sills and carpets. A programme of work has been agreed that will replace all windows and window sills in the school in summer 2020 and to replace all carpets.