

Ballyclare Secondary School



Critical Incident Policy

“Every child deserves a rewarding educational experience.”

<i>Date of last review</i>	<i>April 2023</i>
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Summary

This policy details the procedures to be followed in the event of a critical incident or emergency occurring, either on or off school premises, involving pupils or members of the school staff.

Rationale

A critical incident can be defined as a sudden, unexpected and tragic event or sequence of events which causes trauma and confusion within our school community and which overwhelms the daily running of the school and normal support mechanisms which are in place. It may affect pupils, staff, parents and governors and may relate directly to the safety of our school community or may involve an incident beyond the school premises.

As a critical incident will probably have a distressing impact upon the school, our aim is to ensure that our school strategies and procedures are in place to provide support, both short and long term, to protect the physical and emotional wellbeing to every member of Ballyclare Secondary School.

The school understands that this Critical Incident Policy and Plan will not cover every aspect of recovery from a critical incident and occurrences may arise which cannot be foreseen or considered. The critical incident may occur at any time during or out of school hours so it is vital that the incident policy is easy to understand and can be put into immediate effect.

Key Points to aid the implementation of this policy:

- That it is adhered to.
- That key personnel clearly understand their roles and responsibilities and are fully competent to carry them out.
- That key personnel have a copy and have read the EA Guide to Managing Critical Incidents in Schools.
- That all members of the community work together to aid recovery.
- That consideration and sensitivity is shown by all.
- That pupils, staff and parents are protected from press intrusion.
- That normal routines are to be resumed as quickly as possible.
- There is a realisation that this is an ongoing process of recovery.

The Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT) will have a similar membership as the school's safeguarding team for Child Protection and has the responsibility for ensuring that procedures are followed during distressing times and high levels of anxiety. If the incident involves legal action, a specified response to the incident should be known and is able to be verified by more than one person.

Members of the Critical Incidents Management Team - CIMT

Principal – lead role

Vice Principal for Pastoral Care/Designated Teacher for Child Protection

SENCO

Designated Governor for Child Protection

Chair of Board of Governors

School Nurse

Senior Executive Officer

Other members of staff may be co-opted members of the CIMT as and when required. One/two members of staff may be asked to take responsibility for the normal running of the school whilst the CIMT is engaging in dealing with an incident.

All members of the Critical Incident Management Team must:

- Have a copy of the Critical Incident policy and EA Guide to Managing Critical Incidents in Schools at home and at school.
- Be aware of the roles of each part of the plan to enable the school to react swiftly and correctly.
- Have contact numbers of each other and key contacts for 24 hour contact.
- In the event of a school trip/visit, have access to a list of names for staff and pupils.
- Have a register of emergency services and relevant outside agencies.

Relevant members of secretarial staff will have a register of emergency services and relevant outside agencies.

Emergency evacuation drills are familiar to all members of staff and the school community and practiced regularly.

Opportunities to explore sensitive issues such as tragedy and death will be built into the PSHE and Pastoral Programmes .

Aims of the Critical Incidents Policy

1. To maintain a duty of care.
2. To minimise disruption to the school community.
3. To facilitate the speedy resumption of normal working practices.

Objectives

- To ensure that a swift and appropriate response occurs which aims to reduce the distress caused by the critical incident.
- To ensure that the welfare of pupils and staff is paramount.
- To have in place a Critical Incident Management Team, the membership of which is known to all relevant parties. This team will have a similar membership as the school Safeguarding Team for Child Protection to provide a consistent approach.
- To have in place a Critical Incident Management Plan, the details of which are understood by all relevant parties.
- To maintain normality, as far as possible, in parts of the school which are not affected and to restore normality as soon as possible to the parts which are affected.
- To have immediate access to all relevant contact details, including outside agencies.
- To offer sensitive, non-intrusive support in the short term and medium term to all those affected directly or indirectly by the incident.

Examples of Critical Incidents

A critical incident is likely to involve death or serious injury to one or more members of the school community and, or, their families either at school, journeying to and from school, participating in a school related activity, at home or in some other context.

In school this may involve:

- The death of a pupil or member of staff through natural causes.
- An accident involving a pupil or member of staff.
- A deliberate act of violence such as a stabbing or the use of a firearm.

- A school fire, flood or an explosion in a laboratory.

Out of school this may involve:

- Deaths or injuries through accidents
- Suicide
- Civil disturbance

Guidelines for Managing a Critical Incident

- The Principal will take charge of the school's response.
- In the case of the Principal being unavailable, the members of the Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT) will take charge.
- The Principal's Office will be the central liaison point.
- The CIMT will assess immediate practical needs.
- The CIMT will contact the next of kin of those directly involved if required.
- A short simple statement of facts will be prepared by the Principal (Appendix 2).
- All contacts with the media will be dealt with by the Principal (Appendix 3).
- Secretarial Staff taking incoming calls will use a statement agreed by the CIMT.
- When necessary, all members of staff will be informed and will be guided in relation to informing pupils.
- The CIMT will determine the involvement of parents if appropriate.
- Short and long term support will be offered to those affected.
- There will be an evaluation of the way in which the incident was managed.

CRITICAL INCIDENT MANAGEMENT PLAN

In the Event of a Critical Incident

Initial Response

- Notify the appropriate emergency services.
- The Principal should be contacted first (if not available the Vice Principal for Pastoral Care).
- The Principal (or Vice Principal for Pastoral Care) should seek to clarify from relevant sources the nature and circumstances of the incident.
- The CIMT will meet at the earliest opportunity and agree on procedures for managing the critical incident (Appendix 4).
- If the incident is on site, health and safety measures will be put in place and the emergency services contacted.

Gather Information

- It is important to collect as much information as possible about the incident. This information should be documented and kept as a written log. The following should be included:
 - What happened
 - Where and when the incident took place
 - Whether there is still a continuing danger
 - If the incident happened off-site, what help is required from the school
 - The numbers and names of those injured and the extent of their injuries
 - The current location of those injured, and the name and contact number of an adult present
 - The location of pupils who were involved but not injured, plus the name and contact number of an adult present
 - The name and contact number of an adult at the incident site (if off-site)
 - The name and contact number of local police

Assess continuing risk

Is it likely that further injuries or damage may occur? If there is a continuing risk, the first priority must be to safeguard the welfare of the pupils, staff and visitors. Ensure that any immediate action to protect people or property does not give rise to further risk.

Brief the Critical Incident Team

Additional members may be needed when the incident involves a particular group in the school. The Principal has responsibility for what happens in the school, and is therefore responsible for the actions of the support team. However, he or she may choose to delegate the leading of this team to a pre-arranged member of staff. The purpose of the briefing is to share information gathered about the incident and allocate responsibility for immediate and short-term tasks. The Principal should call a meeting of this team at least annually to update names, contact numbers, checklists and procedures. Written records will be kept using Critical Incident Log Sheets.

Contact appropriate agencies

In all circumstances contact the Chair of the Board of Governors. The Educational Psychology Service and Social Services may also be notified.

Action within the first hour....

Contact the families of those involved

The school will maintain an up-to-date list of emergency contacts for pupils and staff, and ensure it has an effective procedure for knowing who is on site. In the event of serious injury or death, the police will be involved and are likely to take responsibility for informing relatives in person. However, it may be helpful for them to be accompanied by a member of staff. In other circumstances, contacting the families of those involved should be done quickly and sensitively by the school. If the contact person cannot be reached by telephone, leave a brief message asking them to telephone a particular number. Try to avoid leaving complex messages as these can become distorted when conveyed. When releasing information to a wider audience, e.g. parents, prepare the information with care. Give the appropriate facts and express sympathy or concern. Blame and liability should not be attributed. Remember that the media may get access to this statement.

Telephone communication to and from school

When the news of an incident reaches the community, a large number of people will want to contact the school for details. This could block the main telephone line, making it difficult for outside calls to be made and for others to get through. Callers phoning the school line should be given a factual statement and reassurance that action is being taken to manage the situation. If further details are requested, ask the caller to leave a name and number on which they can be contacted. Be courteous but concise to keep the line free for other callers. Parents will need to know whether to come to the scene of the incident, or whether their child will be returned to the school or home.

Inform school staff

Provide staff with the factual details of the incident so that they can feel confident when handling questions and issues. Tell them when this information will be updated. Encourage staff to refer

enquiries to the CIMT when in doubt. Ask them not to talk to the media. This minimises the risk of mixed messages and misinformation.

Inform pupils

Tell pupils what has happened and allow them to ask questions. Decide whether it is better to talk to large groups, small groups or individuals. This process is often best managed by the form teacher.

Handling the media

The Principal or designated person will deal with press interest, which can be intrusive. It may be necessary to control access points to the school site, allowing parents in but not the press. We are entitled to say who can enter the school and who cannot. Members of the press should not enter without permission.

Action within the next few hours

Arrange debriefing for staff and pupils involved in the incident

The nature of debriefing sessions will depend on the incident. We might find it helpful to consider a different process for:

- Casualties
- Witnesses
- The wider community

We will also bear in mind:

- Whether separate briefings might prevent the incident from escalating
- The differing needs of pupils of various ages and at different stages of development
- Whether all parties need to know all the facts, thereby exposing everyone to the same levels of stress
- The closeness of individuals to the incident
- Whether there is good reason to respect the confidentiality of someone involved.

Inform the wider community

Depending on the nature of the incident, we will inform neighbouring schools, especially where siblings known to be at other schools.

Identify any inappropriate content of the school curriculum

Pupils who have recently been traumatised are especially sensitive to reminders. Classroom material may provide sources of likely triggers. We will not avoid such references altogether but anticipate likely reactions and ensure that teachers feel able to manage them.

Develop a plan for handling the feelings and reactions of others

We will be alert to possible staff reactions, even among those who are not directly involved but for whom the incident triggers difficult emotions. Outside agencies can offer support and advice to staff. 5 9

Long-term actions

Support available to Schools

If we face a major critical incident we will use the pastoral support already in place to support us through the difficulties. In some circumstances we will need extra help to provide emotional support, debriefing and counselling from the Educational Psychology Service or from external agencies (e.g. health trusts or religious or voluntary organisations). In the aftermath of a major incident, especially one attracting media attention, we may be inundated with offers of help from voluntary groups and individuals. We will need to select and manage such offers carefully to meet the best interests of pupils and staff. It is clear that anticipation of a critical incident, through basic planning and staff training, will be invaluable if such an event occurs.

Information sharing and planning with staff

School staff may feel responsible for supporting the pupil or class during a period of crisis. However, they also have to deal with their own emotions. A new loss may evoke memories of a previous one. Grief or other reactions may return for a while. In addition, there are several reactions connected with being a professional person having responsibility for the support of children and young people. Feelings of helplessness and inadequacy in the face of others' grief and pain are not uncommon. Shock, embarrassment, guilt and a wish to push down the emotions are all natural reactions at such times. It is important that staff members have support networks readily available and feel able to ask for help. Senior staff need to be aware that these reactions may occur and should seek appropriate guidance from outside agencies. It may be helpful for teachers to discuss the difficulties they may face collectively. We will endeavour to maintain as normal an atmosphere as possible, therefore providing a stable environment that will help our pupils and staff to cope with any stress arising from their personal circumstances. It is also important to remember that most teachers are not trained counsellors. They are not expected to offer bereavement counselling. Listening and being available for comfort are the main skills required. However, if a member of staff feels unable to offer support because of their own reactions, this should be acknowledged and accepted, and another colleague should be considered for the role. Specialist support can be provided to help a group of staff come to terms with a critical incident and to plan their responses to pupils, colleagues and parents.

Information sharing sessions for pupils

Evidence suggests that when pupils are directly involved as witnesses to a traumatic incident they benefit from structured debriefing sessions. Debriefing can also benefit pupils on the periphery of an incident. This enables them to express what they saw or heard, how it affected them and how they feel about it in retrospect. We will usually handle this process ourselves. For more demanding and emotive situations, however, specialist support is valuable. Specialist help

needs careful planning and is likely to be given between one and four weeks after the incident. It is essential to get parental consent to pupil's involvement.

Managing trauma

Introduction The management of a critical incident can result in a great deal of stress for those involved. It is therefore important to:

- Acknowledge the emotional state of staff and pupils and allow time and space when needed.
- Acknowledge that some staff may not wish to or be able to be directly involved in supporting pupils.
- Be aware that the burden of support may fall disproportionately on a small number of staff.
- Acknowledge that the incident may act as a trigger to pupils who are emotionally vulnerable, even if they are not directly involved. This may result in difficulties in behaviour and relationships.

Providing opportunities to talk through or otherwise express personal reactions

While attempting to ensure continuity and normality, staff should encourage pupils to talk about their feelings and be prepared to listen to them. It is helpful if familiar adults are particularly alert to the signals which show that the pupils are still working through what has happened. Some pupils may require support which cannot be provided in a class or small group. If needed, short-term counselling should be offered by appropriately trained and supported staff, possibly outside the normal timetable. The school has a regular Counsellor provided by EA. Groups of pupils may be offered support from outside professionals who can debrief them, to help them understand their reactions and develop coping strategies. Parental permission should be sought in this instance. Staff closely associated with the pupils involved should be offered opportunities for debriefing and counselling. Be aware of the possible delayed reactions of those actively involved in responding to a critical incident. Staff who are co-coordinating the school's response should be supported and scheduled for relief periods. Some pupils and staff may need therapeutic help for a considerable time or at some time after the event. New staff would need to be made aware of loss, etc.

Continuing or quickly re-establishing normal routines

Every attempt will be made to provide as much continuity as possible for pupils. We will maintain the normal school day, as far as possible, so that pupils are unsettled as little as possible.

Longer Term Issues

- School structures and routines will be re-established.
- Supportive strategies for pupils and staff will be implemented.
- There will be ongoing contact with parents/carers.
- Actions taken will be reviewed and policies amended if appropriate.
- The PSHE and Pastoral Programmes will be reviewed.
- Staff will be mindful of anniversaries and other special dates.

The use of appropriate outside agencies is crucial to providing long term support as is the use of appropriately trained members of staff who are known to those in need of help.

Implementation, Monitoring, Evaluation and Review

The SLT and Board of Governors will review this policy at least every two years and assess its implementation and effectiveness. The policy will be promoted and implemented throughout the school.

APPENDICES

DE - A Guide to Managing Critical Incidents in Schools

Please see link below to the all the appendices:

<https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/guide-managing-critical-incidents-schools-appendices>

Critical Incident Management Guide – Initial Report and Running Record

<https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/de/appendix-3.pdf>

APPENDIX -FIRE EVACUATION

When the fire alarm signs:

1. Line up the class inside the room.
2. Lead (do not send) the class quickly to the assembly point at the far side of the gravel pitches. All personal belongings should be left in the classroom. Emergency exit arrows are positioned near the door in every room.
3. Do not lock doors. Appointed teachers will check that the school is completely cleared and close all doors after them.
4. Should an exit route be blocked, teachers should carefully appraise the situation and exit all pupils via the nearest safe route.
5. Class teachers should keep a careful eye on members of their class to ensure they reach the assembly point. Pupils should then line up alphabetically by surname in registration group.
6. Registration teachers should check their class. Class registers and teacher cover/attendance information sheets will be taken to the assembly point by office staff.
7. Should any person(s) be found to be missing the registration teacher will inform the year teacher who will immediately inform the Vice Principal – Pastoral Care, who will take appropriate action.
8. When the emergency/practice comes to an end pupils will be dismissed back to the room they left when the alarm sounded by the Vice Principals. Pupils will continue with the lesson they left or collect their belongings and move on to appropriate timetabled classes.
9. The order to return to school/class will be given by the Principal.

During the lunch break, evacuation of the building will be under the direction of the Principal, Vice Principals and supervisory assistants. However, teachers are asked to report to the assembly point as soon as possible, directing those pupils who they meet on the way. Appointed teachers should ensure that allocated areas are clear.

Should the alarm sound when pupil are not in class or moving between classes they should walk in an orderly fashion to the nearest exit and proceed to the assembly point at the back of the gravel pitches.

When the emergency/practice is over pupils will report to their appropriate timetabled class.

Registration teachers should, at the earliest opportunity, discuss the emergency evacuation procedure with their classes. This will be reinforced in an assembly early in the school year.

Subject teachers should, early in the school year, inform all their classes of the emergency exit route from their classroom.

