

Managing Critical Incidents Policy

Signed: _____
(Principal)

Signed: _____
(Chair of Board of Governors)

Date: _____

Managing a Critical Incident

“A critical incident may be defined as any sudden and unexpected incident or sequence of events which causes trauma within a school community and which overwhelms the normal coping mechanisms of that school.”

(A Guide to Managing Critical Incidents in Schools – Jan 2014)

Examples of Critical Incidents that have affected schools:

- Sudden death of pupil or member of staff;
- Disappearance of a pupil or member of staff;
- Death or injury of a pupil or staff member on a school outing;
- Severe injury to pupil or staff member as a result of road traffic accident;
- Serious assault on pupil or staff member in school;
- Violent/disturbed intruder on school premises during school day;
- Serious damage to school building or property through fire, flood or vandalism;
- Civil disturbance in local community;
- Pupil with contagious illness;
- Immediate evacuation of the school with no likelihood of return for a number of hours.

Experience has shown that schools which have a Critical Incident Management Plan in place will handle the situation better. They tend to provide the best support to pupils, staff and families and return to normality sooner while continuing to be alert to the vulnerability of all concerned.

The following plan has been devised using Department of Education guidance materials (*A Guide to Managing Critical Incidents in Schools – Jan 2014*) and tailor-made to suit the current context, policies and procedures in our school.

Plan for Managing a Critical Incident in Naíscoil & Gaelscoil Éadain Mhóir

The Critical Incident Management Plan (CIMP) can be split into three sections:

- Before the incident (precautionary measures)
- During the incident (response to the incident)
- After the incident (managing the aftermath of the incident)

Before the Incident

Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT)

Team Leader – Mary Nic Ailín (Principal)

Teaching members – Alicia O Kane (Vice-Principal)

Non-teaching member – Karen Watkins (secretary)

Governor member – Deaglán Ó Mochain (Chair)

Critical Incident Emergency Contacts

Contact numbers for the following agencies and persons will be easily accessible in the school office and a copy will be held at home by all members of the CIMT, in case of an incident taking place during the holidays / at the weekend:

EA Critical Incident Response Team

Police and other emergency services

Chair of BOG (mobile)

Principal (mobile)

CIMT members (mobile)

School secretary (mobile)

Contact Details (pupils & staff)

- Emergency contact details (nominated persons & phone numbers) are held on SIMS (connected to C2k text service) for every child in the school.
- Emergency contact details for all staff and their families are held in the office
- A printed copy of contact numbers for pupils & staff is easily accessible in the office (in case of evacuation).

During the Incident

Initial Assessment

The Principal, on being made aware of any critical incident, will make an immediate decision, based on the nature of the incident and the early implications, whether or not the school building needs to be evacuated and if necessary, which of the emergency services need to be contacted. In the case of injury, the trained First Aider will keep the patient calm and comfortable until an ambulance arrives.

Communication

The principal should make contact with the Chair of the Governors immediately and convene the CIMT for a briefing, as soon as is safely possible.

The school secretary will use the internal phone system to inform other staff members of the incident as soon as is safely possible.

The Critical Incident Management team will decide on the level of communication with parents required:

- A text can be sent to all parents via the Teachers2parents system
- Individual parents can be contacted by phone (in case of individual injury. illness of a particular child)
- Family members of staff can be contacted by phone

If School Remains Open

In the case of a critical incident where the **school will remain open**, emergency contact details of pupils and staff are held in the office and on SIMS, to enable us to contact parents, staff (and their families) quickly and efficiently:

- School C2k text service can send a block message, if necessary, to all parents & staff
- Individual parents / staff family members can be contacted / informed of the incident by phone by the Principal

If School has been Evacuated

In the case of a critical incident where the **school has been evacuated**, the following procedures will be put in place:

- Hard copy of contact numbers for all pupils / staff emergency contacts is easily accessible under table in Secretary's office
- Hard copy of contact details for **Critical Incident Agencies** is easily accessible on the office wall in line with fire evacuation procedures, the school secretary will bring the above documents to the **Fire Assembly Point**.
- The C2k text service can then be activated from the Principal's mobile phone when all staff and pupils have been brought to safety at the assembly point.

It is important that parents receive additional updates to re-assure them of the children's safety, as and when the CIMT deem appropriate during a critical incident. All updates, will be agreed and worded carefully by the CIMT and delivered by the Principal.

Evacuation

If evacuation is necessary, the normal procedure for evacuation in the case of a fire will be followed.

The school secretary will bring the following documents to the Fire Assembly Point:

- Pupil emergency contact details
- Staff emergency contact details
- Critical Incident emergency contact list

Class teachers will be responsible for directing their pupils to the Fire Assembly point and will immediately carry out a role call & head-count to ensure that every child is accounted for. The Principal should be informed immediately that this has been carried out and if any child cannot be located.

Class-teachers and classroom assistants should ensure that all necessary medication (inhalers / epipens) for children with health conditions are brought to the Fire Assemble Point in the case of evacuation.

The school secretary will do a head-count and account for all members of staff. The Principal should be informed immediately that this has been carried out and if any member of staff cannot be located.

Safety and Supervision of Pupils

If evacuation is not necessary, the CIMT will ensure that there is adequate supervision in all class-rooms / other areas of the school. Staff supervising in these areas will be kept updated on the status of the incident and of actions taking place.

Central Information Point

If the school remains open, the main school office phone will be the central information point.

- The Principal will make any necessary calls to parents. staff families to inform them of potential injuries etc.
- The school secretary will log all calls made to the school office and the principal will respond to all calls when it is safely possible to do so.

If the school has to be evacuated, the Principal's mobile phone will be used as the central point of contact.

- If necessary, individual parents (eg. of potentially injured children) will be provided with the Principal's mobile number to facilitate communication
- Otherwise, the phone line will be left open to make and receive calls from emergency services.

Emergency Services

All staff should fully co-operate with the various emergency services and a designated area should be set up to facilitate them in doing their work effectively.

School Closure

In the case of a critical incident which demands the closure of the school, the following procedures will be followed:

- parents will be contacted by text and asked to collect children immediately from the school / from fire assembly point / other safe location.
- Parents who are unable to collect their child will be asked to ring the school to confirm contingency arrangements – secretary to keep a written record of these arrangements & inform class teachers accordingly.
- Class-teachers will keep a record of children as they leave, to be sure that all pupils are accounted for
- Principal and CIMT to remain on the premises until the last child has been collected and ensure that the school building is secure and locked.
- Parents to be kept updated in a timely fashion via text, confirming if school will re-open / close in the following days, to ease child-care arrangements.

Guidance in DENI circular 2005/08 on Exceptional Closures to be followed in case of all school closures.

Staff Briefing

During a critical incident, it is vital that all staff are kept informed of the status of the incident and of the roles & responsibilities required from staff to effectively manage the incident.

Principal to brief staff as often as possible via internal phone system. In the case where the Principal is attending to emergency services etc. school secretary should be briefed by Principal and delegated with responsibility of briefing other staff.

Announcement to Pupils

The Principal & CIMT will decide if and when an announcement should be made to pupils regarding the critical incident. The announcement will be made by the Principal and information will be age-appropriate and sensitive and delivered in language which is easily understood by the children. Pupils will be re-assured at all times that the school staff will ensure their safety and they will be asked to follow all instructions carefully to ensure the safety of all. Children should be comforted and re-assured throughout any critical incident. Special care should be taken with vulnerable children or those with SEN, who may need one to one re-assurance.

Media

It is not advisable to make any statement to the local media during an incident and the CIMT should decline to do so and instruct all staff to follow suit. Media statements need to be carefully prepared and worded in the aftermath of an incident when the correct facts have been established.

After the Incident

The aim of the work carried out in school during the weeks, months and sometimes years following a critical incident is to help its immediate and broader community cope with and recover from the critical incident. A return to normal routine requires careful and sensitive planning, timing and implementation. Staff should continue to monitor pupils' emotional wellbeing and be attentive to pupils with ongoing difficulties.

Communication

The way in which the school reports the details of the incident, to the school community or wider community via the local media, needs to be carefully planned and agreed with the members of the CIMT and the BOG.

Sample proformas for making formal announcements to the school community / local community / media regarding a range of critical incident scenarios are available in the *Guide to Managing Critical Incidents in Schools – CCEA - Jan 2014*.

Support for Pupils

Returning to school for some pupils after a critical incident may be very difficult and every attempt should be made to provide as much continuity as possible. Return to normal routines is important, but continued support and careful monitoring may need to be in place for a significant length of time afterwards. Suitable arrangements to support a pupil or pupils returning to school should be made.

Agencies which offer support to pupils in the aftermath of a critical incident include:

- Barnardos. Counselling support for children. www.barnardos.org.uk
- Childhood Bereavement Network - www.childbereavement.org.uk
- Childline - www.childline.org.uk
- Cruse Bereavement Care. Resources and bereavement counselling for children of all ages; for parents, carers and professionals: www.cruse.org.uk
- Family Trauma Centre: www.ftc.hscni.net
- Lifeline: 24-hour support and counselling helpline 0808 808 8000.
- NEPS: Responding to Critical Incidents Resource Materials for Schools.neps@neps.gov.ie
- NSPCC. Counselling support for children - www.nspcc.org.uk

Support for Bereaved Families

The family of a pupil who has died will require support for a long time after the tragic event. Family members may be at the same school and have difficulty in adjusting to their loss. Parents may wish to have mementos of their child's involvement in the life of the school and to hear about his/her achievements.

The return of personal belongings and/or school work to the family, perhaps in a 'memory folder' or 'memory box' needs to be handled sensitively. Schools should also consider what to do when events arise that would have involved the deceased pupil, for example, award ceremonies. The management of public examination results and the return of coursework also requires careful consideration. It should be remembered that whatever precedent the school sets should be applied to similar incidents in the future and be in line with family wishes.

Support for Staff

In the aftermath of a critical incident, it may help staff to reflect on the incident, the actions taken and to discuss any changes required to the CIMP in light of the incident. Some staff may also need emotional support in the longer term. The strain on staff of leading a school through a critical incident can be profoundly disturbing and may not be identified until after the crisis. Staff, both teaching and non-teaching, can often underestimate the impact on them and may not recognise that they are experiencing difficulty. The Critical Incident Management Team must be alert to this possibility and ensure that staff are directed to sources of support.

Memorials and Commemorations

A school may wish to hold a memorial or commemoration. Holding a special assembly is a way of celebrating the life and achievement of the pupil or colleague and gives the school a corporate means of thanksgiving and farewell. The wishes of the bereaved family should always be taken into consideration and schools should be mindful of different religious faiths and accepted practices.

Significant dates such as anniversaries or celebrations may revive deep feelings among pupils and staff and need careful handling if new problems are not to be created. Additional support for pupils and staff may be required at this time. In addition, it is important to take account of any long-term legal processes, for example, a court case or an inquest, possible media interest and any related public events which may be unsettling for the school.

Review of Critical Incident Management Plan

A review should be carried out within six weeks of a critical incident. This review should be undertaken in collaboration with those support agencies involved and should include consultation with the school community to evaluate the effectiveness of the CIMP and to make necessary modifications if required.