**Critical Incident Policy**



**SAINT MARY’S PRIMARY SCHOOL**

**GREENLOUGH**

**September 2022**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **DATE** |  |
| **Chair of Board of Governors** |  |
| **Principal** |  |
| **Date of Review** | **September 2023** |
| **Issued to parents** |  |

**This Policy sets out the procedures to be followed to ensure the safety and protection of the whole school community in the event of a critical incident.**

**INTRODUCTION/RATIONALE:**

A critical incident can be defined as a sudden, unexpected and tragic event or sequence of events which causes trauma and confusion within a school community and which overwhelms its normal coping mechanism.

It may affect pupils, staff, parents and governors, may relate directly to the safety of the school community or may involve an incident beyond the school premises.

As a critical incident is likely to have a severe impact upon the school, both in the short and long term, our aim is to ensure that school strategies and procedures are in place to protect the physical and emotional wellbeing of every member of our school community.

The Critical Incident Policy and Plan cannot cover every aspect of recovery from a critical incident.

Occurrences may arise which cannot be foreseen or considered.

The critical incident may occur during the school day, during the evening, during the school holidays or on a school trip.

Whilst they do not occur frequently, Critical Incidents can happen and it is therefore important that we have a plan in place to best respond and manage a traumatic situation should it occur. Critical incident management is an integral part of normal school management practice.

It is important that the incident policy is easily understood and swings into action immediately.

The following must be remembered in relation to the incident policy:

* that it is followed as closely as possible;
* that designated personnel understand their tasks and are competent to carry them out;
* that other people do not take unilateral actions;
* that consideration and sensitivity is shown by all;
* that pupils, staff and parents are protected from press intrusion;
* that normal routines be resumed as soon as possible;
* there is a realisation that total recovery may take a long time.

The Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT) has responsibility for ensuring that procedures are properly addressed at times of high emotion. If the incident involves legal action, a precise response to the incident should be known and is able to be verified by more than one person.

**Aims of the Critical Incidents Policy**

* To maintain a duty of care
* To minimise educational and administrative disruption within school
* To enable normal working to be resumed in the shortest possible time

**Objectives**

* To ensure that swift and appropriate action is taken in the case of the school being made aware that a critical incident has occurred
* To ensure that the welfare of pupils and staff is paramount
* To ensure that the school responds in a sensitive, consistent and effective manner which reduces confusion, panic and extreme emotion
* To have in place a Critical Incident Management Team, the membership of which is known to all relevant parties (see Appendix 1)
* To have in place a Critical Incident Management Plan, the details of which are familiar to all relevant parties (see Appendix 2)
* 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 and medium term to all those affected directly or indirectly by the incident

**What types of critical incidents can affect a school?**

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 or from school, participating in a school related activity, at home or in some other context.

* Sudden death of a 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 a road traffic accident:
* Serious assault on a pupil or staff member in school:
* Violent/disturbed intruder on school premises during a 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.

For an incident to be declared ‘critical’ consultations must first take place between the person at the school handling the incident (usually the Principal or Delegate) and a CCMS/EA/DENI representative. In responding to an incident, the aim should always be to ensure :-

* rapid and appropriate action is taken;
* accurate information is provided;
* normal school routines are maintained as far as possible and
* immediate, sensitive and non-intrusive support is offered.

An emergency is difficult to define and the procedures will not apply to all emergencies.

**The two most frequent on-site emergencies are likely to be the need to evacuate the building or a serious/fatal accident.**

**Critical Incident Management Team (Appendix 1)**

The Governors and Principal must ensure that a Critical Incident Management Team is established and reviewed annually.

N.B. Other staff members may be co-opted on to the team, depending upon staff availability and/or involvement in incident (e.g. away on a school trip on day of incident or if the incident occurs during a holiday period.)

**GUIDELINES FOR MANAGING A CRITICAL INCIDENT**

**Action Plan for Dealing With a Critical Incident:**

Very often the Education Authorities (EA’s) senior Education officer and his/her team will take over much of the management of the incident, leaving the principal free to deal with pupils, parents and colleagues. In any event, as soon as an incident is declared ‘critical’, the following plan of action, in order of priority, should be put in place.

**Short Term Actions (Day One):**

* Firstly take whatever action necessary to ensure the safety of pupils, staff and any other persons associated with the incident
  + Contact emergency services as appropriate
* Gather accurate information
  + Date, time and location of the incident
  + Details of individuals involved
  + Brief description of the incident including any unconfirmed reports
  + Record of immediate action taken.
* Meet with Critical Incident Management Team and
  + Allocate roles to staff members.
  + Establish a central information point
  + Set-up a dedicated phone line
  + Inform key people and seek support as appropriate with other relevant agencies e.g. Police, Fire Brigade, School Nurse, Educational Psychologist & Educational Welfare Officer etc.…
  + Consider the need for an Exceptional School Closure – refer to the Department of Education’s Circular 2005/08 for further advice.
* Brief all staff
* Inform all pupils
* Inform all parents
  + In very serious circumstances it may be more appropriate for the police to make the initial contact
  + Keep a log of who has been contacted and when
  + Ensure parents are not left alone in distress
  + Protect the family’s privacy
* Protect children, parents and staff from publicity, direct all media enquiries to EA /CCMS officer (The only other persons allowed to speak to media are the principal and the Chairperson of Governors)
* Debrief staff at the end of the day
* Meet with Critical Incident Management Team (End of day) and agree plan for following day.

**Medium-Term Actions (24-72 Hours):**

* Record any further information / details since previous day.
* Maintain central information point.
* Maintain dedicated phone line
* Deal with staff cover
* Brief staff regarding practical arrangements, support for pupils & self-care etc.
* Provide pupils with further information as appropriate.
* Provide further information to parents as appropriate.
* Consider Memorial / Funeral plans if agreed by bereaved family
  + Selection of students/staff to attend funeral
  + Involvement of pupils/staff in liturgy if applicable
  + Provision of flowers, Mass Cards, Book of Condolences, etc.
* Debrief staff at the end of the day
* Meet with Critical Incident Management Team (End of day) and agree plan for following day

**Longer Term Actions:**

* Monitor students for signs of continuing distress
* Acknowledge the consequences of the event on children, staff and others
* Provide opportunities for pupils and staff to express their personal reaction to what has happened and to talk about it
* Where necessary make contact with child or colleague at home or in hospital
* Make sensitive arrangements for the return to school of anyone who has been injured/affected
* Inform new staff of which pupils/staff were affected and in what way
* Decide on appropriate ways to deal with anniversaries
* Try to re-establish normal routines
* Evaluate response to incident and amend Critical Incident Plan appropriately
* Share advice and information about what has happened

**SUMMARY OF ACTION PLAN:**

* As far as possible, make sure staff, pupils and other personnel are safe.
* Contact emergency services
* Inform EA/CCMS/DENI support services and obtain name and direct phone number of the officer delegated to manage the incident
* Keep a log of all events and actions
* Inform Chairperson of Governors
* Contact parents and provide such support as may be required. Stick to the facts and avoid speculation. In very serious situations, it may be preferable for the police to make contact with parents.

*No-one can legislate for the unknown, but we hope that by having clear procedures and clear lines of responsibility that we will be in a better position to do the right thing if the time comes. We trust this policy will never be tested.*

***Appendix 2*** *contains a list of a variety of incidents and the immediate responses before the CIMT convenes.*

***Critical Incident Management File***

***See Appendix 3 (master copies from Support Document – electronic forms on C2k School Policies – Pastoral Care Policies – Critical Incident Folder .)***

*This kit contains all necessary documents required for the management of a critical incident. The Critical Incident Management File will also contain all contact details for the members of the Critical Incident Management team. (A hard copy of this file will be available in the Principal’s office and in the homes of the Principal & SMT members in case the school site can not be accessed during a critical incident or one which happens during a holiday period or in the event of a fire during the night.)*

*An electronic copy of this files will also be available on the Staff area of the C2k system.*

**Media Management Guidelines (See Appendix 4)**

**N.B.(Only Principal / Chair of Governors will speak with media.)**

In a critical incident that draws media attention the following points should be considered:

* The needs of our children or staff at the centre of the critical incident should take precedence and next of kin should be informed and kept up to date. A media ‘blackout’ may be appropriate at times or for a period of time.
* Child protection, Data Protection and other confidentiality issues or legal issues should be considered before releasing information. The Principal or person/persons deputising should authorise any press/media releases.
* In the age of mobile communications and social media we recognise it is not realistic, nor is it always best practice to sustain a media ‘blackout’ beyond the necessary period as information from other sources can spread very quickly and it is often better for all involved to have reliable information put into the public domain to quell speculation.

**Press Releases/Statements**

In putting information out to the media we will always try to:

* **INFORM** – provide the facts as they stand while being sensitive to issues outlined above
* **REASSURE** – give reassurance that the school is using all of the resources at its disposal in dealing with the incident and that the public can be confident that the school will act swiftly to resolve the issue
* **APPEAL** – appeal to parents/public to take on board any message or action that may be useful in helping the school deal with the incident – this may be an appeal for privacy to be respected or an appeal for parents to seek medical advice or contact a particular agency.

Sample of press release templates / media interview templates are contained in the Critical Incident File/Kit. (**Appendix 3)**

**Support and Advice for all staff dealing with a critical incident**

**These are contained in the Critical Incident File (Direct copies from EA Support documentation.)**

The critical incident management file contains advice for all staff explaining ways to support pupils during and after a critical incident. These will be shared with all staff during training.

Copies of this advice will be stored as a hard copy within the Critical Management Folder and will be available electronically on the School Policies Folder/Pastoral Care Folder - Critical Management Folder (A guide to managing a critical incident in school”.Appendix 3 - )

**Links with School Policies**

The following school policies may be integral to some critical incident situation and action should be in keeping with the policy on these issues where possible:

* **Critical Incident File –** this is located in the main office and has comprehensive reference and contact information to be used in the event of a Critical Incident as per DE and EA Guidance
* **Emergency Plans –** within the Health and Safety File Evacuation procedures – every classroom/area has their procedures displayed
* **Child Protection Policy**
* **Health and Safety Policy**
* **Special Needs Policy**

**Curricular Links/Support**

In the aftermath of a Critical Incident we may seek help to resolve the issue through the following educative means:

* PDMU
* Circle Time
* Assemblies
* Referrals for counselling

This policy will be reviewed following an incident we determine to be critical, or as deemed necessary in light of developments or changes but will be a part of our formal review every three years.

**Contacts**

The Education Authority has a critical incident response team who can be contacted to provide support to schools.

Critical Incident Line: **028 3751 2515**

This number should be used by all schools to report a critical incident that has occurred both during the day and out of hours.

**REFERENCES:**

* Department of Educations – A Guide to managing Critical Incidents in Schools
* Department of Education’s Circular 2005/08

**APPENDIX 1**

**MEMBERS OF THE CRITICAL INCIDENT MANAGEMENT TEAM**

* **Principal – Mr M Meehan (Lead person)**
* **Chair of Board of Governors – Mrs Sheila Kinoulty (or any other board member in her absence)**
* **Vice-Principal/Pastoral Care Co-ordinator – Miss M Maguire**
* **School Secretary – Mrs M Diamond**
* **Other members of staff may be co-opted members of the CIMT as and when required- depending upon availability/ability/involvement of other members.**

**One/two Senior members of staff may be asked to take responsibility for the normal running of the school whilst the CIMT is engaged in dealing with an incident.**

**APPENDIX 2**

**Initial Procedures for various incidents before the Critical Incident Management Team Meets**

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| **INCIDENT** | **INITIAL ACTION** | **INFORM/INVOLVE ASAP** |
| **Sudden death of a staff member** | Initiate Emergency Service Response – 999  Arrange appropriate care and safe relocation of any pupils in immediate vicinity | * Principal * SLT * Next of Kin * Chair of Governors * EA (Western Region) * Staff Welfare |
| **Sudden death of a pupil** | Initiate Emergency Service Response – 999  Arrange appropriate care and safe relocation of any pupils in immediate vicinity | * Principal * SLT * Next of Kin * Chair of Governors * EA (Western Region) * Staff Welfare * Ed Psych |
| **Assault/Aggressive incident on school grounds** | Initiate Emergency Service Response – 999  Arrange appropriate care and safe relocation of any pupils in immediate vicinity | * Principal * SLT * DTCP/DDTCP * Chair of Governors |
| **Major accident/Injury to pupil/staff/parent on school grounds** | Initiate Emergency Service Response – 999  Arrange appropriate care and safe relocation of any pupils in immediate vicinity | * Principal * SLT * DTCP/DDTCP * Chair of Governors * Next of Kin |
| **Major Incident/Accident off school grounds, e.g. trip** | Initiate Emergency Service Response – 999  Arrange appropriate care and safe relocation of any pupils in immediate vicinity | * Principal * SLT * DTCP/DDTCP * Chair of Governors * Next of Kin |
| **Emergency Evacuation Situation** | Instigate emergency evacuation plan  Initiate Emergency Service Response – 999 | * Whole staff |
| **Discovery of outbreak of major contagious illness or similar** | Immediate advice from School Health Team SWAH | * Principal * SLT * DTCP/DDTCP * Chair of Governors |

**APPENDIX 3a**

**(Appendix 3-20 are documents copied from Support Document.**

**Contents of School Critical Incident Kit**

* Initial Report – Appendix 3
* Details of those involved – Appendix 3
* Day 1 Running Record (direct copies from support document.) – Appendix 3
* Day 2 Running Record (direct copies from support document. ) – Appendix 3
* Details of Pupils and staff requiring on-going support – Appendix 3
* Review of Management of Incident (To be completed 6 weeks after the incident) – Appendix 3
* Cascade of communication (from **Appendix 3b** school policy)
* Record of Consultation (**Appendix 3b** school policy **manager to make during incident management**)
* Telephone Log & Visitor Record – **Appendix 3b** school policy**. May be useful for Principal and Secretary to use this during the management of the incident.**
* Announcements to pupils – advice for teachers (Appendix 6 & 7)
* Information for staff – Children and Young people’s Understanding of Death (Appendix 8)
* Death by Suspected Suicide (Appendix 9)
* How school staff can support pupils (Appendix 10 & 11)
* Information for pupils – Understanding your Reactions (Appendix 12)
* Sample letters to parents (Appendix 13) Word templates in school policy **Appendix 3b**
* Information for parents (Appendix 14)
* Press/Media Statements – samples (Appendix 15 & 16) **Templates in policy Appendix 3b**
* Pupils returning to school after a bereavement – Information for teachers (Appendix 17)
* School Record on a pupil who has experienced Loss and Bereavement (Appendix 18)
* Pastoral care Transfer Information (Appendix 19)
* Publications/Resources and Support Services (Appendix 20)

**Staff Training Document - will focus on the documents listed above and the school policy.**

**APPENDIX 3b**

**Electronic Drafts of sample documents for use at the time of the critical incident**

**INITIAL REPORT**

**(CONFIDENTIAL)**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Date:** |  | **Time:** |  |
| ***(When report completed)*** | | | |

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| --- | --- |
| **Information received from:** |  |
| **Contact details:** |  |
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|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Name of person informed:** |  |
| **Information passed to:**  ***(Name of person with overall responsibility)*** |  |

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Date:** |  | **Time:** |  |
| ***(When incident occurred)*** | | | |

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| --- |
| **Facts of incident received so far:**  **Brief Description of the Incident on (Date)** |
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| --- |
| **Unconfirmed reports:** |
|  |

**Communication Tree**

If knowledge of incident is raised outside school hours. First contact is always to the Principal.

E.g. if a member of teaching staff learns of an incident, please contact the Principal immediately.

PRINCIPAL

Chair of Governor’s

All governors

CCMS/EA personnel

All teaching staff

Senior

Management

Vice Principal contacts Secretary,

Caretaker

& all supervisory & kitchen staff

All teaching staff contact their classroom assistants

**CONFIDENTIAL**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Details of individuals known to be involved:** | | | | |
| **Name** | **Pupil/Member of Staff or Local Community** | **Involvement** | **Known/Suspected** | **Contact Details** |
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| **IMMEDIATE ACTION:** | | | | |
| **Critical Incident Management Team Informed:** |  | *(Time)* |  | *(Date)* |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Name of Person:** |  |

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Arrange Meeting of Critical Incident Management Team:** |  | *(Time)* |  | *(Date)* |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Name of Person:** |  |

**RECORD OF CONSULTATION**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **DATE** | **NAME OF PERSON** | **CONTENT OF**  **DISCUSSION** | **RECOMMENDATIONS** |
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**TELEPHONE LOG**

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Date and Time of Call | Name of Caller | Query | Response | Name of staff member to follow up query |
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**STATEMENT TO SCHOOL STAFF**

To: All Staff

From: Mr M Meehan, Principal

I have just been informed of **(an accident/incident**) involving **(name of pupil** **or staff member).** It saddens me to announce that **(name of pupil/staff member) has died.**

As more information becomes available, I will pass it on to you. In the meantime I would ask that students remain in their classrooms and follow their current timetable.

If any pupils feel they need additional support, (**members of the pastoral** **team, critical incident team, EA Critical Incident Team**) will be available in (**venue**) at (**agreed time**).

**STATEMENT TO PUPILS**

To: All Pupils

From: Mr M Meehan (Principal)

Today I have heard the sad news that **(name of child/staff member)** has died.

The whole school is very shocked by this news and would offer our sympathy to **(name of child/staff member)** family and friends.

This is a very sad time for all of us and we may feel shocked, angry, tearful or numb. At the moment we would like you to stay in your classroom, however, if you feel you need to talk to someone about this news, the school **(pastoral** **team/critical incident team**) will be available in **(venue)** at **(agreed times).**

**TEMPLATE**

**LETTER A**

Dear Parents

I am writing to inform you that today we received the sad news that one of **(our pupils/member of staff)** has died.

As you will be aware this is a difficult time for the whole school community and our (critical incident team/EA critical incident team) are available to help staff and pupils cope with their reaction to this loss.

However, your child may wish to talk to you about some of the thoughts or feelings they are experiencing and I have enclosed an information leaflet which may guide you at this time.

If you would like any further advice or assistance, please contact either myself or any of the following staff:

* Miss M Maguire (Pastoral Care Co-ordinator)
* Mrs Sheila Kinoulty, Chair of Board of Governors
* Pupil Personal Service, Education Authority – Telephone

Yours sincerely

Mr M Meehan

PRINCIPAL

**Sample Press Release**

Date

School grieves sudden death of pupil

As reported by the PSNI, a pupil at ……………………………………………………. School died tragically on …………………………. The circumstances of …………………………………’s death are not known at this time and an investigation is currently ongoing. This is a tragic loss to ………………………………….’s family and to our school community. To assist in supporting our staff and pupils through this time of grief, additional trained staff from the ELB’s Critical Incident Response Team have been assigned to the school to provide support. A letter has been sent by the school to parents, informing them of this incident and providing information on the support services available through the school.

A special assembly to remember ………………………………… has been arranged for ……………………………………………….

Contact: …………………………… Principal, ………………………………… School at ………………………………………………………

……………………………………………………………….

**PREPARED STATEMENT FOR MEDIA**

We are sorry to learn of the tragic……………………………….of ……………………………….…………………………….……………………………….

We hope at this time the school would be given the privacy needed to support our pupils at this difficult time, etc NB: If the Principal wishes to comment about the pupil, they may want to gain permission from the family to include: Sporting achievements Musical talents Academic success Personal attributes

**LETTER B**

**SAMPLE LETTER TO ALL PARENTS**

Date:

Dear Parent/ Carer

It is with great sadness that I have to tell you of the sudden death of **NAME,** **(a pupil in Year ........../ a Year ........... Teacher/ Learning Support Assistant, etc).** The children were told this morning by their class teacher/ Principal at assembly. **NAME** died of **(an asthma attack, meningitis etc)** and the children have been assured this is something that does not happen very often. Your child may or may not want to talk about it but it is likely that he/ she will need extra love and support from you in the days ahead. This does not mean that anything is wrong with him/ her. It only means that this traumatic event has been too powerful for him/ her to deal with on his/ her own. He/ she may be feeling anxious. Take time to listen to your child and try to provide a predictable routine for him/ her at home. Avoid too many absences to start with. We have enclosed an information leaflet for you which may be useful at this time. Trained staff from the Education Authority NI’s Critical Incident Response Team are helping to support us through this difficult time. It is sometimes necessary for a member of the team to speak to a class or individual pupils who may be distressed. He/ she will be guided by the Principal/ class teacher in this. If you do not wish your child to receive such support from the team please contact us immediately. We are deeply saddened by this great loss but are trying, for the children’s sake, to keep the school environment as normal as possible. Our thoughts are with NAME’s family at this tragic time and the school community sends them sincerest sympathy and support. NAME’s funeral is on DAY/ DATE at TIME am/pm at (Name of Church or Crematorium). We are in touch with the family regarding their wishes for the school’s representation at the Service.

**Appendix 4:**

**Media Management**

**GENERAL ADVICE**

* Provide nothing but the facts – Avoid speculation or opinion – it can be inaccurate and upsetting to those involved in the critical incident.
* Express
  + the need to reduce and prevent further stress
  + the need to stabilize the situation
  + normal functioning of the school and its individual members
  + individuals will get the help they need.
* Give a prepared statement rather than an interview and anticipate the worst possible questions. Write it down as it gives you time to think about what you want to say rather than responding in an ad hoc manner.
* Immediately correct any incorrect or misleading information – by interrupting if necessary.
* Offer a written statement which could include an expression of school’s grief and what the school has done so far e.g. contact with parents, clergy, Education Authority (EA) support staff etc.
* Do not apportion blame or liability to anyone even in ‘off the record’ conversations.
* Remember to praise and thank any person or service that have helped during the incident.
* Remember that there are no ‘off the record’ conversations and that all contact with the press should be treated with caution.
* Report on positive developments following the event. Following a tragic situation, it is important to give the Press information.