



# CRITICAL INCIDENTS POLICY

Coleraine Grammar School

## Policy on Managing Critical Incidents

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.

### Rationale

Experience has shown that schools which have a Critical Incident Management Plan in place tend to handle unexpected events more effectively, providing better support for pupils, staff and families and returning to normality sooner while continuing to be alert to the vulnerability of all concerned. It is important that staff know they have a significant role at this time, that they feel valued and that their contribution to the situation is acknowledged.

### What might constitute a critical incident?

The following is a list of examples of possible critical incidents

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

Should a critical incident occur, the overall aim is to maintain a normal routine as far as possible to ensure the safety and well-being of all members of the school community.

### Aims of the Policy

The aim of the policy is to create a balance between managing the incident while meeting the needs of the whole school community. This is achieved through

#### Staff

- being able to recognise what constitutes a critical incident
- knowing how to respond to a critical incident
- being aware of the needs of all involved in the event of a critical incident
- ensuring a safe and secure environment is created which takes account of and prioritises the needs of individuals
- being clear about procedures
- delivering appropriate coping skills and mechanisms in the curriculum
- establishing positive working relationships with outside agencies, thus enabling full and effective collaboration in the event of a critical incident.

## **SECTION ONE: BEFORE THE INCIDENT.**

### **Roles and Responsibilities:**

#### Headmaster

The Headmaster has overall responsibility for managing the incident.

#### SLT

SLT will work under the direction of the Headmaster, or in their absence will endeavour to make contact with him and follow the procedures laid down in the policy

#### BoG

The BoG will be informed of any Critical Incident by contacting the Chair and may be involved in the drawing up of any press statements.

#### Critical Incident Management Team and individual roles within team

The Critical Incident Management team incorporates SLT and any other member of staff as appropriate. The Business Manager is also included in the team. The Board of Governors is kept informed of developments by the Headmaster.

Their roles are as follows

The school office will be the central point of contact during a critical incident during school hours.

Key Stage/ Year groups	Who?	Where?	What?
	Dr Carruthers	Remains in Headmaster's Office	Keeps in touch with emergency services/ Translink etc. and updates Vice Principals
	The Business Manager	Office	Informs non-teaching staff of developments
	Vice Principals/Senior Teachers	Office	Headmaster briefs VPs who will brief pupils and staff and send them to Form Rooms to await evacuation, if appropriate.
KS3	Pupils Pastoral Leader(s) and Form Teachers	Gym, library, canteens as available.	
KS4 and post 16	Pupils Pastoral Leader(s) and Form Teachers	HH, TA  SFC as available.	Headmaster updates VPs, VPs keep Pastoral Leaders informed. Pastoral Leaders keep Form Teachers informed regarding developments.

## **Responses to Critical Incidents**

### Procedures

Summarised below are the immediate responses to large scale or major critical incidents. Since incidents are, by nature unexpected, it is not possible to address specific situations. There are, however, some steps which will be taken in order to ensure effective management of the situation. A policy of openness with teaching and support Staff will be adopted so that they are better placed to respond to the needs of individual pupils.

### **Everyone is advised not to give statements to the press.**

Good communication is essential. It is recommended that, where possible,

- an initial written note will be circulated to all Staff to ensure pupils are adequately supervised and in appropriate accommodation.
- actions advised by PSNI or other sources will be communicated in a similar manner.
- further written clarification will follow as the incident develops.

In order to ensure pupils' records are kept up-to-date the following procedure is followed:

- at the start of each School Year contact details are checked and changes are communicated directly to the Office Staff who are responsible for updating the School Records.
- during the year pupils, who change address or contact details, should bring a note of changes to the Office Staff immediately.

## **A Incidents which occur on the school premises**

### **(i) During school hours**

In a crisis, all members of Staff have the authority to act in order to save lives or prevent deterioration of a situation. Information will be relayed to Senior Staff who will make decisions about how to deal with the situation.

The Headmaster, or in their absence another member of the Senior Leadership Team, will

- establish and record the accurate details of the critical incident and if necessary, carry out essential checks
- based on the facts, assess and take immediate steps to deal with the situation in order to save life and protect all concerned
- where appropriate make a 999 call to the emergency services and contact the Divisional Medical director of Causeway Hospital. Contact details are provided in Appendix 1
- advise the Chairman of the Board of Governors at the earliest possible stage
- if not already alerted, inform other members of the Senior Leadership Team who will meet to decide details of the response and allocate Staff duties

***NB* Should an incident occur which calls for the closure of the school, advice on exceptional closures and the procedures to be followed can be found on DENI website <http://apps.education-ni.gov.uk/appExclos/default.aspx>.**

**(ii) Out of school hours**

The Headmaster or other member of Senior Leadership Team initiates appropriate steps to communicate relevant information to Staff and pupils.

**B Incidents Which Arise off the School Premises**

In these situations, the Group Leader acts in accordance with the Policy and does so in the best interests of all concerned in the particular context.

**(i) In school hours**

The Group Leader or deputy

- assesses the situation
- as soon as possible, when immediate action has been taken, contacts the Headmaster and in consultation with the Headmaster decides who is best placed to contact the parents
- deals with the remainder of the group in the most appropriate manner to keep things as normal as possible
- asks members of the group not to contact home using mobile phones until the situation has been clarified
- protects the group from the press and advises them not to make a statement to the press

**(ii) Out of school hours**

**Immediate response**

The Group Leader will carry out the procedure as above by informing School via one of the named contacts.

The person contacted will

- ask Senior Staff and/or other available Staff to come in to School to deal with the incident. See Appendix 2
- ask a member of the administration staff to come into school to deal with telephones

In all incidents, pupils with Special Education Needs will be guided by their Classroom Assistant. Where the Classroom Assistant is not present the class teacher should pay special attention to ensuring these pupils are kept calm and taken to the assembly point in a safe and secure manner.

**Communicating with parents of those involved**

The Headmaster will brief the Senior Leadership Team.

Senior Leadership Team will

- contact parents of those directly involved
- respond to incoming calls from parents of those involved
- make any other necessary telephone calls

**Communicating with other parents**

**Dealing with concerned parents who arrive at School**

These parents will be taken to a central location, e.g., Library. Every effort will be made to ensure this is warm and, if possible, some refreshments made available.

While it would be preferable to communicate with all parents, this is not feasible. The Senior Leadership Team will decide how best to deal appropriately in a particular context.

### **Informing the rest of School**

The Pastoral Care Structure will be used to inform pupils. Pastoral Leaders and Form Teachers will be provided with written details of the information to be communicated to the pupils. At a later stage, a full Assembly will be held to address the issues surrounding the event.

### **Section 2 During the incident**

During the incident the SLT should make reference to the Critical Incident Management Guide in the appendices.

When a critical incident occurs the school should inform key contacts of the incident that has taken place and keep them updated. These may include the emergency services, members of the school's Board of Governors, the EA Critical Incident Response Team and other relevant agencies who may have a role in providing support.

#### Key tasks during an incident

- Responding to any inevitable risk or threat e.g. evacuation or first aid
- Notifying emergency services and any other key parties
- Mobilising the critical incidents management team
- Agreeing the school routine for that day (try to establish a normal routine as soon as possible)
- Informing staff
- Establishing a dedicated phone line
- Setting up a recovery room
- Informing pupils and parents
- Preparing a media statement
- Assessing the impact of the critical incident on all members of the school community

### **Briefing staff**

A formal staff briefing will take place as soon as possible after the circumstances of the incident are known. Absent teachers should also be briefed.

At this meeting the Headmaster or deputy will:

- give a brief statement of factual information
- outline the school's response and proposed plan of action;
- allow staff to ask questions and to get a response;
- outline staff responsibility for monitoring pupil and staff welfare;
- identify vulnerable staff and pupils who may be at risk;
- clarify specific responsibilities for staff;
- advise staff on procedure for dealing with media enquiries;
- advise staff on agreed procedure for informing pupils and parents;
- inform staff of the support services that are available;
- reassure staff and pupils that they will be supported; and

- advise staff of time/place of next briefing and debriefing session.

### **Breaking the News to Pupils**

It is important to inform pupils of a critical incident as soon as possible as rumour can add another aspect to handling the critical incident.

To reduce the potential for creating a highly charged emotional atmosphere pupils will be informed in small groups, for example, class group or year group preferably in their regular classroom setting. Many pupils will likely be in shock so a small group setting will also act as a 'safe space'. The news will be communicated by the class/form teacher or the Head of Year. Staff may decline this task if they feel unable to do it.

The appendices provide sample announcements and useful information on informing pupils. Teachers will be given a carefully worded announcement to read aloud in classrooms simultaneously to ensure all pupils hear about the incident at the same time. Staff need to be aware of vulnerable pupils in their group and consider those who may have been recently bereaved, have Special Educational Needs. Staff must not speculate when making the announcement and be truthful when questions cannot be answered.

Where there has been a death it is important that the bereaved family's right to privacy is respected. In this instance the announcement made to pupils will usually include a statement of condolence and this should be sensitive to the different religions and cultures present in the school community.

Time should be provided to allow pupils to discuss their feelings after the announcement has been made. (See Appendices)

The announcement will also advise pupils of the support arrangements to be put in place and how these can be accessed.

It is important that Staff are aware that young people's understanding of death will depend on their cognitive and developmental stage. In the case of a suspected suicide there are a number of issues that need to be considered. (See Appendices)

Staff making the announcement must be aware of vulnerable children.

Vulnerable pupils include:

- close friends and relatives of those affected;
- pupils with a history of self-harm or suicidal ideation;
- pupils who have experienced recent bereavement or separation;
- pupils with mental health difficulties;
- pupils with a history of substance abuse;
- pupils with child protection needs;
- pupils with learning, communication or sensory difficulties;
- non-communicative pupils who have difficulty talking about their feelings;
- pupils experiencing serious family difficulties including mental/physical illness;
- pupils with Special Education Needs

### **Informing Parents**

When a critical incident occurs, parents must be informed. The type of critical incident will determine the nature of contact with parents and the urgency with which this is done.

Parents of pupils directly involved should be telephoned or visited. If the death of a pupil has occurred, one has to be mindful of the bereaved parents' needs. It is important for the Headmaster or another school representative to make contact with the parents as soon as possible to express sympathy, liaise over messages of condolence from staff/pupils and to discuss funeral arrangements. Schools should always take into account the wishes of the family before sending school representatives, including pupils, to a funeral and be sensitive to different religious practices and cultures.

Other parents also need to be informed; this is likely to be done most effectively by email or text. The Appendices provide sample letters and give practical and constructive suggestions on how parents

can support their children.

When making contact with parents it is important that any letter issued should give the facts of the critical incident and ensure that only accurate information is shared. School should also consider the needs of parents whose first language is not English.

Where the critical incident requires all parents to be contacted as a matter of urgency, this will be achieved by use of the school texting or e-mail service.

### **Media Management**

While there is no obligation to speak to the media, co-operation with the media can make the difference between accurate and inaccurate reporting. Pupils should also be advised about dealing the media and encouraged to use their discretion when commenting on social networking sites.

### **Dealing with the Press/Media**

#### **Meeting and accommodating Press/Media**

A senior member of Staff who has been briefed by either the Headmaster or a Vice Principal will:

- meet and accommodate the Press/Media. Where possible, this will be at an off-site venue where they cannot have direct access to Staff, parents or pupils
- if necessary, contact the Information Officer at the EA. Contact details are provided in Appendix 1

#### **Briefing Press/Media**

- the task of briefing the Press/Media will be carried out by the Headmaster, a Vice Principal or Chairman of the Board of Governors
- press will not have access to other members of Staff, any parents who are involved, Governors or pupils on the school premises
- contact details for other members of Staff, any parents who are involved, Governors or pupils will not be given out by the school

Checklist before a media statement is released.

It is strongly recommended that before making a statement:

- a check is carried out with the police, ambulance, and fire and rescue service;
- the relevant education and library board Schools' Communications Officer is contacted for advice on the statement;
- a decision is taken on whether all media enquiries and follow up enquiries are handled by the Headmaster or another designated member of the Critical Incident Management Team;
- an accurate, factual report is prepared as background to any questions;
- no other staff should make comment or provide comment on the incident;
- news media should not be permitted on school property without the prior approval of the Headmaster. This applies to television, radio, print media and photographers.

### **Support for staff**

Support within School

Informal support in school may be available through staff, colleagues and friends who can help each other and, if appropriate, someone in the Senior Leadership Team.

More formal support may include, for example, providing cover arrangements for staff that are temporarily unable to carry out their normal duties, arranging for staff to have time out if necessary and advising staff of external support that may be available to them.

Staff will be supported during a crisis. In order to support pupils effectively, staff need to be kept

informed, to understand the importance of their role and to be supported themselves. The needs of all staff must be monitored and appropriate support provided.

The impact of a critical incident on staff may be distressing and some may have difficulty coping. The extent of this impact will depend on staff involvement in the incident and the particular circumstances pertaining to it. The impact will also vary according to staff experience and training, coping skills, past trauma history and current stresses.

Staff may access Carecall support service.

The needs of the Headmaster and other senior members of staff must also be provided for. While this group of staff will be well supported from within the school, it is likely that support will also come from outside the school. They should access help through the EA and Carecall as required.

Opportunities will be provided for staff, as individuals or in groups, to discuss their own reactions to what has happened, to assess the climate of the school and to share their observations on the monitoring of vulnerable pupils.

### **External Support**

In the immediate aftermath of a critical incident the school community needs the type of support described in this document such as calm reassurance by familiar adults. The school can be supported in providing this by the Education Authority's Critical Incident Response Teams in conjunction with the Independent Counselling Service for Schools.

In the longer term, however, staff may benefit from counselling support, such as that provided by the employing authority (Carecall) or other community based counselling services.

### **Assisting Statutory Investigations**

A critical incident, in particular, the sudden death of a pupil can trigger an investigation that may involve a number of statutory agencies.

The sudden death of a pupil is an extremely difficult and emotionally charged time for all concerned. Alongside a coroner's inquest there may be other officially established reviews or inquiries into the pupil's death and the circumstances surrounding it.

It is important that we anticipate being asked to contribute information about the pupil to any such review or inquiry and ensure that all relevant records are secured. It is important to stress that the purpose of such reviews is not to inquire into how a child died or who is culpable. It is to learn from the experience on how best to protect children in the future and if there are ways of improving the practice of all professionals working with children particularly in relation to multi-disciplinary and inter-agency working.

## **C Follow-up Actions - Pastoral**

### **AFTER THE INCIDENT**

The aim of the work carried out during the weeks, months and sometimes years following a critical incident is to help the 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.

### **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. Suitable arrangements to support a pupil or pupils returning to school should be made.

These arrangements include:

- arranging a home visit to discuss plans for returning to school even on a phased basis;
- helping arrange a rota of support from school friends;
- arranging for school work to be sent home where appropriate;
- briefing staff and pupils on how best to support individuals returning to school;
- arranging support for temporary or permanent mobility difficulties or disfigurement; and
- planning support for emotional needs e.g. leaving class when distressed.

The Appendices deal with planning a positive return for a bereaved pupil.

A record should be kept of a pupil who has been affected by bereavement. The suggested form in the appendices may be useful. When a pupil affected by a critical incident moves school, the receiving school should always be informed, a sample form is provided.

Pupils who continue to show signs of significant distress after a number of weeks and who are finding the return to normal school routine difficult may require a referral for specialist intervention. Schools should also consider the need for a support plan for individual pupils or a group of pupils returning to school after a long absence or those considered at risk. Safeguarding children is a multi-agency issue and can become a child protection issue where schools should liaise with external agencies for appropriate guidance and reassurance.

The support plans for these vulnerable pupils are an integral part of the schools' pastoral care arrangements.

Staff may have to cope with the continuing impact of the critical incident and with issues as they arise during teaching and learning. The classroom provides opportunities to deal with these issues in a more extensive way. It would be unwise to focus obsessively on the critical incident, yet issues arising from the event should not be avoided. School should remember that some pupils' ability to concentrate is significantly affected after a critical incident. If public examinations are imminent for pupils it is important to make the examining boards aware of the situation.

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 their achievements.

The return of personal belongings and/or school work to the family needs to be handled sensitively. When considering 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 this should be in line with family wishes.

### **Support for Staff**

Some staff may need 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**

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 Plan and to make necessary modifications if required.

The review should address the following questions:

- What went well?
- What was most/least helpful?
- Were there any gaps?
- Have all necessary referrals to support services been made?
- Is there any unfinished business?
- Have all records relevant to the Critical Incident been secured?
- Are there any identified training needs?
- Does the Plan need to be reviewed/changed/updated?

The Critical Incident Management Team should meet on a termly basis to discuss the Plan and ensure that it is fit for purpose including considering the recent experiences of other schools. Key contact details should always be reviewed on a termly basis.

**There must be a formal review of the Critical Incident Management Plan annually.**

#### 1. Short-term

In the immediate aftermath of a crisis, Staff and pupils will feel numbed with a need to talk. The response will be tailored to the nature of the crisis.

#### **(i) Management of Staff**

All Staff, including the person in overall charge, will be given the opportunity to express their emotions and talk over events with colleagues. They will be given the opportunity to acknowledge that they require professional guidance to cope with the incident. In such cases, a member of the Senior Leadership Team will seek assistance from the EA or other professional bodies. Contact details are given in Appendix 1.

#### **(ii) Management of pupils**

School will ensure that every pupil has the opportunity to talk to an appropriately trained adult. In later days they will be referred to designated members of Staff- Form Teacher/ Pastoral Leader/Counsellor. Pupils will be given a choice as to whom they wish to be referred. Any pupils who appear to be withdrawn are identified by Staff and offered assistance via the School pastoral system/the EA or other professional counsellors. It will be made clear to pupils that, while the incident has been abnormal in their experience, their reaction is normal and also that school will continue as normal, providing stability during a difficult time.

### **(iii) Debriefing meeting**

To help all staff who have been directly involved in managing a critical incident, a formal debriefing will be organised. This will help to clarify what happened, enable individuals to share experiences and be reassured that their reactions are normal.

The purpose of the meeting is to help bring closure to the event and help those involved work through the bereavement cycle (see Appendix 2 – download cycle from BBC)

Such a meeting may be taken by an experienced person from outside the School.

### **(iv) Express sympathy and arrange attendance at funerals**

The Staff will set aside time to attend funerals, express sympathy to bereaved families, visit the injured, and encourage pupils to send cards to those in hospital. The Senior Leadership Team will delegate tasks where appropriate.

## **2. Medium term**

As the School settles back to normal routine, further responses are needed. Arrangements are made to monitor those involved, referring to outside agencies if necessary.

### **(i) Prior to returning to School for pupils/Staff involved**

It may be appropriate to make contact with those concerned prior to their return to School. The purpose of this contact will be to reassure those involved that procedures are in place to help them cope if they are upset during the day at School and to provide an opportunity to talk about the incident.

This will also provide an opportunity to reassure pupils about arrangements for special consideration for public examinations, part-time attendance and deciding on a suitable plan of how to catch up on missed work and re-scheduling project deadlines.

Before those involved return the rest of the school community will be briefed about how to support those who have been involved, especially if an accident has altered appearance/mobility. The EA Critical Response Team and ICSS can if required provide initial support to the school community. Any other support offered should be considered carefully and be governed by Child Protection guidelines and legislation.

### **(ii) Returning to School**

Staff and pupils returning to school should

- be reassured that they are unlikely to operate as efficiently as before and therefore need to take things at an easier pace
- be encouraged to express difficulties with concentration and recognise that these are normal and will pass
- be helped to make sense of what has happened and understand that, even if they feel guilty, they are not to blame

Parents of pupil(s) may also make use of outside help. For example, therapists may run group

activities for those involved but none are pressurised to join and individual consultations will also be available.

**(iii) Memorial service**

School will decide if this is appropriate and if so devise a suitable, appropriate format. Many people will be upset during such a service and this is considered in the planning. For some, the memorial service may acknowledge that a major event is now over.

**(iv) Continued monitoring of both progress and emotional adjustment**

The normal procedures for monitoring progress, attendance, absence from classes, behaviour and of keeping parents informed will operate. More regular contact with parents may be maintained to make Staff aware of unexpressed grief or anxiety and ensure that they are sensitive to the pupils from the bereaved families.

**3. Long term**

**(i) Monitoring vulnerable people**

New Staff are advised of all involved.

**(ii) Marking the anniversaries**

Decisions need to be made in advance as to whether these are marked in some way.

**(iii) Dealing with reports of findings, inquests, postponed funerals**

These prolong the return to normality and School needs to be sensitive and supportive to those attending inquests, involved in legal matters, enquiry boards etc.

**D Follow-up Actions - Administrative**

Within the first month, the following essential administrative tasks must be carried out to demonstrate that the School has acted reasonably.

**1. Maintaining a Record**

As soon as possible following a critical incident and during the follow-up process Staff involved in taking decisions will

- record circumstances of the event, decisions taken and rationale for such decisions
- ensure statements from all involved are taken and recorded
- keep secure any logs, video-footage as evidence
- contact the School's Legal Advisors to cross-check that all necessary steps have been taken

## **2. Review and Evaluation by Senior Leadership Team**

First of all, Teaching and Support Staff will meet to assess the responses made and their views on the effectiveness of follow-up actions and any possible long-term effects on the atmosphere in the School. Based on this the Senior Leadership Team will meet to evaluate the response and amend current procedural checklists appropriately. The overall Policy will be reviewed in the light of the experience.