

**Critical Incidents Policy**

CRITICAL INCIDENTS POLICY

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| **NAME:** | **ROLE:** |
| **E Johnston** | **Principal** |
| **J MacVicar** | **Chair of Board of Governors** |

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| **Date**  **Ratified:** | **18/11/2024** |
| **Date of Review:** | **18/11/2027** |

# Ethos

In Harmony Primary School we endeavour to create a nurturing, caring supportive and stimulating environment to ensure that pupils feel happy, safe and secure in school and that they are able to develop emotionally, educationally, socially and physically so that they can fully maximise their potential.

# Rights Respecting School

As a Rights Respecting School this policy takes into account the U.N Convention on the rights of the child, including the following articles:

# Article 3

“The best interest of the child must be our top priority in all our actions”

# Article 12

“The views of the child must be respected”

# Article 19

“Children have the right to be protected from all forms of violence: they must be kept safe from harm: and they must be given proper care by those looking after them”

# Introduction

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.”

(ESAGS – A Guide to Managing Critical Incidents)

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.

# Preventative and Precautionary Measures

Whilst no amount of planning can totally prevent accidents and problems occurring, it is hoped that some can be prevented and the effects of others minimised by taking sensible precautionary measures. It is expected that:

* All staff and pupils should be familiar with the school’s routines for fire and

evacuation of the school building on hearing the fire alarm.

* All staff should be familiar with the routines and procedures for dealing with emergencies (as detailed in this policy)
* All staff should be familiar with the school’s security procedures, in particular that all visitors not wearing a visitor’s badge should be questioned and escorted to reception.
* All staff organising school trips and visits follow the guidelines and ensure that a risk assessment has been carried out. (See Educational Visits Policy)
* All staff are aware of pupils with medical needs or health problems
* All staff are aware that they should assess associated risks to children before carrying out a curriculum or other activity
* All staff are ware that they are responsible for assessing risks to themselves before undertaking an activity.

# A major incident may be defined as:

* An accident leading to serious injury or fatality;
* Severe injury or severe stress;
* Circumstances in which a person or persons might be at serious risk of illness;
* Circumstances in which any part, or whole of the school is unable to function as normal due to external influences; and
* Any situation in which the national press or media might be involved.

# As such, major incidents include:

* Death of a pupil or member of staff;
* Death or serious injury on a school trip;
* Epidemic in school or community;
* Violent incident in school;
* A pupil missing from home;
* Destruction or major vandalism in school;
* A transport accident involving school members;
* A disaster in the community;
* A civil disturbance or terrorism
* Major fires at a school
* The critical Incident team comprises:

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| MEMBERS OF THE CRITICAL INCIDENT MANAGEMENT TEAM | |
| Principal | Mrs E Johnston |
| Vice-Principal | Mrs J Hughes |
| Chairperson of the Board of Governors | Mr J MacVicar |
| Other members of staff/governors may be co-opted members of the team as and when required. Other 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. | |

# Managing a critical incident

In the event of a critical incident occurring then the school Critical Incident Management Team (under the stewardship of the Principal) must ascertain the facts and assess the significance to the school.

The Principal’s/Incident Team’s decision will determine the response that will be implemented. In keeping with good practice, the Principal will record all relevant information and prepare an initial report (see Appendix 1). In addition, an Incident Management Log should also be used to record relevant information and updates (see appendix 2).

The school’s reaction to a critical incident can be divided into the following categories:

* Immediate action
* Short term action
* Medium term action
* Longer term action

**IMMEDIATE ACTION** – i.e. within hours of the incident occurring)

1. Obtain and collate information relating to the incident – uncertainty breeds rumour and accurate information is essential;
2. Gather and brief the CIMT – brief the whole staff team, allocate roles and responsibilities;
3. Trigger support from the EA and other contacts on emergency list – establish clearly who is going to contact whom;
4. CIMT should agree factual statement for anxious parents to avoid speculation;
5. Contact families affected – must be done quickly and with sensitivity. Consistency of information is vital. It may be appropriate for families to come to school and immediate emotional support could be a possibility (PSNI/EA may provide support for this if appropriate);
6. Make arrangements to inform other parents – may need to take advice form EA, especially if there is the possibility of legal liability. CIMT may wish to send a letter to parents, or prepare a leaflet.
7. Inform teaching and other school staff – staff need to be cautioned about talking to the media or responding to questions from reporters. It is vital that all staff in contact with pupils are kept well informed and feel secure in handling comments or questions from pupils.
8. Inform pupils – can be done in small or large groups depending on which is most appropriate. Care needs to be exercised to protect both children and adults closely involved in the incident. It is important that children receive a consistent account of the incident allowing for differences in their ability to understand.
9. Encourage people involved to talk – the incident may need to be discussed before children go home for the day, for both pupils and adults.
10. Deal with the media – most important to seek advice from EA before agreeing to speak to or be interviewed by the media. If this is not an option, then an agreed text for release should be prepared by the CIMT and a designated spokesperson briefed and prepared to respond on the school’s behalf.
11. Devise a plan for handling the reactions and feelings of people affected – the most common reactions will include denial, distress, guilt, anger and helplessness. CIMT need to consider outside professionals to support and debrief staff and pupils affected by the incident. Those providing support also need support. At this point the CIMT will need to plan their short term reaction to the incident.

**SHORT TERM ACTION** – the next stage

1. Reunion of children with their families – especially where the incident occurs outside the school
2. Encourage pupils to talk – activate strategies for enabling young people to talk about the incident and their feelings, using outside agencies if appropriate. Staff will need briefing about ways to help the children affected by the incident, and how to identify patterns of behaviour etc. This may have implications for the wider curriculum i.e. training in bereavement counselling for staff, provision of a range of books, PDMU discussions etc.
3. Debriefing meeting – it may be appropriate to hold a debriefing meeting for staff, children and parents to:
   * Clarify what has happened
   * Allow for sharing reactions
   * Reassure people that reactions are normal
   * Mobilise resources e.g. parental support groups

An experienced person, possibly someone outside the school community should lead this meeting.

Formal and informal recognition of rituals – it is important to remember to express sympathy to families of the hurt or bereaved. The school may wish to plan for visits to children/staff in hospital. Pupils may wish to send cards and letters. The school may also need to consider attendance at funerals, and/or the desirability of holding special assemblies or memorial services. Anniversaries are also key times when support and sensitivity are required.

Re-establishing routines – every attempt should be made to provide continuity for the children. The return to school of staff or pupils directly affected by the crisis will need to be managed carefully and with sensitivity but the re-establishment of routine is an important stage in emotional recovery.

**MEDIUM TERM ACTION**

1. Return to school for staff and pupils after long absence – reintegration will need to be planned carefully, and may involve home visits prior to return, part-time attendance initially, reducing workloads, putting in place mentoring process etc.
2. Consulting professionals – consideration should be given to consulting the Educational Psychology Service for support and guidance, especially to help those showing unusual or prolonged reaction to the incident.
3. Keeping parents informed – it may be appropriate to produce a leaflet for parents giving guidance on the possible delayed reactions of pupils to an incident and making suggestions to help them deal with these.
4. Support for staff – ongoing monitoring and support for staff is a major consideration.

**LONG TERM ACTION**

1. Monitoring the vulnerable – the effects of a crisis can reverberate for years, and it is especially important that new staff and pupils are briefed in the school’s history to help them understand and deal with potential repercussions especially at anniversary times.
2. Marking anniversaries - these difficult times need to be dealt with sensitivity
3. Curriculum implications – it may be appropriate to schedule INSET training for staff in loss counselling, bereavement etc.

“**A Guide to Managing Critical Incident**” is available from the Department of Education website via the following link:

<https://www.eani.org.uk/services/eatv/teacher-videos/a-guide-to-managing-critical-incidents>

APPENDIX 1: Initial Report

Initial Report – CONFIDENTIAL

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

Facts of incident received so far: Brief description of the incident on (Date: )

Unconfirmed reports:

APPENDIX 1 cont.

Details of individuals known to be involved in the incident:

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Name | Pupil/staff/community  member etc. | Involvement | Known/suspected | Contact  details |
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IMMEDIATE ACTION:

Critical Incident Team Management Informed:

(Time) (Date)

Arrange Meeting of Critical Incident Management Team:

(Time) (Date)

This initial report was completed by: Name: Designation: Date:

CONFIDENTIAL

APPENDIX 2

INCIDENT ACTION/DECISION LOG

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| DATE | TIME | SITUATION UPDATE |
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CONFIDENTIAL

APPENDIX 3

REVIEW OF THE INCIDENT REFLECTION/REVIEW

Details of key lessons learned in the management of this incident:

* What went well?
* What was most/least helpful?
* Have all necessary referrals to support services been made?
* Are there any identified training needs?
* Does the policy need to be reviewed, changed or updated?
* Is there any unfinished business?
* CONFIDENTIAL

APPENDIX 4 USEFUL CONTACTS

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| Department of Education | <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/> |
| Education Authority Belfast Region | [www.eani.org.uk](http://www.eani.org.uk/) 02890564000 |
| Education Authority  Child Protection Support Services CPSS | 02890566248 |
| Education Authority Staff Welfare |  |
| EA Belfast Region Maintenance |  |
| Health and Safety Executive | [www.hseni.gov.uk](http://www.hseni.gov.uk/) 02890243249 |
| Public Health Agency for NI | [www.publichealth.hscni.net](http://www.publichealth.hscni.net/) 03005550119 (Duty Room) |
| PSNI | Central switchboard – 0845 600 8000 Community Involvement – 02890700964 Crimestoppers – 0800 555111  Non- Emergency – 101 Emergency – 999 |
| Family Support NI | [www.familysupportni.gov.uk](http://www.familysupportni.gov.uk/) |
| CAMHS | [www.belfasttrust.hscni.net](http://www.belfasttrust.hscni.net/) |