

## Critical Incident Policy

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<b>Committee Responsible for Policy</b>	Business Committee
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## Introduction

Schools, under normal circumstances, provide a safe and secure environment for all children to learn, develop and grow in. Unfortunately, crises or tragedies can occur and can result in significant distress for all individuals involved as well as for the school as a whole.

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.

## Definition

A critical incident can be a physical incident or psychological trauma that has a severe immediate impact and likely long term effect on pupils, staff or parents.

This may include:

- Incidents that involve staff, children or young people or others
- People made disasters/ emergencies
- Natural disasters/ emergencies

There are 3 levels of incident:

- **Level 1** – a major incident involving a large number of children/ adults
- **Level 2** – an incident involving death or serious injury or other traumatic incident witnessed by the children or staff
- **Level 3** – distress/ trauma resulting from an incident but not witnessed by the pupils

Staff and pupils may be affected by crises that occur either in or out of school, during school time or out-of-hours. A list of example critical incidents is provided below.

### In-school

- the death of a pupil or member of staff through natural causes, such as illness
- a health emergency such as widespread virus or other illness
- a traffic accident involving a pupil or staff member
- a deliberate act of violence, such as a knifing or the use of a firearm
- a school fire or flood
- allegations or actual incidents of abuse against pupils by staff and staff against pupils
- an arson attack on the school

### Out-of-school

- deaths or injuries on school journeys, trips or residential trips
- tragedies involving children from many schools at public events such as theatre visits
- refugee children joining a school, uprooted from their countries and perhaps shocked by wars or atrocities

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- abductions/ disappearances
- Incidents involving the murder of school children that attract the attention of national and international media over prolonged periods
- a civil disturbance or act of terrorism
- a disaster in the community
- a transport accident involving school members.

The emotional effects of disasters on children are not always immediately obvious to parents/ carers or school staff. Indeed, at times children find it difficult to confide their distress to adults as they know that it will upset them. In some children the distress can last for months, even years, and may additionally affect their academic attainment.

Some young people may not feel comfortable enough or be able to share their feelings and thoughts in public or with staff either because they are unable to do so or because they fear their confidence may be abused. Similarly, because many adults are not able to talk about death, bereavement and tragedy, they may unwittingly stop children talking about similar emotional experiences.

We take all children's needs seriously, including emotional and psychological and are committed to ensuring all children receive the help they require to explore such matters as death and significant harm or injury in an environment of trust, care and safety. We also recognise the impact such incidents can have on the well-being of staff and parents/ carers and will do our utmost to support any recovery needed and to work with any agencies required.

Crisis management and recovery processes involve personal support, crisis intervention and a whole range of practical assistance.

## The Critical Incident Plan and School Emergency Management Team

The Headteacher is responsible for organising a response to a critical incident. The Critical Incident Plan will name the additional people who will assume key roles (School Emergency Management Team), and the information and procedures that will need to be in place, as well as the communication framework required to handle any contingency and the support structures for staff.

The School Emergency Management Team has responsibility for ensuring that procedures are properly addressed at times of high emotion and that if the Headteacher is the subject of the incident then the response mechanism should proceed effectively. If the incident subsequently involves legal action, a precise response to the incident should be known and be able to be verified by more than one person.

## Preventative and precautionary measures

While 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.

We expect that:

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- Staff and pupils should be familiar with school routines for fire and evacuation of the building and procedures for a 'lock down' if required
- Staff will be familiar with the routines for dealing with emergencies
- Staff organising school trips will follow guidelines and complete a risk assessment to be signed off by the Headteacher
- Staff will sign in and out of the premises using the sign-in boards in the foyer and will sign groups of children out using the clipboards at the school office
- Staff are aware of pupils with medical needs or health problems
- Staff are aware that they should assess associated risks to children before carrying out a curriculum or other activity
- Staff are aware that they are responsible for assessing risks to themselves before undertaking an activity.

In the event of a critical incident the priorities of those adults in charge of the school or trip will be to:

- Save life
- Minimise personal injury
- Safeguard the interests of all pupils and staff
- Minimise loss and to return to normal working as quickly as possible

## Planning for an emergency

It is important that the school knows which people can be contacted immediately following an incident, what information is available and where this stored. Therefore, the School Emergency Management Team will:

- Issue all Senior Leadership Team staff with a Critical Incident Plan
- Display a flow chart and contact telephone numbers in the staff room and school office
- Review the Critical Incident Plan at a staff meeting during the first term of each school year (or when required in response to known threats)

The School Emergency Management Team will comprise the Headteacher, Deputy Headteacher, School Business Manager, Chair of Governors and the Site Manager.

Others may be co-opted as necessary in light of the nature of the emergency and the availability of the people and personal involvement of those concerned. All other staff, including non-teaching and temporary staff, should be notified as soon as practicably possible (depending on the nature of the emergency).

The Headteacher's Office should be used as the central liaison point for all incidents. However, if this is not available, an alternative area will be identified e.g. the Deputy Headteacher's Office.

In the first instance, it may be appropriate to use dedicated mobile phones to separate in-coming and outgoing calls.

## Information to be available on and off site

The following information will be held in school and accessible to members of the School Emergency Management Team.

- Telephone numbers of all members of staff (SIMS)
- Names of key holders (Critical Incident Plan)
- Pupil contact information (SIMS and ParentMail)
- Details of names, location and contact details relating to all pupils and staff off site at any time, e.g. school outings, etc.
- Significant medical information relating to pupils and staff off site on school outings at any time (SIMS and Medical File)
- Telephone numbers of all Governors (Chair, Vice and Health & Safety Governor are in Critical Incident Plan. Chair holds all other phone numbers)
- Contact list of all people, groups or organisations who visit or use the school and would need to be informed (Groups to be identified from on-line diary)
- Contact list of people and groups used by the school, e.g. suppliers, contractors (Critical Incident Plan)
- School's Bank details, e.g. account number and sort code (via LBM Finance and Critical Incident Plan)
- Back-up disks for all accounts (c/o MMICT)
- Keys to school safe (Office Staff)
- Premises and site plan of the school, including critical locations (Grab Bag)
- Gas, electric and water mains control positions (Grab Bag)
- Computer based copy of policies etc. (MyUSO)

## Responding to an emergency

Initial responses should be to:

- Obtain accurate information relating to the incident
- Contact the Headteacher and all members of the School Emergency Management Team
- Assess that all children and staff are safe – during a major incident the safety of all is paramount
- Build a profile of the incident, e.g. who is most affected by the incident and how it may have affected them
- Check to establish whether any individual or group needs immediate attention
- Assess immediate practical needs
- Ensure all staff have an emergency number (e.g. Mobile) to contact Headteacher if required

The incident will be reported to the LA and Diocese by phone. These phone numbers are to be held by the School Emergency Management Team at home and at school and in the school office.

The Priory C of E School has been identified as a place of evacuation and/ or to manage the incident in the initial hours if required.

The LA and Diocese should provide full support to enable the incident to be managed as effectively as possible. This could include making arrangements for:

- Communication with all relevant LA / Diocesan individuals and relevant groups
- Emergency accommodation
- Additional teaching resources
- Additional staffing
- Transport
- Specialist advice
- The dissemination of information

## Communications

Those dealing with in-coming calls should record who has phoned so the school knows who else needs to be contacted and provide an agreed factual statement together with re-assurance of action being taken at the incident site.

A separate dedicated line will be needed for out-going calls; this might be a mobile phone or line that cannot take in-coming calls. It is important to remember that mobile phones are not necessarily secure and that caution about what is said should therefore be exercised at all times.

## Contacting families directly affected

The school should contact families directly affected quickly and sensitively. Consistency of information is vital, so use of a chain of communication should be avoided wherever possible.

If parents cannot be contacted, staff should leave a message with a relative, friend or neighbour identified in the pupil's record. If parents are to be invited to a venue to meet school or LA staff, the venue should be secure and the location not made known to the media.

## Responding to calls from relatives

The School Emergency Management Team will agree which members of staff will be delegated/ permitted to talk to relatives.

These members of staff should:

- Use language and tone that alleviates anxiety
- Anticipate questions relevant to the incident, e.g. 'Did my child witness the incident?' and be prepared to answer them

## Information for staff

It is vital that all adults in contact with children and young people are kept well informed and feel secure in handling questions and comments. A schedule for updating them will be arranged, e.g. breaks, at the end of the school day or first thing in the morning in order to ensure that knowledge is common and questions are answered.

Staff will be cautioned against talking to the media or responding to questions from reporters.

## Informing pupils about the incident

Staff may need to be given advice and guidance on what the pupils should be told and how. Some information may be given in whole school assemblies and then discussed in class. Other types of information may best be disseminated in small groups by the staff closest to the pupils.

All information given should be tailored to cognitive and emotional levels of the children. Pupils will be given all the time they need to ask questions or talk about the incident to have their worries allayed.

Families should be informed about the amount of information their children have been given as they will not be able to relay this information themselves.

## Contacting families and others not directly affected

The families of those not directly affected by the incident will normally be informed by ParentMail message, however, in other cases, it may be more appropriate to call an early meeting at the school. The School Emergency Management Team will make a decision based on the nature of the incident whether a letter is sent immediately or if it would be better to be delayed until all facts are known.

A prepared verbal or written statement will be used to provide necessary facts, expressions of sympathy and concern and possibly a message for the community. Staff will bear in mind that a letter can be passed on to the media.

The school will seek guidance from the LA/ Diocese before issuing any form of written statements wherever practicably possible.

## Working with the media

Once an incident has been reported to the LA, the Press Office will contact the school as a matter of high priority to provide advice. The School Emergency Management Team will agree who is and is not permitted to speak to the media on behalf of the school (in most cases this will only be the Headteacher). Anyone talking to the press should have a colleague present to take notes and record what is said.

Staff should remember that there are no 'off the record' conversations and that all contact with the press should be treated with caution.

## Post incident support

It is easy for the emotions and stresses experienced by the person managing the incident to be overlooked. It is important that those managing the incident also take care of themselves and that someone takes on responsibility for ensuring this element is not forgotten.

It is important to acknowledge the emotional state of all the people involved – staff, pupils and parents. It must be recognised that, depending on the nature of the emergency, not all staff may feel able to support others or the pupils and that a burden of support may, therefore, fall on a disproportionately small number of staff. It is important that this is openly acknowledged.

The school will seek to recognise that a critical incident could have an impact on emotionally vulnerable children and affect their behaviour or emotional state and be prepared to offer them support from appropriate professionals within or outside school.

Staff closely involved in the incident in any way should be offered opportunities for debriefing and counselling, informally or through a more formal structure.

The leadership team will seek to remember that there may be long term effects on some people and staff or pupils may need to be offered professional therapeutic help.

The school may designate areas for parents and others to meet so that support can be given but privacy maintained.

## Formal and informal recognition and rituals

Where applicable, the School Emergency Management Team will make arrangements to express sympathy to the families directly affected. Injured children may be visited in hospital and pupils may be encouraged to send cards and letters.

Staff and pupils may attend funerals if they are sure of being welcome. The school may be closed in recognition of funerals. Special assemblies and in-school memorial services may also be held.

## Significant damage to the school premises

If the school building is not safe to be used as a place of learning, the Headteacher will contact the Local Authority and Diocese for guidance in the hope that alternative arrangements can be made quickly. Parents will be informed that the school has been closed at the earliest opportunity so that appropriate childcare can be secured. Information regarding the closure of the school will be through ParentMail email and SMS message, an alert on the website Home Page (banner) and through the LGfL 'opencheck' software.

The school will not reopen until all health and safety regulations have been met.

## Multiple staff absence

There may be an occasion when there is multiple staff absence due to a severe virus, through other illnesses or through the impact of off-site accidents in which several members of the staff have been hurt. If there is insufficient staff to open the school parents will be informed as soon as possible.

Guidance will be sought from the Local Authority as to whether there is any possibility of staff from neighbouring or other schools could be brought in at short notice to enable learning to continue in school. All possibilities will be looked into to ensure the school functions as normally as possible and as soon as possible.

## Implications for the curriculum

We believe that the subject of death and how to deal with death should not be left for when a critical incident happens in school. Most children will have experienced death in some way, whether this is the demise of a loved family member or a family pet. Death should be seen as a natural part of our life cycle and needs to be discussed sensitively through the PHSE curriculum we deliver. Staff will receive training in areas such as loss, change and bereavement.

## Data security

We follow Local Authority guidance regarding the safe keeping of the schools' data. Information is backed up by the school's ICT provider MM-ICT nightly.