



# CRITICAL INCIDENT POLICY

**Date of Last Review:** February 2016

**Date of Next Review:** February 2019 (or after major incident)

**Responsibility:** Mrs C. Whiting

**Advisory Body Signature:**

## Rationale

It is not known when a school will experience a crisis or tragedy. Whatever the size of the incident, the distress caused to one or more individuals can be devastating. The forward planning identified below is designed to help the school deal with any such event and, therefore to reduce the stress experienced by pupils, staff and parents.

It is impossible to predict when a crisis begins. There will be either one devastating event or there is an initial phase when it is patent that something has gone badly wrong.

The initial phase is often characterised by disorder and confusion, together with incomplete and/or inaccurate information.

Try to establish the facts ASAP.

If a statement has to be made before all the facts are clearly established, make this clear. Do not speculate or make guesses. If you do not know the answer to a question, say so; detail can be made available later.

Do not attempt to 'understand' the incident. This takes time and will only become clear (if at all) with time.

Bring together a crisis management team.

Ensure that whoever leads the team is relieved of all other responsibilities and is located in one place where they can be contacted and can contact others (in an office with a telephone). A mobile phone is handy if other lines are jammed.

Find out quickly who needs what; information, facilities, practical help, etc.

There may be the need to decide:

- If the school should be evacuated or closed temporarily.
- When will it re-open and to who.
- Which rooms might be needed for emergency use, for isolation purposes, etc.
- Which support services will be needed.
- Which telephones can be made available and who will staff them.
- What letters will have to be written and to whom.
- Will a press statement be needed; who will help draft it and approve it etc.

All relevant personnel should be given relevant information.

## The Contingency Plan

Any number of events could result in a crisis or tragedy. Such events might include:

- Death of a pupil or member of staff
- Serious violence or assault in school or on a school visit/journey
- Destruction of part or all of the school
- Pupil or teacher being taken hostage

- Road, sea, air or traffic accident involving pupils or staff.
- A disaster in the community
- Civil disturbance or act of terrorism

### **Lock Down Procedures**

In the event of an intruder on site who is believed to be causing a threat to the safety of staff and students, a lockdown procedure should be applied.

A whole school tannoy announcement of 'Code 1'.

On hearing this announcement, the following must be observed by all staff immediately:

- Close all windows and doors
- Lock up
- Out of sight and minimise movement
- Stay silent and avoid drawing attention
- Endure – be aware you may be in lockdown for some time

The School Receptionist should move into the Heads PA office, lock the door and call the police.

The Site team should lock all external doors where possible without putting themselves at risk.

Individual teachers and teaching assistants should lock classroom doors and windows.

The nearest adult should check and lock the entrance/exit doors

### **Communication about the event is vital**

The names of all pupils and staff, together with destination, contact names, telephone numbers etc, on a school trip must be left with the designated person and a spare copy left with the School Administration Officer.

All emergency contact numbers must be kept up to date. The school office staff should endeavour to complete a termly check on names, addresses, telephone numbers etc. in the school registers and on the school database.

The Head teacher **MUST** be contacted immediately a crisis occurs.

In the event of a tragedy, there will be kept a separate log of calls relating to the event so there is certainty as to who has been contacted and who remains to be contacted.

Parents of pupils involved should be contacted immediately and appropriately. This may be by telephone or personally, depending on the event and the circumstances. The Head Teacher or Deputy Head Teacher will determine who is responsible for this task depending on the circumstances.

It may be appropriate to offer the parent immediate support, e.g. help with transport to the school, hospital, site of accident, etc.

Children involved in a crisis should be re-united with their parents/guardians as soon as possible. It may be necessary to share with parents the circumstances and location of the accident so that child and parent can discuss the matter later as party of `counselling`

Ensure that parents or pupils who are distressed are not left alone. Help them to contact relatives, friends and ensure that they have a school contact in case they need further information.

It may be appropriate to write to all parents explaining that the school community has suffered a tragedy and that their child may become upset.

In all cases there must be consistency of information given.

Parents should be advised as to what professional help is available e.g. Counselling

If the school is to close this should be communicated to parents in writing.

### **Dealing with the press**

There will be media interest. Media management will be a key element of the management of the whole incident. Only one person should speak on behalf of the school.

- Working with the media makes sense; working against them is often damaging.
- Stick to the facts
- Avoid saying anything that can be turned into a sensational headline
- Do not deny your emotions but avoid becoming emotional
- Avoid having to answer questions that draw your own opinion, etc.
- Use local media first to communicate with your immediate audience.
- The Head Teacher or designated person(s) will deal with the press.
- The press should not be permitted direct access to staff or pupils
- The press should be issued with a prepared press statement
- The privacy of staff, pupils and families should be protected at all times.

Once the immediate trauma has been managed, there follows a middle period of dealing with a trauma.

This manifests itself by reacting to what is known and trying to come to terms with it once the wider implications are becoming clearer.

People will want to know what happened, why it happened, and what the implications are for the immediate and distant future.

There will be differing needs for flow of information. Part of the effective management of a critical incident involves trying to prevent uncertainty, doubt and speculation from developing. This means good, clear, regular communication with all the various audiences, offering an explanation of what has happened (not why it has happened is preferable).

It is not unusual for rumours to start in a school and to spread outside quickly. Regular statements should be given to pupils and then to parents, press, etc.

It is often easier to say the wrong thing rather than the right thing. Therefore:

- Do not speculate
- Do not blame
- Do not bewail what might have been
- Do not treat peoples reactions to critical incidents superficially

Try to keep everyone aware of what is being done, what is planned to be done and when things are going to happen. Straightforward information simply conveyed and honestly expressed can provide great reassurance as it often conveys that somebody is in charge and things are not chaotic.

Do not let anybody come into the school, or have access to pupils unless and until you are sure what they propose to do, with whom, when and how. You also need to be satisfied that their contribution will help.

Remember there are no `right` or `wrong` ways of reacting to a crisis. A whole range of emotions will be felt by those affected and often those most seriously affected will adopt a position of quiet.

People will need time and perhaps skilled help to talk about what has happened, to articulate their feelings and to begin to come to terms with the incident. Crisis counselling teams are important.

A Critical incident can never be quickly forgotten. People should never be told to `pull themselves together` or to `get on with their lives`. It is OK to cry and to let out emotion.

Counselling and the opportunity to talk are best done in small, discrete groups, with those that people know and are comfortable with.

### **Dealing with Staff**

- If necessary, the Head Teacher will appoint a small team to deal with the crisis in the short term and, if appropriate, that team shall be relieved of teaching duties in order to allow them to undertake any work necessary.
- All staff should be informed of the incident ASAP at a specially convened staff meeting.

- Staff involved may need support in dealing with their emotions. Peer support and access to professional counselling may be needed.
- The Professional Associations have access to information and contacts ref. support and counselling.

### **Dealing with Pupils**

Pupils should be brought together in small groups (i.e. form groups) to be told simply and factually what has happened. They must have the opportunity to ask questions and receive honest, simple, straightforward answers. When a question cannot be answered this should be acknowledged.

Local religious or community leaders should be informed and, where appropriate, a memorial service arranged.

Pupils should not be dissuaded from discussing the incident but after an agreed time pupils should be directed to a `counsellor` rather than continue to perpetuate the tragic circumstances.

If a pupil appears to suffer PTSD they should be referred to a professional counsellor.

We should be mindful of those returning to school after a trauma and show them due consideration.

### **Informing Others**

The Chair of The Trust and LEA representatives should be informed as soon as possible and their assistance requested as appropriate.

### **Attendance at Funerals**

It should be remembered that different cultures have different burial rites.

Pupils who are invited to attend a funeral should have parental permission and should be briefed before attending.

In the long term, newly appointed staff should be briefed as to the vulnerability of those who have experienced or are affected by a trauma. Pupils so affected should be placed on the SEN register temporarily.

It may be appropriate to mark the anniversary of such an event and this should be planned to be as sensitive as possible, planned with the parents, pupils and staff who were involved.

Legal action and boards of enquiry may be involved and those personnel involved should be given support during this process.

## Useful Contacts

Director of Education  
Police  
Senior Educational Psychologist  
EWO  
Principal Education Social Worker  
General Hospital  
Local Newspaper  
Chair of The Trust  
Deputy Chair of The Trust  
Head Teacher  
Deputy Head Teacher  
Business Manager  
Office Manager

### **Bringing the incident to an end**

No traumatic incident can ever be over quickly, although the way in which it is managed will affect the amount of time that it takes those involved to come to terms with what has happened.

Initial reaction and response to a critical incident and the way it is managed can have, not only a profound effect, but also have massive implications for what happens later.

Everybody will need to move on including the school. Journalists need to know or be told when the story is exhausted and that there is nothing else to report.

Pupils, parents and teachers need to know when they can start to look ahead again. But this needs to be done with great sensitivity. There are no easy solutions or rules. A lot will depend on the nature of the incident as well as how it is managed.

It is important that the institution and those that work within it are assured that those most profoundly affected by the trauma will not be forgotten or disavowed and that, if there have been any deaths, those who have lost their lives will continue to be honoured and kept in the schools mind.

### **Finally:**

It is easy for those who are managing the critical incident to look after everybody else's interest and to forget to look after themselves.

Allow time to talk about your emotions to professional counsellors or close friends.

Normality will return but it may take a very long time.