

# St Patrick's Primary School and Nursery Unit Loughguile

## Critical Incidents Policy Safeguarding Procedures



Policy reviewed and updated: May/ June 2023

Ratified by Governors: June 2023

Chair of Board of Governors: Mr John Devlin

Date of Review: May / June 2025  
(every 2 years)

# St Patrick's Primary School and Nursery Unit

## Safeguarding Procedures

### Critical Incidents Policy

#### BACKGROUND

Handling crises and dealing with difficult 'incidents' on a daily basis is viewed by some as a normal aspect of school life. However, there are occasions when schools will experience incidents of a significantly more extreme nature. What seems to distinguish these incidents is their nature and scale. Such occurrences will be referred to as '**critical incidents**'.

Critical incidents can be defined as:

**'Unexpected occurrences which may, suddenly, have a major impact on school'.**

In order to capture the *relative nature* of some critical incidents, Gibson (1999) would suggest that an incident could be described in critical terms when it:-

**'Overwhelms or overcomes the normal coping strategies and strengths of those involved'.**

It is also important to note that this approach, which views critical incidents as situations or crises that are beyond the everyday experiences of school life, contains an implied understanding that these incidents would be markedly distressing to a significant number of adults and children.

#### 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 the 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 and pupils 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 EA guidelines
- All staff are aware of pupils with medical needs or health problems
- All staff are aware of school procedures in dealing with violence at work
- All staff are aware that they should assess associated risks to children before carrying out a curriculum or other activity
- All staff are aware that they are responsible for assessing risks to themselves before undertaking an activity
- EA Health and Safety procedures should be observed at all times. If necessary, advice from the Building Supervisor should be sought

## **MAJOR INCIDENTS**

A major incident may be defined as:

- An accident leading to a 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
- Any situation in which the national press or media might be involved

As such, major incidents include:

- Arson attacks on schools
- Major fires at a school
- Significant vandalism or destruction in school
- Pupil suicides and sudden deaths
- Violent attacks on pupils and staff members
- The sudden death, in tragic circumstances of members of staff or their close family member
- Incident involving an intruder, believed to be armed, on school premises

- Road traffic accidents, involving fatalities within a school community
- Abductions / disappearances
- Allegations or actual incidents of abuse against pupils or staff
- The murder of school children: National/International media over prolonged periods
- Floods
- School use in a community emergency situation
- 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
- A hostage taking
- A transport accident involving school members
- A disaster in the community
- A civil disturbance or terrorism

### **PRIORITIES**

In the event of such critical incidents, the priorities of those adults in charge of the school or trip at the time must be to:

1. Save life
2. Minimise personal injury
3. Safeguard the interests of pupils and staff
4. Minimise loss and to return to normal working as quickly as possible

**Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT)** will comprise the following people:

<b>Principal:</b>	Mrs Margaret Hanna
<b>Vice-Principal</b>	Mrs Mairead McErlean
<b>Designated Teacher</b>	Mrs Mairead McErlean
<b>Chair of Governors</b>	Mr John Devlin
<b>Pastoral Support</b>	Father Mulholland ( Ministerial Representative: Board of Governors)

## **Critical Incident Policy**

To be reviewed every **two years** by the Board of Governors, Principal and Leadership Team.

### **SCHOOL RESPONSE**

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**

*This is the first level of response within the first minutes and 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 **Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT)** - 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. Set up an incident management room and accessible phone line - to deal with calls from anxious parents etc. CIMT should agree a factual statement and 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.
6. Make arrangements to inform other parents -take advice from 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 is outside the school. Mostly children will need to be brought home, but sometimes parents and families need to visit the scene of the incident to understand how they deal with repercussions in terms of children's fears etc.
2. Managing staff - support needs organising for all staff, preferably from within the school, but using outside agencies if appropriate. Staff monitoring should be a priority, even members of the CIMT. If a crisis persists over many hours staff become tired, weary and upset and this affects their powers to make sensible decisions.
3. 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 e.g., training in bereavement counselling for staff, provision of a range of books, PDMU discussions etc.

4. 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 from outside the school community, should lead this meeting.

5. Formal and informal recognition of rituals - it is important to remember to express sympathy to families of the hurt or bereaved. Consider 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.
6. 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 or 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 Support Service. Support and guidance, especially to help those showing unusual or prolonged reaction to the incident, may be needed.

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. CIMT especially will not be immune to reaction from their ordeal.

### **LONG TERM ACTION**

#### **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.*

- Marking anniversaries - these difficult times need to be treated with sensitivity. Some suggestions for schools to mark anniversaries are by annual concerts, memorial services, memorial prize giving ceremonies, memorial gardens etc.
- Legal processes - the length of time taken over some legal processes can prolong the recovery process following a critical incident. CIMT may need to plan for this especially where staff may be involved attending legal processes, and facing extended emotional trauma
- Curriculum implications - it may be appropriate to schedule school-based training for staff in loss. This may involve counselling, bereavement support etc.



## ACTION CARD 1:

School guidance for a major incident.

# IN SCHOOL

1. **Q**UICKLY OBTAIN THE FACTS OF THE SITUATION
2. **C**ALL THE EMERGENCY SERVICES: **DIAL '9'** FOR OUTSIDE LINE  
THEN **DIAL '999' OR '112'**
3. **C**ONSIDER FULL / PARTIAL EVACUATION OF THE SCHOOL
4. **C**ONSIDER RELOCATION TO OTHER PREMISES
5. **P**REPARE FOR THE ARRIVAL OF THE EMERGENCY SERVICES
6. **G**ATHER AND RETAIN ANY EQUIPMENT / WITNESS STATEMENTS
7. **I**NFORM THE **EA**, SEEK ADVICE
8. **I**NFORM REST OF SCHOOL STAFF AND CHILDREN AS APPROPRIATE
9. **C**ONTACT CHAIR OF GOVERNORS
10. **C**ARE FOR RELATIVES ARRIVING AT SCHOOL
11. **P**REPARE TO DEAL WITH THE MEDIA
12. **K**EEP OTHERS INFORMED OF SITUATION
13. **C**OMPLETE **ALL ACCIDENT FORMS / RELEVANT RECORDS**

## ACTION CARD 2:

School guidance for a major incident

# OUT OF SCHOOL

1. **ADMINISTER FIRST AID WHERE POSSIBLE**
2. **CALL THE EMERGENCY SERVICES USING '999' OR '112'**
3. **ESTABLISH A CONTACT POINT WITH THE EMERGENCY SERVICES**
4. **ALLOCATE RESPONSIBILITY TO ENSURE OTHER PUPILS ARE SAFE**
5. **TRAVEL WITH CASUALTIES TO HOSPITAL**
6. **INFORM SCHOOL PRINCIPAL: PROVIDE REGULAR UPDATES**
7. **COMPLETE ALL ACCIDENT FORMS / RELEVANT RECORDS**

