



**St Mary's Primary School Maghery**

**Critical Incident Policy and Plan**

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## **Introduction**

St. Mary's Primary School Maghery aims to protect the well-being of its pupils and staff by providing a safe and nurturing environment at all times.

The Governors and staff of St. Mary's recognise a critical incident to be "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". Critical incidents may involve one or more pupils or staff members, or members of our local community.

### **Types of incidents might include:**

- The death of a member of the school community
- An intrusion into the school
- An accident involving members of the school community
- An accident/tragedy in the wider community
- Serious damage to the school building through fire, flood, vandalism, etc
- The disappearance of a member of the school community.

## **Aim**

The aim of this Critical Incident Plan is to help school management and staff to react quickly and effectively in the event of an incident, to enable us to maintain a sense of control and to ensure that appropriate support is offered to pupils and staff. Having a good plan should also help ensure that the effects on the pupils and staff will be limited. It should enable us to return to normality as soon as possible.

## **Creation of a coping supportive and caring ethos in the school**

Our curriculum and pastoral care arrangements aim to help and support both staff and pupils, thus preparing them to cope with a range of life events. These include measures to address both the physical and emotional needs of the school community.

### **Physical Needs**

- Evacuation plan formulated
- Regular fire drills occur
- Fire exits and extinguishers are regularly checked
- Public access gates are locked during school hours (9.15-3.15)
- School access gates are security locked during class time
- Rules of the playground are agreed and known by the school community

### **Emotional Needs**

The Governors and staff of St Mary's Maghery aim to use available programmes and resources to address the personal and social development of pupils, to enhance a sense of safety and security in the school and to provide opportunities for reflection and discussion. Further details can be found within other relevant policies such as Pastoral Care, Child Protection and Anti-bullying.

- Consultation has taken place with the whole school community as the Policy and Plan have been developed
- Staff are familiar with the Child Protection Guidelines and Procedures and details of how to proceed with suspicions or disclosures
- Books, website links and resources on difficulties affecting the primary school pupil are available
- Emotional health and well-being is an integral part of the school curriculum
- The school may use a range of external agencies for support

- Inputs to pupils by external providers are carefully considered in the light of criteria about pupil safety, the appropriateness of the content, and the expertise of the providers.
- The school has a clear policy on anti-bullying and deals with bullying in accordance with this policy.
- There is a comprehensive Pastoral Care System in place in the school.
- Pupils who are identified as being at risk are referred to the designated staff member, concerns are explored, and the appropriate level of assistance and support is provided. Parents are informed, and where appropriate, a referral is made to an appropriate agency.
- Members of staff are informed about how to access support for themselves.

## **Critical Incident Management Team**

A Critical Incident Management Team has been established in line with best practice. Members bring a wealth of experience and expertise to the team and were selected on a voluntary basis and will retain their roles for at least one school year. The members of the team will meet every two years and after an incident to review and, if necessary, update the policy and plan. The Pastoral Care folder contains a copy of the policy to be used in the event of an incident.

### **Preparation of Critical Incident Management Team**

#### **Roles**

##### **The key roles covered are as follows:**

- Team Leader— Miss R Robinson (Team Leader) and School Principal
- PSNI liaison — Miss R Robinson
- Staff liaison — Mrs S Copeland (First Aider and Designated Child Protection Officer)
- Pupil liaison — Mrs S Copeland
- Parent liaison — Miss R Robinson/Mr S Murray
- Community liaison — Fr Garret Campbell
- Media liaison — Miss R Robinson / Mr J McKee(Chairperson of BOG)
- Administrator — Mrs L Cushnahan and/or Miss R Robinson (school/afterschool hours)

##### **For key responsibilities of each role see appendix 1**

## **Record keeping**

In the event of an incident each member of the team will keep records of phone calls made and received, letters sent and received, meetings held, persons met, interventions used, material used etc.

Miss Robinson will have a key role in receiving and logging telephone calls, sending letters/emails etc.

## **Confidentiality**

The management and staff of St. Mary's Maghery have a responsibility to protect the privacy and good name of the people involved in any incident and will be sensitive to the consequences of any public statements.

## **Critical incident rooms**

In the event of a critical incident the following rooms will be used:

- The staff room to meet staff
- PI/2 classroom- for meetings with pupils
- Canteen (if required: after school hours) - for parents
- the Principal's office for media (if required) ■
- the Staff Room and/or Principal's Office for other visitors
- Incident Rooms to be reviewed in light of school development

## **Implementing the Critical Incident Management Plan**

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, Council for Catholic Maintained Schools, the education and library board's Critical Incident Response Team and other relevant agencies who may have a role in providing support.

When implementing a Critical Incident Management Plan there are a number of immediate key tasks that need to be undertaken. The nature of the incident will determine an appropriate order for these tasks. The following checklist can be adapted for different types of critical incidents.

The key tasks will include:

- responding to any inevitable risk or threat e.g. evacuation or first aid;
- notifying the emergency services/other relevant authorities and agreed parties;

- mobilising the Critical Incident Management Team;
- agreeing the school routine for that day;
- informing staff;
- establishing a dedicated, telephone line;
- setting-up recovery/designated room;
- informing pupils and parents;
- preparing/adapting a media statement; and
- assessing initial impact of the critical incident on staff and pupils.

Further guidance and resources can be obtained from *Every School a Good School*;

*A Guide to Managing Critical Incidents in Schools*

<https://www.educationni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/de/guide-to-managing-critical-incidents-inschools.pdf>

The Education Authority has a critical incident response team who can be contacted to provide support to schools.

Critical Incident Line: 028 3751 2515

## **Briefing Sessions for Staff**

It is essential that staff receive factual information on what has occurred, how the incident will be handled and how they can contribute to the school's response. A formal staff briefing should take place as soon as possible after the circumstances of the incident are known with a time set for formal debriefing at the end of the school day(s). Absent teachers should also be briefed on the situation.

This information should be given by the Principal or Team Leader. Staff should be kept updated on developments during the course of the day and this can be done during morning breaks and/or lunchtime using the staff room.

### **The initial briefing should:**

- 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.

## **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 Principal 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.

## **Breaking the News to Pupils**

It is important to inform pupils of a critical incident as soon as possible. Delaying a formal announcement may make the situation worse, as rumour can add another aspect to handling the critical incident and pupils may feel that a delay shows a lack of concern or sensitivity by the school staff and could undermine the credibility of information given later.

Consideration should be given to the range of different groups among the pupils and how they are to be informed. Very young children and those with special educational needs must be informed in a way which is appropriate, using language and methods of communication already familiar to them.

To reduce the potential for creating a highly charged emotional atmosphere schools should consider informing pupils in small groups, for example, siblings, close friends, class group, and 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 best person to communicate this difficult news will normally be the class teacher. Staff should be able to decline these tasks if they feel unable to do it.

## **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.

**Monitoring and Review**

**The Principal and Board of Governors (in consultation with staff) will monitor this policy and its effectiveness regularly and it will be reviewed and revised as necessary.**

**Signed:** \_\_\_\_\_ (Chair of the BOG)

**Signed:** \_\_\_\_\_ (School Principal)

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_



## **Appendix 1: Key Responsibilities of Critical Incident Team Members**

### **Team leader**

Usually the Principal  
Alerts the team members to the crisis and convenes a meeting  
Coordinates the tasks of the team  
Liaises with the Board of Governors  
Liaises with the bereaved family

In the absence of the team leader, Mrs S Copeland will assume the lead.

### **PSNI liaison**

Liaises with the PSNI  
Ensures that information about deaths or other developments is checked out for accuracy before being shared

### **Staff liaison**

Leads briefing meetings for staff on the facts as known, gives staff members an opportunity to express their feelings and ask questions, outlines the routine for the day  
Advises staff on the procedures for identification of vulnerable pupils  
Refers staff to materials from their critical incident folders  
Keeps staff updated as the day progresses  
Is alert to vulnerable staff members and makes contact with them individually  
Advises them of the availability of Staff Care Services and gives them the contact number.

### **Pupil liaison**

Alerts other staff to vulnerable pupils (appropriately)  
Provides materials for pupils (from their critical incident folder)  
Keeps records of pupils seen by external agency staff  
Looks after setting up and supervision of 'quiet' room were agreed

### **Community/agency liaison**

Maintains up to date lists of relevant contact numbers such as emergency support services and other external contacts and resources  
Liaises with agencies in the community for support and onward referral  
Coordinates the involvement of agencies  
Reminds agency staff to wear name/visitor badges  
Updates team members on the involvement of external agencies

### **Parent liaison**

Arranges parent meetings, if held  
May facilitate such meetings, and manage 'questions and answers'  
Ensures that sample letters are typed up, on the school's system and ready for adaptation  
Sets up room for meetings with parents  
Maintains a record of parents seen  
Meets with individual parents  
Provides appropriate materials for parents (from their critical incident folder)

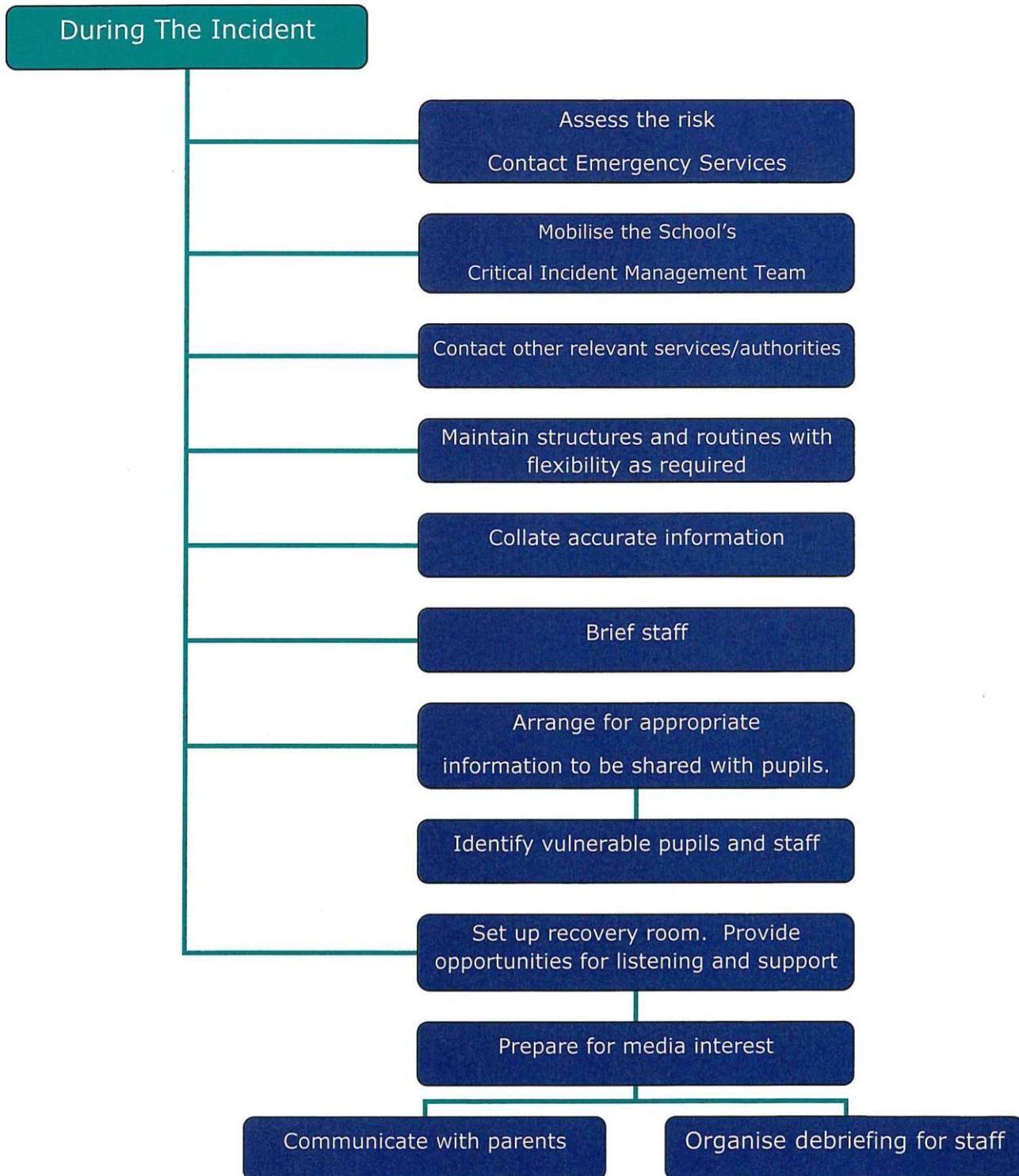
### **Media liaison**

Will draw up a press statement, give media briefings and interviews (as agreed by school management), Will consult Communications Officer EA.  
Where appropriate, may liaise with the EA/CCMS Legal Services and relevant teacher unions.

### **Administrator**

Maintains up to date telephone numbers of Parents/Guardians/Teachers/Emergency services  
Takes telephone calls and notes those that need to be responded to  
Ensures that templates are on the school's system in advance and ready for adaptation  
Prepares and sends out letters, emails and faxes  
Photocopies materials needed  
Maintains records of all correspondence

**Appendix 2 Immediate Actions for Schools Following a Critical Incident Flowchart**



1	Assess the risk and take necessary action (e.g. school evacuation/first aid/contact emergency services)
2.	Gather factual information regarding the incident Details of person/people involved Confirmation of facts from the source -family, Police, hospital
3.	Initiate the use of the DE Critical Incident Management Guide Records
4.	Mobilise the School's Critical Incident Management Team
5.	Allocate tasks to School's Critical Incident Management Team/SMT Identify a school Critical Incident Coordinator (Miss R Robinson or Mrs S Copeland) Contact the parents of pupils directly involved in the incident Inform relevant key people and seek support as appropriate e.g. staff, BOG, ELB Critical Incident Team, CCMS, Local Clergy etc (see example of telephone tree below) Establish a central information point Set up dedicated phone line Calls and enquiries logged (see example of telephone log below) School visitors logged (see example of visitor log below) Contact impacted family/s to determine their wishes regarding public announcements and staff/pupil briefings Contact with the media (support available from EA Communications Officer)
6.	Arrange staff briefing (when incident is confirmed) Provide clear factual information and agree pupil briefing content Advise staff on how to inform and support pupils (in form groups/classes/small groups) Team working and practical arrangements e.g. cover, flexible timetabling, recovery rooms etc Identify vulnerable staff Remind staff regarding confidentiality - media contact and guidelines
7.	Inform pupils and parents (when incident is confirmed) with accurate and agreed statement; Use clear language Provide age appropriate factual information Dispel rumours Offer support Identify vulnerable pupils
8.	Maintain normal structures and routines with flexibility
9.	Set up a warm, quiet and equipped recovery rooms with drinks, tissues, comfortable chairs etc.