

Critical Incidents Policy

Policy Review	October 2026	
Ratification of Policy by School Governors	October 2026	
Next Review Date	October 2029	

Critical Incident Policy

IMPORTANT

Throughout this document there are references added as appendices which can be accessed in the link below

A guide to managing critical incidents in schools PDF (1.3 MB)

These appendices offer formats and suggestions for e.g. day by day recording an event, pastoral reports, press statements, debriefing etc

The complete document is stored in hard copy in the principal's office alongside up to date contact numbers which may be required

Fort Hill Integrated Primary School

Rationale

Fort Hill Integrated Primary School constantly seeks to provide a safe and secure environment for all members of our school community.

However, it is recognised that there is always the potential for a set of circumstances to impact upon the life and well-being of students and staff over which it will have no direct control. In severe circumstances, such events are known as critical incidents.

A critical incident may be defined as any sudden and unexpected incident or sequence of events which causes trauma within a school community, and which overwhelms the normal coping mechanisms of the school. 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. An incident might be designated as critical where the result is likely to be serious disruption to the running of the school, or where there is likely to be significant public and/or media attention on the school. (Ref. Appendix 1)

Aims

- To maintain a duty of care
- To provide all appropriate and essential support for staff and pupils in the event of a critical incident occurring involving the Fort Hill community.
- To minimise educational and administrative disruption within our school
- To return to normal life as soon as reasonably possible.
- To arrange any long-term support necessary for either students or staff in the aftermath of a critical incident. (This support will be directed by the Critical Incident Management Team alongside advice from EA).
  (Appendix 2)

Objectives

- To ensure that swift and appropriate action is taken in the case of the school being made aware that a critical incident has occurred.
- To ensure that the welfare of pupils and staff is paramount.
- To ensure that the school responds in a sensitive, consistent and effective manner which reduces confusion, panic and extreme emotion.
- To have in place a Critical Incident Management Team, the membership of which is known to all relevant parties.
- To have in place a Critical Incident Management Plan, the details of which are familiar to all relevant parties.
- To maintain normality, as far as possible, in parts of the school which are not affected and to restore normality as soon as possible to the parts which are affected.
- To have immediate access to all relevant contact details (including outside agencies).
- To offer sensitive, non-intrusive support in the short and medium term to all those affected directly or indirectly by the incident.

Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT)		
PRINCIPAL	Mr S Patterson	First point of contact and responsible for instructing all parties concerned and effected.
HEAD OF PASTORAL CARE/SAFEGUARDING	Miss D Kirk	
VICE PRINCIPAL	Mr C Knight	
SCHOOL SECRETARIAL STAFF	Mrs P Harron Mrs S Morgan	
BUILDING SUPERVISER	Mr M Cherry	
SENIOR MANAGEMENT TEAM	Mr S Patterson Mr C Knight Mrs D Wiggam Miss J Hawthorne	
CHAIR of GOVERNORS	Mrs E Watson	

The Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT) has responsibility for ensuring that procedures are properly addressed at times of high emotion. If the incident involves legal action, a precise, official response to the incident should be known and be able to be verified by more than one person.

(Appendix 15, 16)

All members of the Critical Incident Management Team must:

- have a copy of the Critical Incident Policy at home and at school
- be aware of the plan to enable the school to react swiftly.
- have contact numbers for each other for 24-hour contact.
- in the event of a school trip /visit, have access to a list of names for staff and pupils.
- have a register of emergency services and relevant outside agencies.

(Appendix 2)

The CIMT will meet annually and, additionally, before a school trip overseas to familiarise each other with their role requirements and to check that personal contact numbers are up to date in the event of a critical incident.

The following must be remembered in relation to the critical incident policy:

- it is followed as closely as possible.
- designated personnel understand their tasks and are competent to carry them out.
- other people do not take unilateral actions.
- consideration and sensitivity is shown by all.
- pupils, staff and parents are protected from press intrusion.
- normal routine be resumed as soon as possible.
- there is a realization that total recovery may take a long time.

(Appendix 2)

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 should be familiar with the school Critical Incident Policy
- 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 school's security procedures in particular that all visitors not wearing a visitor's badge should be escorted to reception to be "signed in"
- 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 have knowledge of all other related school policies e.g. Child Protection, Special Needs, Health and Safety, Special Needs
- All relevant 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 aware that they are responsible for assessing risks to themselves before undertaking an activity.
- First Aid training, i.e. Designated First Aider Training and First Aid Awareness for all Classroom Assistants
- Emergency Evacuation Fire Drills will be conducted termly
- There should be curriculum opportunities to explore sensitive issues,
- A register of "Key People" with their contact numbers will be held in the general office, copies allocated to the CIMT and additional copies in the Critical Incident file in the principal's office.
  (Appendix 3 Day1 section 5)

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

1. **Immediate action**
2. **Short-term action**
3. **Medium-term action**
4. **Longer-term action**

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

- The principal must be informed of any critical incident as soon as possible.
- Principal, alone, to act as 'press officer'
  (Appendix 15, 16)
- As soon as an incident is confirmed, the CIMT will meet to decide strategies in the Principal's Office (**Central Information Point**)
- Collect and record accurate information relating to the incident to form the "Initial report "and "running record"– uncertainty breeds rumour and accurate information is essential.
  (Appendix 3)
- Advise school secretaries or co-opted staff in the management of communications.
  (Appendix 4/5)
- Inform immediately the ***Crisis and Bereavement Service at the Education Authority**
  (Appendix 4/5)
- Gather and brief the CIMT – brief the whole staff team, allocate roles and responsibilities.
- Trigger support from the EA and other contacts on emergency list – establish clearly who is going to contact whom.
- CIMT should agree a factual statement for anxious parents to avoid speculation.
- The remainder of the staff will be briefed as soon as possible alongside allocation of roles, preferably at a specially convened staff meeting.

- All staff should share the same information.

- Contact families affected – this must be done as quickly as possible 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)

  (Appendix 7, 18, 19)

- Pupils will be told information simply and sensitively, without fabrication, preferably in smaller group situations, e.g. siblings, close friends, class group etc.
  (Appendix 7, 18, 19)

- The school will try, as far as possible, to keep to the normal routine.

It is expected that the Education Authority will:

- ***Advise the Public Relations Unit so that appropriate assistance is given to the school.***
- ***Ensure that the appropriate Officers, including Health & Safety, are advised of the crisis so that the best possible level of support can be made immediately available, as appropriate.***
- ***Ensure that those agencies or services who are skilled in offering counselling are alerted to the crisis so that support is available as soon as seen to be appropriate.***
  In determining the timing of the above response by the Education Authority, the Chief Executive needs to be guided by the principal, making certain that the support offered is timed to acknowledge the school's own response to the tragedy.

2. SHORT-TERM ACTIONS

- Reunion of children with their families especially where the incident occurs outside school

- Encourage pupils to talk – activate strategies for enabling young people to talk about the incident and their feelings, using outside agencies if appropriate. (Appendix 6, 7)
- 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.
  (Appendix 7, 18, 19)

- 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).
  (Appendix 10,11, 17, 18, 19)

- 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.
  (Appendix 17, 18, 19))

3. MEDIUM TERM ACTION

- 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. (Appendix 10, 11,14)

- 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.

- Keeping parents informed – it may be appropriate to produce a leaflet for parents giving guidance eon the possible delayed reactions of pupils to an incident and making suggestions to help them deal with these.

- Support for staff – ongoing monitoring and support for staff is a major consideration.

4. 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.

- (Appendix 17) deals with planning a positive return for a bereaved pupil.

- Complete the **"Management of incident Review"** six weeks after incident. (Appendix 3 and page18)

- Marking anniversaries - these difficult times need to be dealt with sensitivity (Appendix 3 and page18)

- Curriculum implications – it may be appropriate to schedule INSET training for staff in loss counselling, bereavement etc. (Appendix 3)

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List of Useful Contacts

Contact / Role	Name
Principal	Mr Simon Patterson
Vice Principal	Mr Craig Knight
Building Supervisor	Mr Mark Cherry
Chair of Governors	Mrs Eileen Watson
EA Critical Incident Response Team	Mrs Shelia Gamble
EA Maintenance Officer	Stuart Steele (Mechanical & Electrical) Christopher McCallion (Building)
PSNI Lisburn	
Lisburn Fire Station	
School Nurse	Ms Jill Megarry
Lisburn Health Centre	
Gateway Team	
Local Church	Rev. David Turtle
Staff Welfare	Mrs Lynette Bailie
Education Psychologist	Mrs Roz Richardson
Education Welfare	Louise Smith
Main Keyholder	Mr Simon Patterson
Legal and Insurance EA	Mr Bill Harper Mrs Anita Bahrani
Counselling Support	Mrs Michelle McGrath
Special Needs Statementing Officer	Mrs Julie Mercer