



Critical Incidents Policy

Date ratified: June 2023

Date for review: June 2025

The aim of this policy is to lessen the effect of a critical incident on the staff, children, and parents at our school. It is anticipated that by adopting the procedures outlined in this policy we will provide a more secure environment for everyone associated with the school. In addition, we hope to continue to maintain the strong working partnership linking home, school, and the community.

What is a critical incident?

A critical incident can be defined as any sudden and unexpected incident or sequence of events which cause trauma within a school community, and which overwhelms the normal coping mechanisms of that school."

Critical Incidents happen and it is therefore important that we have a plan in place to best respond and manage a traumatic situation should it occur. Critical incident management is an integral part of normal school management practice. We consider a critical incident to be any event which causes trauma to our school community and overwhelms our normal coping mechanisms. 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.

As a critical incident is likely to have a severe impact upon the school, both in the short and long term, our aim is to ensure that school strategies and procedures are in place to protect the physical and emotional wellbeing of every member of the Taughmonagh Primary School Community.

The Critical Incident Policy and Plan however cannot cover every aspect of recovery from a critical incident. Occurrences may arise which cannot be foreseen or considered. The critical incident may occur in school during the school day, during the evening, during the school holidays or on a school trip. It is important however that the critical incident policy is easily understood and swings into action immediately as all incidents can have major impact on staff and children.

Examples of in-school critical incidents

- A serious accident to a child or adult
- The death of a pupil or member of staff through natural causes, such as an illness
- A traffic accident involving a pupil or staff member
- Violence or assault within school
- A school fire or explosion
- Destruction of part of the school building
- Abduction of a pupil
- A pupil or pupils absconding
- An illness such as meningitis within the school or the local community

Examples of out-of-school critical incidents

- An accident to a pupil or staff while out of school on a visit or swimming etc.
- Death or injuries through accidents
- Tragedies involving children from many schools e.g., the tragedy at Hillsborough Football Ground
- Suicide
- Civil disturbance

Aims of the Critical Incidents Policy

1. To maintain a duty of care
2. To minimise educational and administrative disruption within school
3. To enable normal working to be resumed in the shortest possible time

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 (see Appendix 1)

To have in place a Critical Incident Management Plan, the details of which are familiar to all relevant parties (see Appendix 2)

- 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

Practice within school

The class teacher has an important role to play in managing critical incidents and will be the best person to deal with the pupils in her class. The main role of specialist agencies is one of support, empowerment and to support pupils who cannot be helped by the teachers within the school. In times of crisis teachers must react as they feel is appropriate and there can be no easy formula for dealing with critical incidents but by ensuring good communication within school the crisis can be managed.

ACCESSIBILITY

All teachers will be given a copy of this policy to be retained in their class file, accessible daily and to substitute teachers if necessary. A copy will be held by office staff. Parents will be informed and will be able to access it on the school website. The School Council will be made familiar with the main principles.

PRINCIPLES OF CRISIS MANAGEMENT IN TAUGHMONAGH PRIMARY SCHOOL

- We will respond quickly but with fore thought to stabilise the situation.
- We will use our plan but not follow it blindly if a situation dictates a deviation would better support pupils and staff.
- We will first make safe, then move to restore calm.
- We will maintain basic school structures and continuity
- We will aim for full functioning but accommodate crisis needs.
- We will assess needs and ensure people get appropriate help.
- We will be sensible and pro-active-not simply 'wait and see'.
- We will anticipate and prevent any preventable stress and problems.
- We will promote healthy active coping and discourage 'wallowing' and rumours
- We will review and learn

IMPLEMENTATION AND KEY AREAS FOR CONSIDERATION

Intervention Team

A central component of this policy is the identification of the composition, roles and responsibilities of the Intervention Team. The role of the team is to review and direct the handling of the incident and the response and recovery process to:

- Ensure the safety and security of students, staff, other users of the premises and visitors;
- Minimize the loss to the School in physical, human and financial terms;
- Manage an incident to minimize disruption to regular operations;
- Liaise with appropriate agencies, including the Media.

The Critical Incident/Intervention Team will comprise of:

- ✚ Principal
- ✚ Senior Management Team
- ✚ Chair of Governors
- ✚ School Secretary
- ✚ Others may be co-opted as necessary in light of the nature of the emergency.
- ✚ It will be the role of the Principal (or in her absence, the role of the Senior Teacher or a nominated member of the SLT), to ensure that the Critical Incident Management Strategy is implemented.

Principal/Team Leader

- ✚ Confirm that a major incident has occurred e.g., death.
- ✚ Mobilise the School Critical Incident Team.
- ✚ Convene a meeting to brief staff or prepare a statement to notify staff.
- ✚ Prepare a statement for pupils, staff, and parents
- ✚ Brief Critical Incident Team members, who have specific role
- ✚ Liaise with Media - Appendix 1
- ✚ Liaise with family of deceased
- ✚ Liaise with other parents
- ✚ Liaise with External Agencies
- ✚ Convene regular meetings with Critical Incident Team
- ✚ Liaise with family/families regarding the involvement of the school in funeral arrangements
- ✚ Keep school, staff and pupils updated, as appropriate.

Intervention Team Members

- ‡ Offer immediate, emotional, and practical support to staff and pupils for 2 - 5 days following the incident.
- ‡ Support teachers in the classroom as they work with bereaved pupils.
- ‡ Offer advice and support to Principal/Senior Management Team.
- ‡ Carry out the specific tasks assigned to them by the Team Leader.
- ‡ Keep notes on any contact

PROCEDURES

1. The Principal must be informed of any critical incident as soon as possible.
2. As soon as an incident is confirmed, the Intervention Team will meet to decide strategies in the Principal's Office (Central Information Point)
3. The rest of the staff will be informed as soon as possible, preferably at a specially convened staff meeting.
4. All staff should share the same information.
5. Students will be told information simply and sensitively, without fabrication, preferably in smaller group situations. E.g., siblings, close friends, class group etc
6. The School will try, as far as possible, to keep to the normal routine.

ACTION PLAN

1. Set up a communication network.
2. Convene the Intervention Team in Central Information Point (Principal's Office)
3. Collect, record, and convey as much accurate information as possible.
4. Identify two telephonists
5. School phone for incoming calls
b) Mobile phone for outgoing information/staff use
6. Reception area to be used for enquiries
7. Use the up-to-date list of pupils' next of kin (record files) and contact parents of affected children
8. Record all actions
9. Principal to act as 'press officer'
10. Do not allow press/television on school premises

Action Plan Timetabling

Obtain information at the start	Within hours
Senior staff meeting with support personnel	Within hours
Advise EA	Within hours
Establish an intervention team	Within hours
Contact families	Immediately
Call a staff meeting to give information	Same day if possible
Inform pupils in small groups	Same day if possible
Arrange a debriefing meeting for staff involved	Same day if possible
Arrange debriefing for pupils directly involved	Same day if possible
Identify high risk pupils and staff	Following day
Promote discussion in classes	Following days and weeks
Identify the need for group or individual treatment	Over days and weeks
Organise counselling	As required
Mark anniversary (discreetly)	Annually

Support Required from EA: -

TEL 02837512515

- a. Advise Public Relations Unit so that appropriate assistance is made to the school.
- b. 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.
- c. 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 EA they will be guided by the Principal, making certain that the support offered is timed to acknowledge the school's own response to the tragedy.

Welfare

- Pupil and staff welfare will be considered throughout any procedures.
- Critical Incidents will be approached on the basis of the response needed in the view of the Critical Incident Team and any other External Agents including EA.

Longer Term Issues

- School structures and routines will be re-established
- Supportive strategies for pupils and staff will be implemented
- There will be ongoing contact with parents
- Actions taken will be reviewed and policies amended if appropriate
- The PSE and pastoral programmes will be reviewed
- Staff will be mindful of anniversaries and other special dates

The use of appropriate outside agencies is crucial to providing long term support as is the use of appropriately trained members of staff who are known to those in need of help.

Preventative Strategies ·

Regular review of relevant policies e.g., Child Protection, Health and Safety

- First Aid training
- Fire Drills
- PDMU Programme - including Drugs Education

· All members of the critical incident management team must:

- have a copy of the Critical Incident Kit and Policy at home and at school
- be aware of the roles of each part of the plan to enable the school to react swiftly and accordingly
- have contact numbers of 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.
- will have a register of emergency services and relevant outside agencies ·

The secretary will have a register of emergency services and relevant outside agencies e.g., Education Authority 028 3751 2515

Emergency evacuation drills are familiar to all members of the school community and practised regularly. ·

Opportunities to explore sensitive issues such as tragedy and death will be built into the PDMU programmes as appropriate - with the age of the children being a significant factor.

Links with other school policies

This Critical Incident Management Strategy will be informed by a range of other relevant school policies and in particular:

- Child Protection and Pastoral Care
- Acceptable Use of the Internet and Digital technologies /E-Safety
- Use of Mobile Phones
- Data Sharing and Protection
- Staff Welfare
- Health and Safety Guidance and Risk Assessments
- Special Needs
- Evacuation Plans and PEEPS (Personal Emergency Evacuation Plans)

Professional Development

Where identified and appropriate, in-service training which supports this Critical Incident Strategy will be made available to the relevant members of the school staff including teachers, learning and support staff and Governors.

All teachers will be consulted on the Critical Incident Strategy and will be made aware of the guidance available in the DE ESAGS guidance 'iMatter- A Guide to Managing Critical Incidents in Schools'.

Emergency Evacuation

If it is necessary to totally evacuate the school premises / grounds the assembly point will be at Taughmonagh Church. From this location the emergency action plan will be put into operation.

Monitoring and Evaluation

This Strategy will be reviewed:

- Post-incident (6 weeks) and including any relevant immediate debriefing and subsequent policy amendment.
- Every 3 years by the Board of Governors.

Appendix 1 MEDIA GUIDELINES

- Provide nothing but the facts - Avoid speculation or opinion - it can be inaccurate and upsetting to those involved in the critical incident.
- Express
 - ‡ the need to reduce and prevent further stress
 - ‡ the need to stabilize the situation
 - ‡ normal functioning of the school and its individual members
 - ‡ individuals will get the help they need.
- Give a prepared statement rather than an interview and anticipate the worst possible questions. Write it down as it gives you time to think about what you want to say rather than responding in an ad hoc manner.
- Immediately correct any incorrect or misleading information - by interrupting if necessary.
- Offer a written statement which could include an expression of school's grief and what the school has done so far e.g., contact with parents, clergy, EA support staff etc.
- Do not apportion blame or liability to anyone even in 'off the record' conversations.
- Remember to praise and thank any person or service that have helped during the incident.
- Remember that there are no 'off the record' conversations and that all contact with the press should be treated with caution.
- Report on positive developments following the event. Following a tragic situation, it is important to give the Press information.

TAUGHMONAGH PRIMARY SCHOOL CRITICAL INCIDENT ACTION PLAN

Procedures for Critical Incident Management Principal

- Seeks clarification
- Calls emergency services if appropriate
- Summons the CIMT to inform of incident c Prepares relevant statements/letters

Vice Principal

- Convenes and informs staff
- Arranges staff cover if appropriate
- Liaise with Caretaker to ensure access for essential personnel
- Ensure health and safety measures are in place

Member - Senior Leadership Team

- Contacts external agencies
- Contacts relevant parents
- Supports the physical and emotional wellbeing of pupils

Secretary

- Ensures phone lines are operative

First Aider

- Liaise with Vice Principal and provide appropriate support practically

- Day 1: INFORMATION - Receiving and communicating to others

☐☐Central Information Point - designated person and place

☐☐Intervention Team - adopt roles

Phone Calls (Out and In)	Staff Briefing and de-briefing	Pupils	Parents and Media
Contacts list	Each morning and afternoon	Siblings	Letter/Basic Details.
Dedicated lines		Close Friends	Follow up later.

(outgoing calls)		Year Groups	Prepared Statement for media
Parents (as appropriate)		Whole School	

Day 2: Ongoing/Follow-up action and Support

Funeral plans?

Monitoring pupils and staff.

Staff	Pupils	Parents	Media
Briefing/Debriefing Support	Talking Action: Card/Memory Book Debriefing/counselling EA Support Service	Information/via letter: Acknowledge event Funeral Reactions (normal for event)	Follow-up Statement? ?

APPENDIX 3 SAMPLE ANNOUNCEMENTS

After a known fatality

We are taking this time to think about, a Primary 7 pupil who died last night in a road traffic accident. was traveling with her family to We do not know any details about the accident at this time except that the rest of the family is safe, and no one is injured seriously.

.....'s funeral is being held at on

A funeral is a special time to remember a person who has died. The school will let your families know about the specific time and address of the funeral in a written note which will be sent home tomorrow.

Let's take a moment of silence to think of, to remember all the good things about her, and to say goodbye. In our silence we will express our loving thoughts.

After a suspected suicide

A tragedy has happened., a Primary 6 pupil, has died suddenly.

Details of 's premature death will not be released to protect the privacy of family members. You will be given information about funeral arrangements as soon as possible.

This kind of tragic news is hard to accept. You may experience many feelings within the next few days. Everyone deals with loss differently. It is important to respect the way others grieve. Counsellors are available in.....

Feel free to arrange to go and talk to the counsellors. They want to listen to your feelings and concerns.

Sample Press Release 1

Date

School grieves sudden death of pupil

As reported by the PSNI, a pupil at School died tragically on The circumstances of 's death is not known at this time and an investigation is currently ongoing.

This is a tragic loss to 's family and to our school community. To assist in supporting our staff and pupils through this time of grief, additional trained staff from the EA's Critical Incident Response Team have been assigned to the school to provide support. A letter has been sent by the school to parents, informing them of this incident and providing information on the support services available through the school.

A special assembly to remember has been arranged for.....

Contact: Principal, School at

PRO FORMA LETTER (for parents) 'With great regret, we have learnt of the death/deaths of and we extend our deepest sympathy to the family circle.

PREPARED STATEMENT FOR MEDIA We are sorry to learn of the tragic..... of..... We hope at this time the school would be given the privacy needed to support our pupils at this difficult time, etc

NB: If the Principal wishes to comment about the pupil, they may want to gain permission from the family to include: Sporting achievements Musical talents Academic success Personal attributes

SAMPLE LETTER TO ALL PARENTS

Date:

Dear Parent/ Carer

It is with great sadness that I have to tell you of the sudden death of NAME, (a pupil in Year/ a Year Teacher/ Learning Support Assistant, etc). The children were told this morning by their class teacher/ Principal at assembly.

NAME died of (an asthma attack, meningitis etc) and the children have been assured this is something that does not happen very often. Your child may or may not want to talk about it, but it is likely that he/ she will need extra love and support from you in the days ahead. This does not mean that anything is wrong with him/ her. It only means that this traumatic event has been too powerful for him/ her to deal with on his/ her own. He/ she may be feeling anxious. Take time to listen to your child and try to provide a predictable routine for him/ her at home. Avoid too many absences to start with. We have enclosed an information leaflet for you which may be useful at this time.

Trained staff from the Education Authority's Critical Incident Response Team are helping to support us through this difficult time. It is sometimes necessary for a member of the team to speak to a class or individual pupils who may be distressed. He/ she will be guided by the Principal/ class teacher in this. If you do not wish your child to receive such support from the team, please contact us immediately.

We are deeply saddened by this great loss but are trying, for the children's sake, to keep the school environment as normal as possible. Our thoughts are with NAME's family at this tragic time and the school community sends them sincerest sympathy and support.

NAME's funeral is on DAY/ DATE at TIME am/pm at (Name of Church or Crematorium). We are in touch with the family regarding their wishes for the school's representation at the Service.