



Critical Incidents Policy

Agreed by Board of Governors: May 2010

To be reviewed: May 2013

Rationale

A critical incident can be defined as an unpredictable, unexpected, sudden and tragic event which results in instability and confusion for both staff and pupils. It is important to guard against turning a non crisis event into a crisis situation. Our aim is to ensure that in the event of a critical incident, school strategies and procedures are in place to protect the health and safety of every member of the school community while as far as possible maintaining normality.

Purposes

- 1) To keep all staff fully informed of school procedures in the event of a critical incident. If a child protection issue is involved the Designated Teacher will manage the response.
- 2) To review these procedures on an annual basis.
- 3) To make the SLT and designated staff fully aware of their role in the event of a critical incident.
- 4) To ensure that these procedures will include short, medium and long term strategies.

As well as procedures for specific critical incidents, this booklet contains a list of emergency contact names and numbers and also the School's First Aiders and Pastoral Team. The Principal and SLT will coordinate the response to any critical incident. This policy will be reviewed annually by the SLT.

Guidelines

Managing a Critical Incident

This involves the use of common sense. Please note that:-

- A calm, systematic approach is essential to reduce instability and confusion during a crisis.
- Panic and overt emotional reactions are counter productive.
- The single best predictor of how students will respond to a crisis is how the adults around them are reacting.
- Pupils need consistency and direction and the role of the school is to provide a predictable, supportive structure where adults are still in charge.
- The Principal is designated to release information to the Press.

Examples of Critical Incidents and Procedures

1. Bereavement

N.B. In all cases of bereavement, the Principal should ascertain what specific information the family would like to be shared with staff and students. The wishes of the family should be respected as much as possible.

a) The Sudden Death of a Staff Member - In School

- Notify the Principal and School Nurse and/or order an ambulance.
- Remove the pupils from the classroom, and organise supervision of them,
- Principal notifies staff.
- Principal contacts the immediate family. ,
- Staff meeting is held to deal with staff reactions and to implement plans for students and community needs.
- Principal notifies parents via letter.

b) The Sudden Death of Staff Member - Outside of School.

- Principal notifies staff members
- Principal convenes SLT meeting to develop a plan to deal with reactions from the school community.
- Special emphasis must be placed on helping the pupils directly affected.

Strategies for Dealing with Pupils:-

- Member of staff, preferably someone known to the class or classes, helps pupils to deal with their feelings.
- Where appropriate, the Designated Teacher will arrange for further help for distressed pupils.
- All pupils should be given the same information.
- Teachers will help pupils to discuss their feelings.
- Concrete activities should be planned such as sending cards, letter writing etc.
- Principal sends a letter to parents so they are aware of the situation and encourages parents to allow pupils to express their feelings.

The SLT will coordinate a programme of support for members of staff liaising with BELB and other outside agencies.

c) The Sudden Death of a Pupil - In School

- Remove the other pupils from the classroom
- A member of staff should remain with the class to help pupils deal with their reactions.
- Principal to be notified.
- Principal notifies parents and BELB
- Principal notifies other principals if siblings attend other schools.
- All staff must be notified of the incident in person or by delivered memo to ensure that all staff members have the same information.
- SLT meet to develop plans to establish strategies for working with staff and pupils.
- Staff meeting is held that day to update staff, provide information regarding expected reactions and how to respond to and deal with them; also to initiate a plan.

d) The Sudden Death of a Pupil - Outside of School

- All staff must be notified of the incident by memo or staff meeting to ensure that all staff members have the same information.
- Principal contacts BELB
- SLT meet to establish strategies for dealing with pupils.
- Staff meeting should be held that day to explain strategies for dealing with pupil reactions.
- School Counsellor will work closely with the specific teacher and classroom pupils in dealing with the death.
- Principal should notify other principals if siblings attend other schools.

e) Sudden Death of a Pupil's Parents (during the School Day)

- This would be a crisis situation if both parents die or if the pupil lives in a single parent household and that parent dies
- Principal liaises with family.
- Relevant VP liaises with Social Services
- Principal notifies other principals if siblings attend other schools.

Strategies for dealing with other pupils' classmates etc:-

- All teachers should receive pertinent information
- The form teacher will share appropriate information with the other pupils and enable them to share their thoughts and feeling
- -It would be helpful for pupils to plan concrete ways to express their grief i.e.
- Sending a card to the pupil, buying a wreath, sending a gift to the family etc.
- School Counsellors/ Social Worker to be available to assist pupils having difficulties.

Strategies for dealing with Staff

- Principal will communicate the same accurate information of the death to all staff.
- the SLT will be available to assist staff with concerns that may arise and for follow- up activities.

2. Suicide

- NB Threats or Attempts
- All threats/insinuations/statements by pupils regarding suicide will be given immediate attention. Any school employee who witnesses and/or has any knowledge of such a threat/insinuation/statement will immediately notify the designated teacher and provide all information in writing.

Strategies for dealing with Pupils threatening Suicide:-

- a) If a pupil is threatening suicide **DO NOT LEAVE THE PUPIL ALONE UNDER ANY CIRCUMSTANCES.**
- b) Listen and support the pupil by being calm and affirmative.
- c) Inform the Designated Teacher for Child Protection. She will carry out a suicide risk assessment.
- d) A verbal summary of the interviews will be provided to the Principal who will document the incident and notify the parent detailing concerns and the actions that were taken.
- e) Parents/Guardians will be informed. Parents/Guardians will be advised to take the child or young person to the G.P. and ask for a Mental Health Assessment.
- f) The parent/guardian will come to the school for the child and she will leave in their care.
- g) The pupil will be offered counselling support in school on their return.

Emergency Situation

If the case is deemed an **EMERGENCY SITUATION** by the Designated Teacher the following must be done:-

- a) The pupil will be released to the parent/guardian. The pupil will be removed from school if a possibility exists of doing "harm to self." The Emergency Services will be called to assist if appropriate
- b) Pupil will not be permitted to leave school without a parent or member of staff.
- c) A recommended plan of action will be offered to the parents.
- d) If a medical emergency is evidenced at school, such as self-inflicted injury or drug overdose, the Designated Teacher or School Nurse will evaluate the need for immediate medical/hospital intervention and call 999. The parent/guardian will be notified.

3. USE AND MISUSE OF DRUGS (including alcohol)(see school policy on the use/misuse of drugs)

NB

- Pupils are permitted to bring into school a day's supply of legalised medicines as long as they pass them to the School Nurse for safe keeping and administering.
- Details of substances considered to be harmful are detailed in the school's Drug Policy.

In the case of misuse of legally held substances, the following procedures shall be followed:-

- 1) the member of staff discovering the incident should call the Designated Teacher who will:-
 - a) assess the situation
 - b) ensure the safety of the pupil and other pupils
 - c) give emergency aid and seek medical attention if necessary
 - d) inform the parent/guardian
- 2) pupil will, if it is thought necessary, be taken to hospital to receive medical assistance

In the case of misuse of illegally held substances

- advice and guidance will be sought, if necessary, from the BELB Education Officer with responsibility for Drug and Solvent Abuse.
- Should any illegal substance be found on the premises, staff should take possession of the evidence preferably in the presence of a witness. The relevant authorities e.g. the Community Police Liaison Officer should be informed by either the Designated Deputy/Designated Teacher or the Principal.
- Suspicion of trafficking in illegal drugs in school will lead to an investigation by the Principal in liaison with the PSNI.
- Incidents where pupils are suspected of buying illegal drugs in school or bringing illegal drugs into school will be investigated, and, if this is found to be happening,
- counselled by the Designated Teacher and by other support agencies as appropriate. Parents will be informed. If the offence is confirmed the person or persons concerned will be dealt with according to the school's disciplinary procedures.
- The involvement of the media will be dealt with by the Principal.

NB. All staff, teaching and non-teaching will be given access to the full drugs policy.

4. USE OF REASONABLE FORCE (to restrain or control pupils)

(in line with school policy on the use of reasonable force)

Article 4 of the 1998 Order (Education NI), authorises teachers to use such force as is reasonable in the circumstances to prevent a pupil from:

- committing an offence
- causing personal injury, or damage to the property
- engaging in any behaviour prejudicial to the maintenance of good order and
- discipline at the school or among any of its pupils, whether during a teaching session or otherwise.

The right of the member of Staff to use such force as is reasonable to restrain or control a pupil applies:

- where the member of Staff is on the premises of the school
- elsewhere at the time when he/she has lawful control or charge of the pupil concerned
- to teachers at the school AND to any other member of Staff who with the authority of the Principal has lawful control or charge of pupils e.g. on a school visit/residential/sporting fixture etc.

WHEN IS IT APPROPRIATE TO USE REASONABLE FORCE?

When all other behaviour management strategies have failed to resolve a problem, there are a wide variety of circumstances in which reasonable force is appropriate.

They fall into three broad categories:

- where action is necessary in self-defence or where there is an imminent risk of injury
- where there is a developing risk of injury or significant damage to property
- where a pupil is compromising good order and discipline.

Examples of situations that fall into the first two categories are:

- a pupil attacks a member of Staff
- pupils are fighting
- a pupil is causing, or at risk of causing, injury or damage by accident, by rough play, or by misuse of dangerous materials, substances or objects

Where a pupil is acting in a way that is compromising good order and discipline it may be appropriate to use reasonable force.

Examples of situations that fall into this category are:

- pupil persistently refuses to obey an order to leave a classroom
- a pupil is behaving in a way that is seriously disrupting a lesson

PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS TO BE TAKEN INTO ACCOUNT

- Before intervening physically a member of Staff should seek to:
- Deploy other behavioural strategies and where these have failed, where practicable, the member of Staff should tell the pupil who is misbehaving to stop and what will happen if she does not.
- Communication should continue with the pupil and it should be made clear that physical contact or restraint will stop as soon as it ceases to be necessary.

If the pupil continues to refuse to leave the classroom then another reliable pupil should be told to seek help.

The member of Staff should:

- Not give the impression that he/she has lost his/her temper and is punishing the pupil.
- Display a calm and measured approach to the situation

When not to intervene:

If an older or physically large pupil is involved in an incident or if the teacher believes he/she may be at risk.

In this case assistance should be sent for and the teacher should continue to defuse the situation orally.

WHAT CONSTITUTES REASONABLE FORCE?

Physical intervention can take a number of forms. It might involve Staff:

- Physically interposing between pupils (providing that there is no danger of injury to yourself)
- Blocking a pupil's path
- Holding (to remove the pupil from danger)
- Pushing
- Pulling
- Leading a pupil by the arm
- Shepherding a pupil away by placing a hand in the centre of the back
- Using more restrictive holds ONLY in extreme conditions

Care must be taken never to act in a way that might reasonably be expected to cause injury and Staff should also avoid touching or holding in any way that might be considered indecent.

Only when other behaviour management strategies have failed and when the pupil, other pupils, members of Staff or property are at risk can the application of reasonable force to restrain or control a pupil be used as a last resort.

The need to use reasonable force to restrain or control a pupil should be rare. CORPORAL PUNISHMENT remains unlawful and neither Article 4 nor this policy, in any way authorises teachers or others to use any degree of physical contact which is deliberately intended to cause pain or injury or humiliation.

However, Article 4 does not prevent any person from exercising his/her right, under common law, against an attack, providing he/she does not use a disproportionate degree of force to do so.

REPORTING AN INCIDENT

When a situation arises where reasonable force to restrain or control a pupil is used, documentation must be sent to the **Principal**. This teacher should assume responsibility for notifying parents about incidents where reasonable force has been used and for dealing with any complaints which might emerge.

It is essential that this information be detailed. The report should include:

- the name(s) of the pupil(s) involved and when and where the incident took place
- the names of any other Staff or pupils who witnessed the incident
- the reason that force was necessary, for example, to prevent injury to the pupil, another pupil or a member of Staff
- briefly how the incident began and progressed
- what was said by each party
- steps taken to defuse the situation
- degree of force used
- how that was applied and for how long
- pupils response and outcome of the incident
- details of any obvious or apparent injury suffered by the pupil or any damage to property.

NB. A pro forma will be available for the completion of this report. The Principal and the Chairman of the BOG should review the reports of incidents at least annually. Records of the incidents should be kept for at least five years.

Staff should keep a copy of their report.

5. Bomb Threat

NB The safety and well-being of pupils and staff is of primary consideration in handling bomb threats.

The following procedures are to be followed:-

- Record in writing as accurately as possible the bomb threat message received.
- establish the exact time of the message.
- try to distinguish the age, sex and temperament of the caller.
- quote the exact words of the caller, gaining as much information as possible
- concerning the location of the bomb and the time it is activated to explode
- keep the caller on the line to gain as much information as possible.
- inform the Principal and the local police
- put into operation the procedure for evacuating the school buildings

NB. These are the same as for Fire Drill (page 134 in Staff Handbook) except that in the case of a bomb threat pupils are to be kept as far as possible away from the school building.

6. Bus Accident

If this happens in the morning on the way to school the following procedure is to be followed:-

- a message will be sent to Reception and the details recorded
- the Principal will be informed and will investigate the situation - parents will be contacted if appropriate
- members of SLT will go to the scene and liaise with school to provide for other pupils at the scene.

If an accident happens in the afternoon the same procedure will apply except that the SLT member on post school duty will coordinate the response along with the Principal.

7. Hazardous Materials Incident

- This is most likely to take the form of a gas leak affecting an area of the building (probably the Science or Home Economics Department) or a chemical spillage in one of the Labs. In either case the following procedure should be followed:-
- The immediate area should be evacuated following standard procedures outlined in the Staff Handbook
- call an ambulance and fire brigade if necessary
- The BELB Health and Safety Officer should be informed
- A decision will be made whether or not to send pupils and staff home
- Pupils and staff must not return to the affected area until authorised to do so by the fire authorities (if present) or Principal.
- The Principal and S.L. T. will direct further action as required.
- Parents will be notified by letter if this is considered necessary.

8. Intruder on School Grounds or Premises

An intruder is defined as someone who is not authorised to be on school property and who refuses to leave school property when requested to do so. It is most likely that such people will be noticed by the caretakers who will alert the Principal, Vice-Principals or other members of S.M. T. The following procedure should then be followed:-

- Contact the police (see Appendix B)
- Staff will be informed either by the School Office in writing or verbally by members of SLT
- The safety of pupils will be ensured by keeping them in the safest location. If pupils are in their classroom they should remain there with the teacher and with the door locked. If this happens at Break or Lunchtime they should go to Form Rooms or the Assembly Hall and the door locked. –
- all exterior doors should be locked as well classroom windows should be closed and pupils kept away from them.
- Furniture or other obstacles should be placed behind the door.
- SLT will meet to assess the situation and take advice from the police before deciding what action should be taken with regard to pupils and staff
- All doors are to remain locked until the all-clear is given
- If necessary the Principal should send a letter home to parents explaining the situation and action that was taken.

Shooting or Stabbing Incident

The well-being of pupils and staff is a priority in handling an incident involving a shooting or a stabbing. Measures have already been taken to ensure that both school buildings are secure as far as possible from dangerous individuals. If a shooting incident occurs in the playground, staff and pupils should be instructed to lie on the ground face down, still and quiet with their hands on their heads. Pupils must remain in school following any such incident to establish some kind of normality.

- Inform the Principal who will contact the police and if necessary call an ambulance.
- Follow directions given by the police and any other emergency personnel at the scene.
- If the incident takes place in the playground follow the procedure referred to earlier. If it happens in a classroom, all other classrooms must be locked and pupils kept there until the all-clear is given.
- SLT meet having taken advice from emergency personnel at the scene, to decide what further action needs to be taken.
- Principal notifies parents and deals with any media enquiries.

Strategies for dealing with:-

a) Parents at the scene

- This should be left to the police.

b) Pupils

- SLT will decide what information and reassurance should be given to pupils following the incident.
- School Counsellor and Senior Pastoral Team will be available to talk to pupils and advise teachers in facilitating discussion about the incident.
- Principal will send a letter to parents informing them of the incident and of counselling services which are available to their child.
- Social Worker/Educational Psychologist will assist pupils who need additional help in dealing with feelings and concerns.
- SLT will liaise with community agencies and with police regarding the reinforcement of safety measures for pupils c)

Staff

- SLT will be available to provide staff with an opportunity to express their feelings and concerns
- SLT available to answer questions and give facts regarding the incident as well as future plans for prevention; also to assist teachers in facilitating classroom discussion of the incident.
- following consultation with the people they represent on the Staff, The Health & Safety Team will meet as soon as possible to clarify facts and review building security measures.

These policy guidelines are translated into action through other policies and procedures such as:

Pastoral Care Policy

Child Protection Policy

Behaviour Management Policy

APPENDIX A

CONTACTS WITHIN SCHOOL

1. SLT

Mr Graham	(Principal)	Ext 208
Mrs Mairs	(Vice-Principal)	Ext 206
Dr Pinkerton	(Vice-Principal)	Ext. 209
Mrs Logan		
Mrs Leitch		
Mr Hamilton		

2. Pastoral Team

Under review

3. First Aiders

Nurse V Dennison
Under review

4. The Health & Safety Team

Mr Hamilton(Convenor)
Mrs McTernaghan. (HE)
Mr P Mercer (Science)
Mrs Clarke (Staff)
Mrs Gillespie (Support Staff)
Mrs Graham (Music)

APPENDIX B

EMERGENCY CONTACTS OUTSIDE SCHOOL

1. Police

Dial 999 for an immediate response. You must give a name and specific location. Alternatively dial the PSNI Switchboard on 90 650222 and ask for Oldpark PSNI Station which is the nearest one to school.

2. Ambulance / Hospital

Again dial 999 for an immediate response. You must give a name and a specific location. The nearest hospital is the Mater whose number is 90741211

3. Fire

Again, dial 999 for an immediate response. You must give a name and specific location; also ensure that gates are open and that fire engines have easy access to the building. For further enquiries, the Fire Authority area headquarters is at Bankmore Street, Belfast whose number 90310360.

4. BELB Health & Safety Unit

The BELB Health and Safety Officer for the school is Mr Brendan O'Reilly who can be contacted at 90564000 ext. 4162. His assistant is Mrs Marie Stewart who can be contacted at 90564000 Ext. 4258,

5. Chair of Board of Governors

The chairperson of the Board of Governors is Mrs J Weir who can be contacted through school

6. Educational Psychologist

The school Psychologist is Ms Gerry Fey who can be contacted through Mrs Logan (ext. 228)

7. Bereavement Counselling

The service is provided by CRUSE who can be contacted at 90232695.

8. The Samaritans

Whatever you're going through they will go through it with you. The Belfast Branch number is 0845 790 9090.

9. Social Services

Support is available from various agencies outside of school but the initial contact should be made through Mrs J Duncan ext. 250

APPENDIX C:

Task	Time	Who
1. Obtain factual information (Who/what/where)		
2. Contact BELB		
3. Inform Staff		
4. Convene SLT meeting with support personnel		
5. Contact families		
6. Call staff meeting to give advice		
7. Inform pupils (in small groups where possible)		
8. Arrange debriefing meeting for staff/pupils involved		

9. Identify high risk pupils and staff		
10. Promote discussion in classes		
11. Identify the need for group or individual support		
12. Organise support		