



WELLINGTON COLLEGE BELFAST

Critical Incident Policy

Reviewed by The Board of Governors November 2020

Context

The Wellington College Critical Incident Policy has been created in the context of the following guidance.

- A Guide to Managing Critical Incidents in Schools (EANI, 2018)

Rationale

The College constantly seeks to provide a safe and secure environment for all students and staff.

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.

Aims

The main aim of this policy is to provide all appropriate and essential support for staff and pupils in the event of a critical incident occurring involving the College community. This support will be directed by the Critical Incident Management Team which comprises of the Principal, Vice Principal, Designated Teacher, Principal's PA and the Network Manager. A further aim would be for the College to return to normal life as soon as reasonably possible.

Finally, the College would aim to arrange any long term support necessary for either students or staff in the aftermath of a critical incident.

Definition of a Critical Incident

Defining a critical incident is difficult, but it will have some or all of the following characteristics:

- it may affect the whole school (*disruption to school day or life*)
- it may be a single event or ongoing (*examples - Dunblane, Holy Cross*)
- it is usually unexpected
- it will require support from a wide range of staff and outside agencies
- it may involve the media
- it may potentially overwhelm the school
- it is likely to be traumatic for those who are directly involved or who are involved in responding to the incident

A working definition from the EA is

'A critical incident is a sudden or unexpected incident or sequence of events which causes

trauma within a school community and which overwhelms its normal coping mechanisms'

Examples of critical incidents that can occur in schools include –

- Sudden death of student or member of staff;
- Disappearance of a student or member of staff;
- Death or injury of a student or staff member on a school outing;
- Severe injury to student or staff member as a result of road traffic accident;
- Serious assault on student or staff member in school;
- Violent/disturbed intruder on school premises during school day;
- Serious damage to school building or property through fire, flood or vandalism;
- Civil disturbance in local community;
- Student with contagious illness;
- Immediate evacuation of the school with no likelihood of return for a number of hours;

Trauma is defined as ***'Exposure to a terrifying and life threatening event resulting in helplessness in the face of danger, anxiety, fear and instinctual arousal'***

No one can predict when an incident might take place however, planning ahead will allow the College to be aware of needs to be managed and be better prepared to handle the distress experienced by both young people and staff.

Critical Incident Planning

Each member of the Critical Incident Management Team will have copies of the Critical Incident Policy available at all times, especially at home.

A management plan for responding to such incidents is in place so that all staff are aware of their roles.

All emergency contact numbers will be kept up to date.

Draft letters to parents will be scripted and then amended as appropriate to the specific incident.

Communication with students and staff should be maintained and be as accurate as possible.

The incident must be acknowledged by the College although with social media it is always likely that some information (even if not wholly accurate) will already be in the public domain.

It is important that only accurate information is conveyed and if something is not known that too should be communicated so as to remove ambiguity and diffuse rumour, conjecture and speculation.

Communication with key stakeholders must be implemented

In the event of a critical incident taking place in the College, or an incident which directly involves a member or members of the College community, the following actions would be implemented.

Recording of Response

The following appendices from the Guide to Managing Critical Incidents in school will be placed in the Critical Incident File and utilised/completed accordingly –

- List of Contacts
- Initial Report
- Running Record
- Details of students and staff requiring ongoing support
- Review of Incident
- Sample announcements to students, staff, parents and media.
- Information for staff to address students' questions around death
- Information for staff in the event of a suspected suicide
- Information for staff for students returning to the College after a critical incident
- College record on student who has experienced loss or bereavement
- Review of Incident Form (to be completed 6 weeks after the incident)

Immediate Actions for Schools Following a Critical Incident

Gather factual information regarding the incident

(Principal/VP)

Mobilise the College Critical Incident Management Team

(Principal/VP)

Arrange Staff Briefing

(Principal's PA)

Maintain structures and routines with flexibility as required

(VP)

Identify vulnerable students and staff

(Designated Teacher)

Prepare for media interest

(Principal/IT Manager)

Arrange for appropriate information to be shared with students

(Principal/VP)

Organise a debriefing with staff

(VP)

Set up recovery room (if required)

(Designated teacher)

Further explanation of Actions

1. Assess the risk and take necessary action

- Respond to any inevitable risk or threat e.g. evacuation/first aid/emergency services

2. Gather factual information regarding the incident

- Details of person/people involved;
- Confirmation of facts from the appropriate source e.g. family/police/hospital etc.

3. Initiate the use of the DE – A Guide to Managing Critical Incidents in Schools

- Critical Incident Management Guide Records

4. Mobilise the School's Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT) and implement the Critical Incident Management Plan (Appendix 1)

- If critical incident is out of hours use a pre-prepared contact list to contact CIMT members.

5. Immediate tasks for the School's Critical Incident Management Team

- Clarify roles to staff members. The Principal will be the Critical Incident Co-Ordinator;
- Contact the parents of pupil/s directly involved in the incident;
- Inform relevant key people and seek support as appropriate e.g. staff, BOG's, EA Critical Incident Team, CCMS, Local Clergy etc.;
- Agree the school routine for the day;
- Establish a central information point;
- Set up dedicated telephone line and logging system;
- Set up school visitor logging system;
- Set up a warm, quiet recovery room with drinks, tissues, suitable seating;
- Contact impacted family/s to determine their wishes regarding public announcements and staff/pupil briefings;
- For media enquiry support contact the EA Communications.

6. Arrange staff briefing (when incident is confirmed)

- Give a brief statement of factual information;
- Outline the school's response and proposed plan of action, maintaining normal structures and routines with flexibility
- Allow staff to ask questions and provide a response;
- Outline staff responsibility for monitoring pupil and staff welfare;
- Identify vulnerable staff and pupils who may be of risk;
- Clarify specific responsibilities for staff;
- Advise staff on procedure for dealing with media enquiries;
- Advise staff about confidentiality;
- Advise staff on agreed procedure for informing pupils and parents;
- Inform staff of the support services available;
- Advise staff about practical arrangements e.g. cover, flexible timetabling, recovery rooms etc.;
- Advise staff of time/place of next briefing and debriefing sessions.

7. Inform Pupils

- Inform pupils when incident is confirmed, with accurate and agreed statement (in form groups/classes/small groups);
- Make the announcement simultaneously, where possible, to ensure that pupils hear the news at the same time, using clear language with age appropriate factual information;
- Identify vulnerable pupils;
- Advise pupils about the support available;
- Answer any appropriate questions and dispel rumours;
- Allow time for pupils to discuss their feelings;
- Pupils who are absent from school, on work experience, educational trips or suspension should also be informed

- Pupils with SENs including pupils with learning and communication difficulties will require special consideration.

8. Inform Parents

- Use appropriate format to inform parents e.g by telephone, letter, home visit etc;
- In some instances, you may wish to inform parents from a particular class/form/year group/key stage.

Monitoring and Review of Policy

It is the responsibility of the Board of Governors, in liaison with the Principal, to monitor the effectiveness of the Critical Incident Policy.

To appropriately monitor the effectiveness of the Critical Incident Policy, the Board of Governors shall:

- Place a Critical Incident update on the monthly Pastoral Care Report until six weeks after the Event;
- identify priorities for action;
- assess the effectiveness of strategies employed when dealing with the critical incident;
- review the Critical Incident Policy every 4 years.

Links to Other Policies

The following policies should be read alongside the Critical Incident Policy

- Positive Behaviour Policy;
- Pastoral Care Policy;
- Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy;
- Special Educational Needs Policy;
- Anti-Bullying Policy.