

OMAGH ACADEMY



Critical Incident Policy

CRITICAL INCIDENT POLICY

Title	Critical Incident Policy
Purpose	To provide the guidance necessary for an effective response to any future critical incident at Omagh Academy
Author	Vice Principal Pastoral
Date of Approval	June 2023
Approved by	Board of Governors
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Signed: _____ Date: _____

(Chairperson, Board of Governors)

RECORD OF AMENDMENTS

DATE OF REVIEW	AMENDMENTS	AMENDED BY

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The Omagh Academy Critical Incident Policy has been created in the context of the following guidance:

A Guide to Managing Critical Incidents in Schools (Department of Education NI)
Immediate Actions for Schools Following a Critical Incident (Education Authority)
Sample Critical Incident Management Policy Guidance (Education Authority)

Rationale

Omagh Academy 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.

The purpose of this document is to provide the guidance necessary for an effective response to any future critical incident in Omagh Academy. It is our intention to ensure that our response is proportionate and appropriate.

Critical Incident Management Policy Aims

- 1 Recognise which incidents may be critical for the school community.
- 2 Respond to a critical incident in an informed manner.
- 3 Create a positive, open, communicative climate where the needs of staff and pupils are met in critical incident situations.
- 4 Create a safe school environment whereby the physical, social, and psychological health of pupils and staff is prioritised.
- 5 Monitor and review the policy for dealing with emergencies.
- 6 Promote active coping skills within the curriculum; and
- 7 Establish positive working relationships and dialogue with outside agencies, thus enabling full and effective collaboration in the event of a critical incident.

The school's response to any critical incident will differ according to the nature of the incident and the specific circumstances pertaining to it.

Links with other school policies

The school does not consider that the Critical Incident Management Plan and Policy is a stand-alone policy document. Linked policies include:

- Pastoral Care Policy
- Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy
- Pupil Policy on the use of Mobile Digital Devices
- Anti Bullying Policy
- SEN Policy

Definition of a Critical Incident

In Omagh Academy the following definition of a critical incident will apply:

'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'

Some examples of critical incidents may 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 because of road traffic accident.
- Serious assault on student or staff member in school.
- Violent intruder on school premises.
- Serious damage to school building or property through fire, flood, or vandalism.

Before the Event

No one can predict when an incident might take place however, planning will allow the school 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 Management Team

In Omagh Academy the Principal and Vice Principal for Pastoral Care will lead the school response and accept joint responsibility for the recording of that response. The school health and safety officer (Vice Principal Curriculum) will 'quality assure' the response and ensure that essential tasks are completed.

Critical Incident Planning Framework

- 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/emails 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 school 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 to remove ambiguity and diffuse rumour, conjecture, and speculation.

- Communication with key stakeholders must 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 school after a critical incident
- Record of pupils who have experienced loss or bereavement
- Review of Incident Form (to be completed 6 weeks after the incident)

In the event of a Critical Incident

The school will assess the risk or threat associated with any critical incident and take immediate action in accordance with existing policy and guidance. This may involve:

- Initiating emergency evacuation of the school
- Action to prevent harm and/or the escalation of an incident
- The provision of first aid
- Calling the emergency services

Where the critical incident has occurred outside school premises then an impact assessment will be conducted to assess what immediate action needs to be taken.

The school will gather information regarding the critical incident, including details of the people involved and the nature and severity of the incident. It is important that this information is obtained from appropriate sources and subject to confirmation, for example,

- Family involved
- Police or other emergency services
- Medical staff
- Statutory agencies

Following the initial assessment of risk and information gathering, the school will mobilise its Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT) and implement the Critical Incident Management Plan.

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, Board of Governors, EA Critical Incident Team, 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.
- Agree a strategy for media request, including advice from the Education Authority.

Arrange Staff Briefing (when incident is confirmed)

In the event of a critical incident affecting the school, the staff will receive information from the school's Critical Incident Management Team. The Principal is responsible for relaying factual information on what has occurred, how the incident will be handled and how staff can contribute to the school's response.

- Staff will be given factual information as currently available about the critical incident. Staff will be assured that as further details become available, they will be updated as appropriate.
- 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 to them.
- Advise staff about practical arrangements e.g., cover, flexible timetabling, recovery rooms etc.
- Advise staff of time/place of next briefing and debriefing sessions.

Informing 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 information.
- Ensure a family's right to privacy is respected.
- Identify vulnerable pupils.
- Advise pupils about the support available.
- Answer any appropriate questions and dispel rumours.
- Allow time for pupils to discuss their feelings.
- Be as truthful as possible when responding to the questions of pupils, keeping in mind that early information available about a traumatic event may not be accurate.
- Monitor the reaction of pupils.
- Provide a designated area/areas for pupils should they wish to come out of class. They may wish to go to a quiet place (where they can be supervised) or talk to someone e.g., a member of the pastoral care team.

- Communicate to pupils that staff care about those affected by the critical incident and to model appropriate concern.

Pupils who are off site because of link courses or curricular demands, work experience, educational trips etc; should also be informed and supported. Pupils absent due to illness will be informed.

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

Informing Parents and Carers

- When a critical incident occurs parents will be informed.
- Parents will be given the facts of the critical incident, keeping in mind the legal implications, the potential for police investigations and issues of confidentiality.
- Parents of pupils directly involved will receive a telephone call.
- Other parents as appropriate will be informed via an appropriate format e.g., letter/email. The communication might contain information about what has happened and the school's response/intended response.
- Appropriate communication will be maintained between school and parents.
- The school will ensure that only accurate information is shared.
- Parents will be provided with advice on how to support their child.

In some instances, the school may inform parents from a particular class/form/ year group/key stage.

Normal School Routine

Our school aims to restore normal school routine as soon as practicable following the news of a critical incident.

- If visits are planned to the injured/bereaved, a senior member of staff will remain on school premises.
- Liaison will take place with the Chair of the Board of Governors, the Education Authority Critical Incident Team, and others as appropriate.

Supporting Pupils

To provide the most appropriate support to pupils, the school will apply the guidance within the DE publication – A Guide to Managing Critical Incidents, Appendix 10 – “How staff can support pupils at a time of crisis” and Appendix 11 “Responding to pupils questions about a sudden death.” The school will also seek and apply the advice of the EA Critical Incident Support Team.

Supporting Staff

The school acknowledges that staff may find the impact of a critical incident distressing and that this impact may vary depending on a range of factors including degree of involvement in the critical incident, experience, training, appropriate coping mechanisms and current stresses. These factors will be actively considered when deploying staff and monitoring their wellbeing.

Consideration will also be given to the provision of appropriate opportunities for staff, individually and in groups, to discuss their own reactions to what has happened and to suggest options to support both staff and pupils.

The most immediate informal support may come from close friends and colleagues within the school community. However, the school will consider more formal support in terms of cover arrangements to enable staff to take time out and providing advice relating to external support.

The school will seek and apply the advice of the EA Critical Incident Support Team about supporting staff in general and arranging confidential external support where necessary.

Assisting Statutory Investigations

The school acknowledges its legal and moral obligations to assist any investigations or enquiries from statutory agencies and will ensure that any request for information, meetings or interviews are dealt with quickly, sensitively, and appropriately.

The school will ensure that any relevant records relating to the critical incident, those involved, and the subsequent management of the incident are secured and made available to those who are entitled to have access to them in compliance with the law.

After the Incident

It is acknowledged that the management of a critical incident does not end following the immediate response and there are significant potential issues to be addressed after the incident. The School Critical Incident Plan will involve the application of the procedures detailed within DE publication – A Guide to Managing Critical Incidents – ‘After the Incident’ – paragraphs 79-93 inclusive.

Managing the media

The Principal will seek advice from available Education Authority Communication Officers. All media enquiries will be channelled through one person, the Principal. Staff will be reminded about this school policy and will be advised not to speak with the media directly. It is necessary to respond to questions accurately and factually as information becomes accessible. However, it may be necessary to explain to the media that it is not possible to answer their questions at a particular time because of the sensitive nature of the incident or because the information is not available for various reasons. For safeguarding reasons and to ensure that 'normal' school life is disrupted as little as possible, the news media will not be permitted on school grounds without consent from the Principal.

School Closures

Depending on the nature of the critical incident and its impact on the school and wider community, it may be necessary to suspend the normal timetable for a short period of time to permit an appropriate response. In very exceptional circumstances, it may be necessary to close the school.

Critical Incidents during School Holidays

In Omagh Academy if a critical incident occurs during the school holidays, we will inform staff and parents (who will in turn inform their child). When the school opens, we will support the pupils as appropriate.

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 3 years.

Staff Continuous Professional Development

The Principal of Omagh Academy will seek to identify and arrange training for relevant staff.

Appendix 1

Members of the Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT)

Principal

Vice Principals

Chair of the Board of Governors

The Principal's Personal Secretary

Other members of the staff may be co-opted members of the Critical Incident Team as an when required.