

**Critical Incident Policy**

**Introduction**

In Scoil Mhuire N.S., we aim to protect the well-being of our pupils and staff by providing a safe and nurturing environment at all times. The Board of Management, through the principal and staff, has drawn up a critical incident management plan. They have established a Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT) to steer the development and implementation of the plan. The roles designated to the CIMT members are important and they must be respected. The CIMT members will follow the protocols set out below and it is expected all staff will do likewise. A calm, measured reaction alongside clear communication is vital in the event of any critical incident.

**Definition of a Critical Incident**

As per DES / NEPS guidelines, Scoil Mhuire N.S. recognises a critical incident to be *“an incident or sequence of events that overwhelms the normal coping mechanism of the school and disrupts the running of the school”*. Critical incidents may involve one or more pupils, staff, the school, or our local community.

Types of incidents might include:

* The death of a member of the school community through sudden death, accident, terminal illness or suicide.
* Outbreak of disease or major illness in school or community.
* Serious injury sustained by a member of the school community as a result of violence on or off school grounds.
* A threatening or violent intrusion into the school.
* An accident / tragedy in the school or wider community.
* Serious damage to the school building through fire, flood, vandalism, etc.
* The disappearance of a member of the school community.
* Unauthorised removal of student from school.

**Aims**

Recognising that planning and prevention are the key to managing critical incidents, Scoil Mhuire NS has developed This Critical Incident Management Policy and accompanying Plan. Our hope is that, in the event of an incident, these will help staff to react quickly and effectively and to maintain a sense of control. They should also help us to achieve a return to normality as soon as possible and ensure that the effects on the students and staff will be limited.

The Board of Management places no obligation on any staff member to intervene in a critical incident situation if by so doing he/she is placing him/herself or others at risk.

**Creation of a coping supportive and caring ethos in the school**

The Board of Management has a Health and Safety Statement in place, which is reviewed regularly. Measures are in place to address both the physical and psychological safety of the pupils and staff.

Among the measures to ensure **physical safety** include:

* Health and safety statement for the school
* Regular fire drills and evacuation procedures
* Regular checking of fire exits and extinguishers
* Exit doors kept closed during school time
* Yard gates kept closed during yard times
* School yard rules and Code of Behaviour in place and regularly discussed with children
* Pre-opening supervision in the school yard in the Senior Building
* Sign-out procedures for pupils
* Updated contact details for staff, and in case of emergency numbers (in secretary’s office)
* Updated contact details for parents/guardians (in secretary’s office and saved on Aladdin)
* Record of pupils who may have specific medical needs
* First Aid Boxes maintained in the Junior and Senior Buildings

A number of policies and strategies also exist to support the **psychological safety** of the pupils and staff. These include:

* The Child Safety Statement and Risk Assessment
* Social, Personal and Health Education Programme, addressing areas such as grief and loss, communication skills, conflict management, substance misuse etc. Particularly Stay Safe, Walk Tall, Friends etc.
* Access to resources and support e.g. Employee Assistance Service, NEPS: ‘When Tragedy Strikes’, Online Resources etc.
* Links with outside agencies e.g. National Anti-Bullying Centre, DCU, NEPS, Primary Care Psychology
* Anti-Bullying Policy
* NEPS ‘School Refusal’ guidance
* The School Behaviour Policy
* Dignity in the Workplace Policy

**External Resources**

In the event of a critical incident the school may contact NEPS, Parish Priest Fr. Myles, Barnardos, the Irish National Teachers Organisation, the Catholic Primary School Management Association and other support agencies/organisations as necessary to access support.

**Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT)**

Scoil Mhuire NS has set up CI Management Team in line with best practice and will maintain this team in future. The members of the team were selected on a voluntary basis and will retain their roles for at least one school year. The members of the team will meet once a year to review and update the plan. Each member of the team has access to the NEPS “RESPONDING TO CRITICAL INCIDENTS” Guidelines and Resource Materials for Schools 2016.

**Roles**

Key roles have been identified and assigned as follows:

• Team Leader: Lucy Kingston , School Principal.

• Parent Liaison Lucy Kingston , School Principal.

• Media Liaison Lucy Kingston , School Principal.

• Staff Liaison Emer Cleary/Marie O’Neill, Assistant Principal 1

• Student Liaison Lorraine Whelton, Assistant Principal 2.

• Community Liaison Pauline O’Sullivan, Deputy Principal.

• Family Liaison Pauline O’Sullivan, Deputy Principal.

• Administration Tasks Paula O’Driscoll, School Secretary.

• Pastoral Care Fr. Myles McSweeney, Parish Priest

**Media Briefing/Communication**

A critical incident may on occasion necessitate dealing with the media. Only the Principal, Deputy Principal or Chairperson of the Board of Management will communicate with the media, and anything agreed to be shared with the media should be signed off on by two of either the Principal, Deputy Principal, or Chairperson. The Dept. of Education and/or NEPS may also be consulted as necessary for guidance on media briefings. Members of the media must report to the reception office and identify themselves. They will not be allowed beyond the reception area except at the invitation of the Principal or Deputy Principal. The media will not be allowed to interview or photograph pupils on the school premises.

As necessary, the Principal /Deputy Principal/ Chairperson will prepare a brief media statement to include the following;

● Expressing sympathy for the affected /bereaved family.

● Stating that it is a difficult time for the school community.

● Positive information or comments about the deceased/ injured parties.

● The facts about the situation (following consultation with the families.)

● The term suicide will not be used; instead the term ‘tragic death’ will be used.

● Outline what is being done to support pupils and staff.

**Record Keeping**

In the event of an incident each member of the team will document and record actions undertaken in their role, such as meetings held, phone calls made, text alerts sent, letters received or sent etc. The Team Leader will be responsible for forming a coherent record of actions taken by individual members and the team as a whole. The school secretary will be a key support in this.

**Confidentiality**

The school has a responsibility to protect the privacy and good name of the people involved in any incident and will be sensitive to the consequences of any public statements. Comments should not be made through any form of social media, by members of the school staff . All staff must bear this in mind and pupils will be reminded of the need for sensitivity and discretion at an age appropriate level.

**Action Plan**

**Short-Term Actions (Day 1)**

● Inform emergency services

● Account for all pupils, personnel and visitors.

● Immediate and ongoing contact (as appropriate) with family/families.

● Inform Chairperson of the Board of Management.

● Inform Chaplain.

● It is important to obtain accurate information about the incident: What happened, where and when? What is the extent of the injuries? How many are involved and what are their names? Is there a risk of further injury? What agencies have been contacted already?

● Designate a spokesperson (Leader)

● Inform staff, and where appropriate former staff, and update on any arrangements as necessary. (Leader)

● Contact other appropriate agencies: Gardaí/H.S.E./Community Care Services/NEPS

● Ensure that a quiet place can be made for students/staff.

● Prepare a brief statement (Team). ● Media briefing if appropriate (see above).

● Protect the family’s privacy.

**Medium-Term Actions** (24-72 Hours)

● Preparation of students/staff attending the funeral.

● Involvement of students/staff in liturgy if agreed by bereaved family.

● Facilitation of students/staffs responses, e.g. Sympathy cards, flowers, Book of Condolences, etc.

● Ritual within the school.

● Review the events of the first 24 hours.

● Reconvene Key Staff/Critical Incident Management Team.

● Decide arrangements for support meetings for parents/students/staff as necessary.

● Decide on mechanisms for feedback from teachers on vulnerable students.

● Have a review of the Critical Incident Management Team meeting.

● Establish contact with absent staff and pupils.

● Hold support/information meetings for parents/students, if necessary, in order to clarify what has happened and give information on further support if required.

● There will be no compulsion on any teacher to participate in support meetings.

● Arrange individual or group debriefings/support meetings in consultation with outside agencies (with parental permission).

● Plan for the re-integration of students and staff e.g. absentees, injured, siblings, close relatives etc).

● Pupil Liaison person to liaise with above on their return to school.

● Plan visits to injured if and as appropriate.

● School closure (if appropriate).Request a decision on this from school management.

**Long-Term Actions**

● Monitor students for signs of continuing distress. Communication with family is essential.

● Liaise with external agencies regarding referrals.

● Arrange for school memorial service/anniversary if relevant.

● Awareness by staff around significant days like birthdays, Christmas, Mother’s Day, and Father’s Day.

● Ensure new staff is aware of policy and which pupils/staff were affected by an incident.

● Evaluate response to incident and amend Critical Incident Management Plan appropriately: What went well? Where were the gaps? What was most/least helpful? Have all necessary onward referrals to support services been made?

● Consult with NEPS Psychologist as appropriate.

● When individual pupils or a class of pupils affected by an incident are transferring to a new school, the principal should brief the principal of the new school.

● Update and amend school records: All team members will keep written records of phone calls made, meetings, and interventions. Records will be compiled and kept on file in the principal’s office. The school secretary will log all phone calls etc.

**Ratification and Review**

This policy was reviewed in November 2023 and will be reviewed annually by the Critical Incident Team and brought to the Board of Management. The policy will be disseminated annually to staff and will be available to all staff in the case of a critical incident.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (Chairperson) Date: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (Principal) Date: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_