



Critical Incident Plan

Introduction

“Scoil Mhuire seeks to provide a quality education for all its students in a challenging and positive environment.

We are committed to holistic development and to the achievement of the full potential of each student, particularly those who are disadvantaged or marginalised.

In keeping with the above Mission Statement, Scoil Mhuire aims to protect the wellbeing of its students and staff by providing a safe, caring and nurturing environment at all times. The Whole-School Evaluation Management, Leadership and Learning report dated 10th February 2016 stated that “A high priority is placed on creating a nurturing and caring learning environment”.

This policy refers to the response taken by this school should a critical incident occur.

The staff and management of Scoil Mhuire have formulated a number of policies and procedures to be followed with a view to ensuring the physical and psychological safety of both staff and students, and the creation of a supportive and caring ethos in the school, in ordinary time as well as in the event of a critical incident. Such policies include the school’s Admissions Policy; Special Education Needs Policy; Child Protection Policy; Vetting Policy; Anti-Bullying Policy; Safety and Health Policy; Safety Statement; Code of Excellence and the Policy for School Tours/Field Trips; The staff and management have established a Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT) to steer the development and implementation of the plan.

Context for development of the Policy and Plan

In drawing up this policy and plan the CIMT has consulted the following document provided to schools:

- *Responding to Critical Incidents; NEPS Guidelines and Resource Materials for Schools (2016)*

Definition of a critical incident:

“A critical incident is any incident or sequence of events which overwhelms the normal coping mechanisms of the school.”

Critical incidents may involve one or more students or staff members, or members of our local community.

Critical incidents of their very nature tend to occur without warning and at any time of the day or night. This policy provides guidance for those whose task it is to manage such incidents. However, each crisis situation will demand a different set of responses.

Types of incidents might include but are not limited to:

- The death of a member of the school community through accident, violence, suicide or suspected suicide or other unexpected death
- An intrusion into the school
- An accident involving members of the school community
- An accident/tragedy in the wider school community
- Serious damage to the school building through fire, flood, vandalism, etc.
- The disappearance of a member of the school community
- Family bereavement
- Serious emergency on school premises
- Serious violence or the threat of serious violence to a member of the school community either within or without the school
- Serious injury or death of a student while involved in a school activity

Aim

The aim of the CIMP is to help school management and staff to react quickly and effectively in the event of an incident, to enable us to maintain a sense of control and to ensure that appropriate support is offered to students and staff. Having a good plan should also help ensure that the effects on the students and staff will be limited. It should enable us to effect a return to normality as soon as possible.

Creation of a coping supportive and caring ethos in the school

Systems have been put in place to help build resilience in both staff and students, thus preparing them to cope with a range of life events. These include measures to address both the physical and psychological safety of the school community.

1. Physical safety:

Some of the measures taken by the school to ensure the physical safety of the students include:

- Secure access to the school building
- Evacuation plan formulated and clearly visible in each room
- Regular fire drills occur
- Fully functional and regularly serviced Fire Alarm System
- Fire exits and extinguishers are regularly checked
- Health and Safety Plan (and rules) for all practical rooms and laboratories
- Supervision in the school during all breaks
- Induction for all new students and staff

2. Psychological safety

The management and staff of Scoil Mhuire aim to use available programmes and resources to address the personal and social development of students, to enhance a sense of safety and security in the school and to provide opportunities for reflection and discussion.

Some of the measures taken by the school to ensure the psychological wellbeing of the students include:

- Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) is integrated into the work of the school. Issues such as grief and loss; communication skills; stress and anger management; resilience; conflict management; problem solving; help-seeking; bullying; decision making and alcohol and drug misuse are addressed in the SPHE curriculum.. Promotion of mental health is an integral part of this provision.
- Staff have access to training for their role in SPHE.
- Staff are familiar with the Child Protection Procedures and the name of the Designated Liaison Person (DLP)
- Annual Positive Mental Health Week.
- The school has a daily Form time for each form class. Each Year group has an assembly once a week. Form teachers are available to listen to the concerns of students in their care and respond accordingly.

- The school has developed links with a range of external agencies including:
 - National Education Psychological Services (NEPS)
 - Child and Family Mental Health Services (CAMHS)
 - Social Services
 - National Council for Special Education (NCSE)
 - TÚSLA
 - Jigsaw
 - Gardaí
 - Local Clergy
 - Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST)
- Inputs to students by external providers are carefully considered in the light of criteria about student safety, the appropriateness of the content, and the expertise of the providers.
- The school has a clear anti-bullying policy and deals with incidents of bullying in accordance with this policy.
- There is a pastoral care system in place in the school. The Care Team comprising of the Principal, Deputy Principal, Guidance Counsellor and two Special Needs teachers meet each week to review provision of pastoral care and to address specific cases.
- Students who are identified as being at risk are referred to the designated staff member (e.g. guidance counsellor), concerns are explored and the appropriate level of assistance and support is provided. Where appropriate, a referral is made to an appropriate agency.
- Staff are informed about how to access support for themselves.

Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT)

A CIMT has been established in line with best practice. 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 annually to review and update the policy and plan. Each member of the team has a dedicated critical incident folder. This contains a copy of the policy and plan and materials particular to their role, to be used in the event of an incident.

The members of the CIMT are:

- J Maher - Principal
- G E Kiernan - Deputy Principal
- C Nulty – Deputy Principal
- M Mahon - Guidance Counsellor
- M Farrell – Staff Member
- S Byrne – Staff Member
- A Kearns – Staff Member

- G Gilsean - The School Secretary
- The Critical Incident Management Team may co-opt other members of staff to assist them, should they deem it necessary.
- The Principal will act as Team Leader or in her absence the Deputy Principals.

The key roles are as follows:

- Team Leader
- Gardaí Liaison
- Staff Liaison
- Student Liaison
- Agency Liaison
- Parent/Guardian Liaison
- Media Liaison
- Administrator
- Attendance Trackers

Outlined below are some of the key responsibilities of each role:

Team Leader: Ms. Jacqueline Maher (Principal)

- Alerts the team members to the crisis and convenes a meeting
- Coordinates the tasks of the team
- Liaises with the Board of Management; DES; NEPS; SEC;
- Liaises with the bereaved family

Gardaí Liaison: Mr. Gemma E. Kiernan (Deputy Principal)

- Liaises with the Gardaí
- Ensures that information about deaths or other developments is checked out for accuracy before being shared

Staff Liaison: Ms. Jacqueline Maher

- Leads briefing meetings for staff on the facts as known, gives staff members an opportunity to express their feelings and ask questions, outlines the routine for the day
- Advises staff on the procedures for identification of vulnerable students

- Provides materials for staff (from their critical incident folder)
- Keeps staff updated as day progresses
- Is alert to vulnerable staff members and makes contact with them individually.
- Advises them of availability of counselling services such as EAS and gives them the contact number.

Student Liaison: Ms. Gemma E. Kiernan, Ms Celine Nulty, Care Team and Staff Members

- Co-ordinate information from form teachers and year heads about students they are concerned about
- Alerts other staff to vulnerable students (appropriately)
- Provides materials for students (from their critical incident folder)
- Keeps records of students seen by external agency staff
- Looks after setting up and supervision of ‘quiet’ room where agreed

Community Agency Liaison: Ms. Monica Mahon

- Maintains up to date lists of contact numbers of emergency support services and other external contacts and resources
- Liaises with agencies in the community for support and onward referral
- Is alert to need to check credentials of individuals offering support
- Coordinates the involvement of these agencies
- Updates team members on the involvement of external agencies

Parent/Guardian Liaison: Ms. Gemma E. Kiernan, Miss Celine Nulty, Care Team and Staff Members

- Visits the bereaved family with the team leader
- Arranges parent meetings, if held
- May facilitate such meetings, and manage ‘questions and answers’
- Manages the ‘consent’ issues in accordance with agreed school policy
- Ensures that sample letters are typed up, on the school’s system and ready for adaptation
- Sets up room for meetings with parents

- Maintains a record of parents seen
- Meets with individual parents
- Provides appropriate materials for parents (from their critical incident folder)

Media Liaison: Ms. Jacqueline Maher

- In advance of an incident, will consider issues that may arise and how they might be responded to (e.g. students being interviewed, photographers on the premises, etc.)
- Will draw up press statement, give media briefings and interviews (as agreed by school management)
- Will coordinate the monitoring of communications relating to the incident.

Administrator: School Secretary

- Maintenance of up to date telephone numbers of
 - Parents/Guardians
 - Teachers
 - Emergency support services
- Takes telephone calls and notes those that need a response
- Ensures that templates are on the schools system in advance and ready for adaptation
- Reminds agency staff to wear name badges
- Prepares and sends out letters, emails and faxes
- Photocopies materials needed
- Maintains records

Attendance Tracking: Staff Members

In the immediate aftermath of the critical incident special care will be paid to attendance of students.

- All absences will be carefully monitored.
- Students signing in/out must be accompanied by a parent/guardian

Procedures to be followed in the Event of a Critical Incident Occurring

1. Hearing the News

Once a critical incident comes to the attention of a member of the school community, he/she should, where possible and practical, inform the senior management of the school. However, where it is apparent that an emergency situation exists, it may be necessary to call one or other of the emergency services in the first instance.

2. Establish the Facts

Before taking any action, it is crucial that the school has the correct information regarding the crisis. Therefore it is important that senior management and involved staff gather to establish the facts – this may involve contacting Hospitals, Gardaí, Emergency / Medical Services, Parents/Guardians, etc.

3. Senior Management to Convene a Meeting of the Critical Incident Management Team

Once the facts of the crisis have been established, a meeting of available members of the Critical Incident Team should be called. This group will need to agree an immediate plan of action, which may involve:

- Informing staff and students – where feasible all staff should be informed in the first instance.
- Contacting Parents/Guardians
- Visiting families most intimately touched by the crisis
- Organising a school assembly
- Liaising with relevant support groups – Counsellors, HSE, NEPS, DES, etc.
- Agreeing a factual and sensitive statement with regard to the crisis – with a view to dispelling rumours while not adding to the distress of those involved or invading their privacy.
- Assigning tasks to members of the Critical Incident Team as outlined above
- Organising a timetable for the school to respond to the crisis – wherever possible adhering to normal timetables and routines – while avoiding any signs of insensitivity to those touched most intimately by the crisis.
- Where a funeral is involved and the school proposes to be involved in the funeral in some way, it will be necessary to liaise with the bereaved family regarding any such involvement; it should not be automatically assumed that the family will be happy to go along with whatever the school decides. Indeed, any public actions on the part of the school at the time of any such a bereavement should be discussed with the bereaved or their representatives before being embarked upon.
- Organising a staff meeting and deciding whether or not an outside professional will be invited to that meeting. Where students are going to be in the school, it is critical that appropriate supervision be put in a place for all students whose teachers or supervisors may be involved in meetings.

4. Staff Meeting

All staff (including support staff) should be invited to the meeting. The following matters should be addressed by the meeting.

- A sensitive account of the facts as known, having regard for the privacy of those involved in the incident. Information needs to be provided on a need-to-know basis.
- The views and feelings of staff.
- How, by whom and in what setting students and other members of the school community should be informed of the incident.
- An outline of the timetable that the Critical Incident Team has drawn up for responding to the crisis – the timetable may, if necessary and feasible, be amended at this meeting.
- Details regarding the outside agencies that have been contacted and the support programme that will be put in place for staff, students and other members of the school community.
- Procedure for identifying vulnerable students.

5. Informing Students

It is important that all those needing to be informed of the incident receive the necessary information as soon as is practicable. In the course of preparing to inform students, the following matters should be taken in to account.

- It will be helpful if a common statement is agreed before students are informed.
- Consideration should be given to providing those delegated the task of informing students with an agreed script. But, of course, each person will have his/her own way of relating to his/her group of students.
- If at all possible, all students should be told at the same time in class groups no larger than normal class size.
- The ideal person to inform a group of students is someone who knows them well and has their trust. Where a member of staff indicates that he/she would be uncomfortable undertaking the task of informing a group of students, his/her view should be respected.
- Indeed, where a member of staff feels, for whatever reason, that he/she is unable to be involved in the school's direct response to a serious trauma, he/she should be allowed to opt out readily.
- Clear unambiguous information (the facts as they are known) will reduce the spread of rumour. However, it is important to recognise that everyone does not have to be given full details of the event. Again, information needs to be provided on a need-to-know basis.
- Details of a critical incident will obviously need to be communicated to a group of students in a sensitive manner and those informing a group of students should check the list of those they are informing carefully and note if there are any students in the group who are likely to be more seriously affected by the information than others.
- Those informing students of the details of the incident should spend a reasonable amount of time with the students to allow them to react to news of the incident.

- Where news of the death of a member of the school community is being communicated to students, it should be acknowledged that young and old will all find it difficult to cope with the sad news and that support will be provided through the Guidance Counsellors, NEPS and other support services.
- The statement should highlight the support that will be available to students in respect of the incident – both in the immediate and longer term.
- Where a clear plan of action has been agreed in respect of the incident this should be conveyed to the students. Where a plan is in the process of being prepared the students should also be advised of this and of the time/date that they may expect to be advised of the details of such a plan.
- In the case of a suspected suicide, great care should be taken not to use the term “suicide” until it has been established categorically that the death was as a result of suicide. Even then, it is important to respect the privacy and sensitivity of the deceased’s family and friends.

6. Where an Accident has occurred on a School Activity / Trip

Different situations will call for different responses but the following points should be considered.

- The preparation of a clear statement to assist those contacting the relatives of those who have been injured or affected by the incident.
- It is preferable to have a group of people involved so that all concerned are informed in or around the same time.
- Those contacted should be offered as much practical help as possible – transport, phone numbers, relevant contact persons and other resources
- Those contacting the most affected by the incident should check to see if the contacted are on their own and therefore in need of support.
- Ideally, the most seriously affected should be spoken to face to face rather than by phone.
- The communication should contain some element which allows the person conveying it to check that it has been fully understood.

7. Liaising with the Press

It is important that the school plan for the distinct possibility that the media will enquire about the incident, by nominating one person only to act as the spokesperson. In preparing a press statement the following issues need to be considered.

- Priority should be given to the sensitivities and needs of those affected directly by the incident.
- Other than where it is manifestly in the interest of those affected by the incident, the names, addresses and phone numbers of those affected by the crisis should not be provided to the media.
- Statements should be confined to the facts as known and conjecture should be avoided –other than where it is manifestly in the interests of those affected to speculate on what may have happened.

- Give some thought, in advance, to the kinds of question that the media are likely to ask. Where possible and practical, seek the advice of someone who has experience in dealing with the media prior to talking to the media.
- Understand that the media are not necessarily the enemy. Reporters also have a job to do and the public is entitled to information that neither impinges on the privacy of those affected by the incident nor exacerbates the incident.
- Do not feel that you have to answer a question from a reporter simply because it is asked. Where there is good reason for not answering a question, the reporter should be informed politely that you do wish to answer it.
- There are two ways in which the media may be spoken to – on the record and off the record. When a matter is put on the record, you are essentially giving the journalist the right to report what you say. On the other hand, if you speak off the record to a reporter, you are not giving them the right to report what you say. It may be a good idea to, at the outset, talk to the reporter off the record and then only go on the record when you are clear on what you are happy to see reported in the media. Indeed, before initiating any discussion with a reporter, it may be prudent to clarify the issue of ‘off the record’ and ‘on the record’.
- Agree a specific time and place for media briefings – either on a once-off or on-going basis.
- A Press Statement should be simple and brief. It should, where appropriate, express the sorrow of the entire school community at the sudden death of one of their members and it should extend sympathy to the bereaved family. Again, other than where there is a clear need to do otherwise, the statement should be adhered to –and not elaborated on – in all communications with the media and it should be familiar to every member of the school staff.

8. Others to be informed

Others will need to be informed of the incident in due course.

- **Chairperson of the Board of Management:** As soon as is practical, the Chairperson of the Board of Management should be informed and it will be the responsibility of the Chairperson to decide whether an emergency meeting of the Board is necessary. Whether or not to close the school will depend on the judgment of the Chairperson and the Principal. Should it be decided to close the school, it is advisable to do so ONLY after informing the students both of the details of the incident and of the routine that the school will follow over the coming days.
- **Parent Body:** As soon as is practical, all parents should be informed in writing of all relevant details of the incident-again on a need-to-know basis. The correspondence to parents should also provide clear information in respect of the following: how the school proposes to respond to the incident in the short, medium and long term, and how parents may assist both their own daughters and other students in recovering from any trauma that the incident may have caused them.
- **School Insurers:** Some incidents may require the school to inform their insurers.

Summary of Actions and Roles Assigned:

Short Term Actions: First Day	
Task	Assigned Person
Gather accurate information: Who, what, where, when?	Principal, Deputy Principals and Care Team
Contact appropriate agencies	Deputy Principal: Gemma E. Kiernan
Convene a CMIT Meeting	Principal: Ms. Jacqueline Maher
Arrange supervision of students	Deputy Principal: Ms. Celine Nulty
Hold staff meeting	Principal: Ms. Jacqueline Maher
Agree schedule for the day	All Staff
Inform Parents/Guardians	Principal, Deputy Principals
Inform students – (close friends and students with learning difficulties to be told separately)	Principal, Deputy Principals, Care Team, Staff Members on CIMT
Compile a list of vulnerable students	Care Team and Members on CIMT
Make contact with the bereaved family	Principal: Ms. Jacqueline Maher
Prepare and agree media statement and deal with media	Principal: Ms. Jacqueline Maher
Hold end of day staff debriefing	Principal: Ms. Jacqueline Maher

Medium Term Actions: 24-72 hours	
Task	Assigned Person
Convene a meeting of the CIMT to review the events of day 1	Team Leader
Meet external agencies	Principal, Deputy Principals and Care Team
Meet whole staff	Principal and Deputy Principals
Arrange support for individuals, groups, parents, students and teachers	Deputy Principals, Care Team and Staff Members on CIMT
Plan the re-integration of staff and students	Principal and Deputy Principals
Plan visit to bereaved families	Principal and Deputy Principals
Plan visits to injured	Principal and Deputy Principals
Liaise with families regarding funeral arrangements, attendance and participation at funeral service	Principal: Jacqueline Maher
Make decisions about school closures	Board of Management

Long Term Actions: Beyond 72 hours	
Task	Assigned Person
Monitor students for continuing signs of stress	Class teachers
Liaise with agencies regarding referrals	Deputy Principals and Guidance Counsellor
Plan for the return of bereaved student(s)	Principal, Deputy Principals, Guidance Counsellor and Year Heads
Evaluate response to incident and amend Critical Incident Plan appropriately	Critical Incident Team/Staff/Board of Management
Inform new staff	Deputy Principals
Decide on appropriate way to deal with anniversaries	Board of Management/Staff/Parents and Students

Confidentiality and good name considerations

The management and staff of Scoil Mhuire have 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. The members of the school staff will bear this in mind, and will seek to ensure that students do so also. For instance, the term ‘suicide’ will not be used unless there is confirmed information that death was due to suicide, *and* that the family involved consents to its use. The phrases ‘tragic death’ or ‘sudden death’ may be used instead. Similarly, the word ‘murder’ should not be used until it is legally established that a murder was committed. The term ‘violent death’ may be used instead.

Critical incident rooms:

In the event of a critical incident,

- *The Staff room* will be the main room used to meet the staff,
- *The Gym and the Study Hall* will be used for meetings with students,
- *Board Room* for parents,
- *Meeting Room* for press,
- *Guidance Office* for individual sessions with students
- *Deputy Principal and Year Head Offices* for other visitors
- *Oratory* for a “quiet” space for students

Critical Incident Debriefing

As soon as is practicable after the core elements of the crisis (critical incident) have ended, the school will take every reasonable step to provide all members of the school community, who were most deeply affected by the incident/crisis, with an opportunity to participate in a critical incident debriefing programme. Furthermore, the school will seek to persuade those who may be reticent about taking part in such a programme of the advantages of taking part in it.

Consultation and communication regarding the plan

The relevant staff was consulted and their views sought in the preparation of this policy and plan. Each member of the critical incident management team has a personal copy.

Parent representatives were also consulted and asked for their comments.

All new and temporary staff will be informed of the details of the plan by the Deputy Principal

The plan will be updated annually.

Conclusion:

While it is hoped that the this policy will be of assistance in the event of a crisis occurring in our school community, it is nevertheless important to recognise that this policy cannot replace the most vital qualities needed in dealing with such personal issues as suicide, bereavement and loss – the sensitivity, care and compassion we offer to one another and to our students on a daily basis.

Signed:

Date: Feb 2017

Review Date: Feb 2019

EMERGENCY CONTACT LIST

AGENCY		CONTACT NUMBERS
Gardai	Trim	046 94 31222
Ambulance		999
Hospital	Navan Blanchardstown Drogheda	046 90 21210 01 6465000 041 9837601
Fire Brigade	Trim	999
N.E.P.S. Psychologist	Navan	046 90 93310
Parochial House	Trim	046 94 31251
D.E.S.	Athlone	09064 74621
HSE/Community Care Team Siobhan McArdle (General Manager)	County Clinic/Navan	046 90 21595
Boyne Community School	Trim	046 94 81655
Church of Ireland St Patrick`s Deanery St Loman`s Street Trim		046 94 36698
Employee Assistance Service (EAS)		1800 411 057