Critical Incident Management Policy and Guidance

Policy Date: March 2024

<u>INTRODUCTION</u>

At Milltown Primary School we believe that the safety, welfare and personal development of everyone in the school is of paramount importance and we strive to create a caring and supportive ethos and to respond to the needs of our pupils through our interaction with them in the classroom and beyond. This supportive community is an important pre-requisite for helping everyone - staff and pupils - to cope and feel valued at a time of great stress, such as a critical incident, which exerts enormous pressures on individuals and the whole school community. The resulting wave of emotion is intense and difficult to deal with and can be over-whelming.

Our policy is based on the guidance provided by Department of Education: iMatter, Every School a Good School: A Guide to Managing Critical Incident in Schools and this will form the basis of our response to a critical incident.

Definition

A critical incident may be defined as "*any sudden and unexpected incident or sequence of events which causes trauma within a school community and which overwhelms the normal coping mechanisms of that school*" (iMatter Every School a Good School: A Guide to Managing Critical Incident in Schools).

Critical incidents may involve one or more pupils or staff members, or members of our local community and the effects can be wide-ranging.

Types of incidents might include:
- Sudden death of a member of the school community through accident, violence, suspected suicide or other unexpected death
- Disappearance of a member of the school community
- Death or injury of a pupil or staff member on a school outing
- Severe injury to pupil or staff member as a result of road traffic accident
- Serious assault on pupils or staff member in school
- A violent/disturbed intrusion into the school during the school day
- An accident/tragedy/civil disturbance in the wider community
- Serious damage to the school building through fire, flood, vandalism, etc.
- Civil disturbance in local community

- Pupil with contagious illness
- Immediate evacuation of the school with no likelihood of return for a number of hours.

AIMS

This policy aims to provide the guidance necessary for a co-ordinated, effective response to a critical incident so as to assist pupils, staff and families to cope with, and recover from, the emotional fall-out thus enabling a sooner return to normality while continuing to be alert to the vulnerability of all concerned.

Objectives
1. To recognise which incidents may be critical for the school community.
2. To respond to a critical incident in an informed manner.
3. To identify roles and responsibilities.
4. To create a positive, open, communicative climate where the needs of staff and pupils are met in critical incident situations.
5. To create a safe school environment whereby the physical, social and emotional health of pupils and staff is prioritised.
6. To promote active coping skills within the curriculum; and
7. To establish positive working relationships and dialogue with outside agencies, thus enabling full and effective collaboration in the event of a critical incident.
8. To monitor and review the policy/management plan for dealing with emergencies.

CRITICAL INCIDENT MANAGEMENT

It is recognised that no two incidents are alike. Our school's response to any critical incident will differ according to the nature of the incident and the specific circumstances pertaining to it. Critical Incident Management can be divided into three main sections - 'Before the Event',' During the Event', and 'After the Event'.

1) BEFORE THE EVENT

Prepare for critical incidents:

- Assess the school's vulnerability to a critical incident situation.
- Establish a Critical Incident Management Team to review procedures and establish strategies for coping with a critical incident.
- Develop a Critical Incident Management Plan.
- Review plans with staff members.

Critical Incident Management Team

Members of this team are as listed in the Critical Incident Management Record. The Principal, and in her absence the most senior teacher, will lead the school response, assisted by another member of staff as a deputy. There will be joint responsibility for recording the response and ensuring that essential tasks get done.

The team comprises of:

- Mrs H Wright- Principal   - KS2
- Mrs C Wilson/Mrs D Johnston   - KS1
- Mrs J Hanvey   - FS
- Mrs K Patterson   - Clerical Officer

The Chair of our Board of Governors, Mr A Mateer, will be contacted immediately in the event of a Critical Incident occurring. (Appendix 5 – Key contacts)

All members of the team will be assigned tasks and roles within the school's response plan to a critical incident.

If an incident occurs within the school day, the Critical Incident team will meet in the Staff room.

If an incident occurs outside of the school day, the Critical Incident team will meet in Milltown Primary School.

Critical Incident Management Plan

In the event of the occurrence of a critical incident, we will follow our Critical Incident Management Plan as attached. The Critical Incident Management Record (Initial Report and Running Records – Appendix 3) will guide that response and also serve as a record of events and action taken (including reasons for action, where appropriate).

All information recorded as part of a critical incident is treated as confidential and shared and stored in accordance with Data Protection and Safeguarding/Child Protection procedures.

Guidelines for Managing a Critical Incident

In School

- The Principal will take charge of the school's response and, in her absence, the members of the CIMT will take charge.
- The school office will be the central liaison point.
- The Principal will go the scene.
- The CIMT will implement the agreed plan of action.
- If evacuation of the school is necessary, every member of staff should follow the school's evacuation procedures.
- The Principal will inform the Chair of the Board of Governors and prepare a statement.
- The Principal will contact EA Southern Region if the situation warrants it.
- The Principal will brief all staff.

- ### Out of School
- The Principal will contact emergency services
- The Principal will arrange to notify all staff
- The CIMT will implement the agreed plan of action.
- The Principal will inform the Chair of the Board of Governors and prepare a statement.
- The Principal will contact EA Southern Region if the situation warrants it.
- The Principal will brief all staff using prepared statement.

Important tasks include:

1 The Principal will take charge of the school's response and in her absence the members of the CIMT will take charge.
2 The school office will be the central liaison point.
3 Phone calls and enquiries will be managed appropriately
4 The principal/deputy will brief and debrief staff
5 Class teachers will inform and support pupils (including vulnerable pupils and those who are off-site/absent) (using prepared statement)

6   Communication with parents will be maintained (using prepared factual statement)

7   The Principal will conduct Media liaison, if appropriate (prepared statement in consultation with EA Communications Officer)

8   Support for staff will be arranged.

9   A temporary recovery room/quiet space will be established

10   Liaison with external agencies will be undertaken where appropriate.

During an incident there will be a staffed information point in an easily accessible area to facilitate the exchange of accurate and relevant communication. 'Front line' staff will be supported during a critical incident to ensure that they have adequate breaks, that their classes are covered and that they are helped to cope with the event.

The Critical Incident Management Team will seek the assistance of the EA Critical Incident Response Team, relevant personnel within our Health and Social Care Trust and any other key agencies as appropriate.

Supporting Agencies

It is our intention to work alongside external agencies, including the EA's Critical Incident Response Team, to ensure that our response is proportionate and appropriate. This includes:

- Behaviour Support Team
- Communications
- Educational Psychology
- Education Welfare
- Health & Safety
- Pupil Personal Development Service
- Staff Welfare

Teaching and support staff, in tandem with support agencies, have an important role to play in maintaining a purposeful and supportive environment while sensitively helping restore harmony and routine back to the lives of young people and the whole school community.

We are aware that, during a critical incident, offers of help and support will come from many sources, some welcome and part of our planned response, and others which, though well intentioned, may only serve to complicate that response. Careful consideration will be given to the benefits to be gained for our school community of accepting help from any source, other than those which had been planned for. All contact with pupils from any agency or individuals will be governed by current child protection legislation and guidance for schools.

MEDIA PROCEDURES

Information relating to the critical incident will be communicated to the school and local community. Consistency in relation to the information communicated is essential.

- The Principal will deal with all information requests from the community or media before its release:
  - It may be necessary to check with the police, ambulance, fire and rescue service, EA Communications Officer, as appropriate, before making a statement.
  - 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.
- The Principal is the only person who should release any information to the media (including staff use of

social media).
- The Principal will make any public statements.
- For child protection reasons and to ensure that 'normal' school life is disrupted as little as possible, the news media will not be permitted on school property without the approval of the Principal. (The news media does not have legal access to school property without such consent. This applies to television, radio, print media and photographers.)

STAFF REVIEW
The Critical Incident Plans have been reviewed and agreed with all staff.

2) *DURING THE EVENT - IMPLEMENTING THE CRITICAL INCIDENT MANAGEMENT STRATEGY DURING THE EVENT*

- Follow established critical incident plan
- Communicate accurately, timely and on an on-going basis
  - Be mindful that in certain circumstances there may be a police investigation into an incident. There is a potential that shared information could form part of the evidence. The school's Critical Incident Management Team will liaise with the police for further guidance, if necessary.
- Critical incident team members may be relieved some of their normal school duties to focus on the incident.

Immediate Actions for schools following a Critical Incident

Task	Support
1. **Assess the risk and take necessary action** (e.g. school evacuation, first-aid, contact emergency services)	
2. **Gather factual information regarding the incident** • Details of person / people involved • Confirmation of facts from the source – family, Police, hospital	
3. **Initiate the use of the DE Critical Incident Management Guide record**	Appendix 3
4. **Mobilise the school's Critical Incident Management Team**	
5. **Allocate tasks to the school's Critical Incident Management Team** • Identify a school Critical Incident Co-ordinator • Contact the parents of pupils directly involved in the incident (p.12) • Inform relevant key people and seek support as appropriate e.g. staff, BoG, EA Critical Incident Response Team, Local clergy etc. (telephone tree) • Establish a central information point (school office) • If possible, set up a dedicated phone line • Log calls and enquiries (telephone log) • Log school visitors (visitor log) • Contact impacted family/ies to determine their wishes regarding public announcements and staff / pupil briefing • Prepare statements • Contact with media (support from EA Communications Officer) • Arrange staff support • **Set up recovery room** ○ warm, quiet and equipped with drinks, tissues, comfortable chairs etc.	• Key contact list Appendix 5 • Telephone cascade diagram Appendix 4 • Telephone log • Visitor log • Sample press release statements / advice on media statements & interviews Appendices 15/16

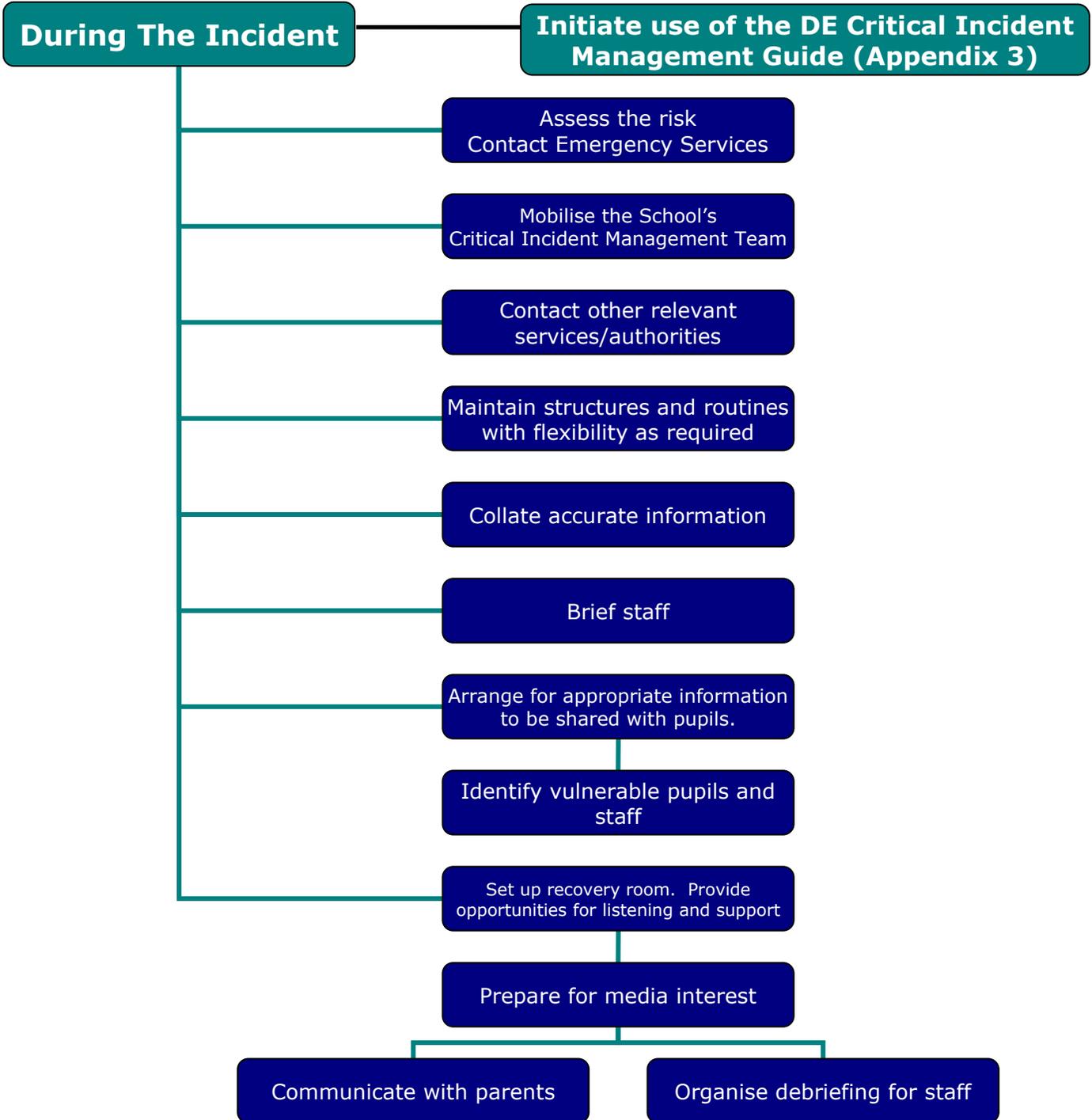|	
6. Arrange staff briefing (when incident is confirmed) • Provide clear factual information and agree pupil briefing content • Advise staff on how to inform and support pupils (in classes / small groups) • Organise teamwork and arrangements (e.g. flexible timetabling, recovery room) • Provide support for staff • Identify vulnerable staff • Inform absent staff • Remind staff regarding confidentiality – media contact and guidelines • Arrange time for debrief session • Maintain **usual structures and routines with flexibility**	iMatter p.8 Appendices 8, 9, 10, 11 • Critical Incident staff leaflet • Inspire Workplaces Support for staff

7. Inform pupils (when incident is confirmed) with accurate and agreed statement
    o Use clear language
    o Provide age-appropriate factual information
    o Be mindful of pupils with SEN / English as an additional language
    o Dispel rumours
    o Offer support
    o Provide assurance regarding updated information
    o Identify vulnerable pupils
    o Inform absent pupils
	iMatter p.9-11
	Appendices 6/7
	• Sample information for pupils
	• Responding to pupils' questions
	• Critical Incident Pupils Leaflet
	Appendix 12

8. Inform all parents o Appropriate form – phone, letter, home visit	iMatter p.12 • Sample letter Appendices 13/14

9. Contact with media (if appropriate)
    o Consult with Communications officer
    o Return media calls
    o Use prepared statement
    o Use measured tone
    o Emphasise school pastoral care support as appropriate
	iMatter p.13
	• Key Contacts list
	• Sample press release statements / advice on media statements & interviews
	Appendices 15/16

10. Debrief staff – end of day session • Thank staff • Advise about self-care • Provide information about the next day arrangements • Allow time to chat / reflect, tea and buns	iMatter p.14
11. Meeting of critical Incident Management Team (End of day session) • Support and debrief • Plan day 2 – morning briefing for staff • Arrange next meeting of team	

DAY 2

Task	Support
1. Record any further information / details since previous day	Appendix 3
2. Maintain central information point	

• Details of person / people involved • Confirmation of facts from the source – family, Police, hospital	
3. Deal with staff cover/flexible timetable as appropriate	
4. Allocate appropriate rooms as necessary	
6. Arrange staff briefing (morning session) • Practical arrangements • Support for pupils • Self-care • Arrange time for debrief session • Maintain **usual structures and routines with flexibility**	
7. Pupils • Provide further age-appropriate factual information (as appropriate), including for absent pupils • Show care and support • Provide comforting routine and predictability • Allow pupils some involvement/outlet e.g. cards/drawings/poems/ceremonies • Recovery room • Refer vulnerable pupils for further action **Record separately details of action taken or follow up action required**	
8. Parents • Provide further information (as appropriate) e.g. letter/meeting etc.	

9. Consideration of memorial service
    o Time/date
    o Staff involved
    o Information to parents
	iMatter p.18

10. Debrief staff – end of Day 2 session • Thank staff • Advise of on-going practical arrangements • Longer term monitoring of pupils who may be at risk • More detailed self-care advice • Time to chat / reflect, tea and buns	

11. Meeting of critical Incident Management Team (End of day 2)
• Support and debrief team
• Plan day 3 – morning briefing, staff cover etc. if required
• Discuss need for longer term actions, including:
  - Memorials, services and ceremonies (e.g. memory books, art work, school event etc.)
  - Re-establishment of feelings of safety and predictability among school community
  - On-going support for pupils' emotional coping (e.g. circle time, PDMU)
  - School support for contact with families affected by incident
  - On-going monitoring of children who may be having difficulties – providing support and referring on as necessary
  - On-going support for staff directly involved and those most affected	

DURING THE EVENT OVERVIEW

Immediate Actions Following a Critical Incident

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│  During The Incident    │────────────────────│ Initiate use of the DE Critical  │
└─────────────────────────┘                    │ Incident Management Guide        │
                                                │ (Appendix 3)                     │
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Assess the risk
Contact Emergency Services

Mobilise the School's
Critical Incident Management Team

Contact other relevant
services/authorities

Maintain structures and routines
with flexibility as required

Collate accurate information

Brief staff

Arrange for appropriate information
to be shared with pupils.

Identify vulnerable pupils and
staff

Set up recovery room. Provide
opportunities for listening and support

Prepare for media interest

Communicate with parents

Organise debriefing for staff

3. *AFTER THE EVENT*

After an event, important work is required to help the school and the broader community cope with and recover from a critical incident. The restoration of harmony and return to routine require careful and sensitive planning, timing and implementation. Alongside the maintenance of a purposeful and supportive environment will be the need for a high level of staff vigilance for pupils' emotional wellbeing and the monitoring of those individuals with on-going difficulties. Reactions and emotions may not surface for months, even years following the event. Painful feelings and reactions can be triggered by seemingly innocuous events.

The school will make arrangements to:

Task	Support

1. Support Pupils & Monitor arrangements
• Arrange to support pupils returning to school, providing as much continuity as possible e.g.
  - discuss plans with pupil's family
  - arrange support from school friends on return to school
  - plan support for emotional needs e.g. 'time out' when distressed
• Maintain on-going vigilance and identification of those with delayed or complicated grief reactions and who may be 'at risk'
• Liaise with external agencies for appropriate guidance
• When a pupil moves school and has been subjected to a trauma, the transferring school will be informed.
	iMatter p.16
	• Pupils returning to school after bereavement – info for teachers
	• Record of those affected by bereavement
	• Resources and Support Services
	Appendix 3
	Appendices 17-20

2. Support Bereaved Families
• Support family members at school as they adjust to their loss
• Consult sensitively with the family regarding:
  - mementos of their child's involvement in the school
  - return of personal belongings	

3. Support Staff & Monitor arrangements • Be aware of delayed reactions • Direct staff to sources of support	Appendix 3
4. Consider memorials / commemorations • Consider e.g. a special assembly as a means of thanksgiving and farewell • Always take into consideration the wishes of the bereaved family • Be mindful that additional support may be required at significant dates such as anniversaries / celebrations / any long-term legal processes, e.g. a court case or an inquest/ possible media interest / related public events which may be unsettling for the school community.	
5. Review the school's Critical Incident Management Plan • Evaluate the actual cause of the critical incident and take necessary steps to prevent a recurrence, if possible; • Review and evaluate the critical incident management plan and procedures to determine if modifications are needed in the event of a similar crisis.	iMatter p.18 Appendix 3