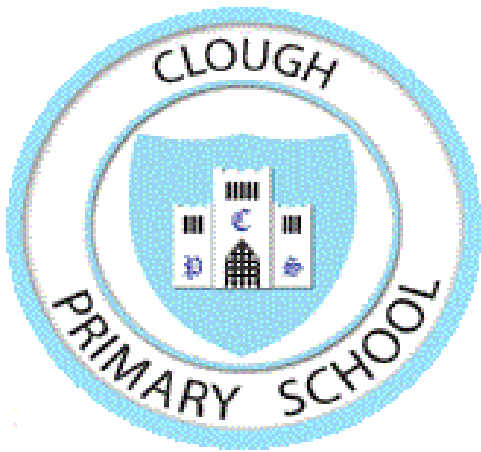


CLOUGH PRIMARY SCHOOL AND NURSERY UNIT

CRITICAL INCIDENTS POLICY



Signed:

Date: June 2023

Review Date: June 2026

Rationale:

A critical incident may be defined as any sudden or unexpected incident or sequence of events which causes trauma within a school community and which overwhelms the normal coping mechanisms of the school (*ESAGS – A guide to Managing Critical Incidents*).

Critical incidents may occur in school or out of school, but both types can have a major impact on staff and students. An incident might be designated as critical where the result is likely to be serious disruption to the running of the school, or where there is likely to be significant public and/or media attention on the school.

There can, of course, be no rigid formula for responding to incidents, but broadly speaking, it has been assumed that where damage to premises is the focus, the EA will take the leading role in managing the crisis in collaboration with the school and other agencies. Where the crisis is related to people, such as in the event of a death or serious injury, the assumption is that the school is likely to take the lead, with the support of the EA, as necessary.

Aims:

- To create a safe, secure environment for all the children and adults within the school community.
- To ensure that any incident occurring in school is dealt with in an efficient and effective manner.
- To ensure minimum disruption and upset to the school community.

Objectives:

- To have clear procedures in place for a critical incident with which all school personnel and parents are familiar. To have clearly defined roles for individuals, including a Critical Incident Management Team, which are known to all.
- To minimise the risk of serious injury or permanent harm, physical or emotional and provide adequate support in the aftermath of any incident.
- To ensure that the school responds in a sensitive, consistent and effective manner which reduces confusion, panic and extreme emotion.
- To create and effectively use links with relevant outside agencies.
- To review procedures and update roles annually in August, as part of child protection training.

Preventative and Precautionary Measures

Whilst no amount of planning can totally prevent accidents and problems occurring, it is hoped that some can be prevented and the effects of others minimised by taking sensible precautionary measures. It is expected that:

- All staff and pupils should be familiar with the school's routines for fire and the evacuation of the school building on hearing the fire alarm.
- All staff should be familiar with the routines and procedures for dealing with emergencies (as detailed in this Policy).
- All staff and pupils should be familiar with the school's security procedures.
- All staff organising school trips and visits follow the school policy guidelines.
- All staff are aware of pupils with medical needs or health problems.
- All staff are aware that they should assess associated risks to children before carrying out a curriculum or other activity.
- All staff are aware that they are responsible for assessing risks to themselves before undertaking an activity.

In the event of such an incident the priorities of those adults in charge of the school or trip at the time must be able to:

- Save life
- Minimise personal injury
- Safeguard the interests of pupils and staff
- Minimise loss and to return to normal working quickly

Examples of incidents which could affect a school:

- Sudden death of a pupil or member of staff
- Disappearance of a pupil or member of staff
- 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 pupil 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
- Pupil with contagious illness
- Immediate evacuation of the school with no likelihood of return for a number of hours.

Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT)

A central component of this policy is the identification of the composition, roles and responsibilities of the team. The role of the team is to review and direct the handling of the incident and the response and recovery process in order to:

- Ensure the safety and security of students, staff, other users of the premises and visitors
- Minimise the loss to the school in physical, human and financial terms
- Manage an incident to minimise disruption to regular operations
- Liaise with appropriate agencies, including the media.

The Critical Incident Management Team will comprise the following personnel:

- **Principal** – Mr I Hutchinson. Key Member. He is the first point of contact and is responsible for liaising with all parties concerned and affected.
- **Chair of Governors** – Mrs Tracy Douds
- **The school's designated Child Protection Officer** – Mrs J Overend. Mrs Campbell will deputise for Mr Hutchinson in the event of his absence from school.
- **Vice Chair of Governors** – Rev R Watt
- **Building Supervisor** – Mrs H Swann
- **School Clerical Officer** – Mrs J Wylie. Principal will brief officer on information to be released. They are to keep records of all phone calls made and information given.

The Critical Incident Management Team will, dependent upon the nature of the incident itself, be concerned with any of the following issues:

- Adequate assessment of hazards and situations which may require emergency action
- Analysis of requirements to address these hazards; establishment of liaison with all relevant emergency services; development of an effective management plan
- Dissemination of planned procedures
- Organisation of practice drills to test the plan
- Regular review of this plan
- Assisting the Principal with all aspects of the implementation of the plan
- Arranging staff development activities, where necessary.

Practice Within School

Individual class teachers have an important role to play in managing critical incidents and may well be the best people to deal with the pupils in their classes. The main role of specialist agencies is one of support, empowerment and to support students who cannot be helped by the teachers within the school alone. In times of crisis, teachers must react as they feel is appropriate and there can be no easy formula for dealing with critical incidents but by ensuring good communication within school crisis may be managed more effectively. By outlining the appropriate actions to be taken in the event of a critical incident, the school aims to reduce the effect.

Managing a Critical Incident

1. The Principal must be informed of any critical incident as soon as possible.
2. As soon as an incident is confirmed, the Critical Incident Management Team will meet to decide strategies in the Principal's Office (Central Information Point).
3. The rest of the staff will be informed as soon as possible, preferably at a specially convened staff meeting.
4. All staff should share the same information.
5. Students will be told information simply and sensitively, without fabrication, preferably in smaller group situations. E.g. siblings, close friends, class groups etc

6. The school will try, as far as possible, to keep to the normal routine.

The school's reaction to a critical incident can be divided into the following categories:

- a) Immediate action
- b) Short term action
- c) Medium term action
- d) Longer term action

The following is guidance on what may be appropriate at each stage. Actions to be taken will be made by the CIMT and will depend on the nature of the incident.

(a) Immediate Action – i.e. within hours of the incident occurring

- Obtain and collate information relating to the incident – uncertainty breeds rumour and accurate information is essential.
- Gather and brief the CIMT (Critical Information Management Team) – brief the whole staff team, allocate roles and responsibilities.
- Trigger support from the EA and other contacts on emergency list, establish clearly who is going to contact whom.
- Set up an incident management room and dedicated phone line – to deal with calls from anxious parents etc. CIMT should agree a factual statement and avoid speculation.
- Contact families affected – must be done quickly and with sensitivity. Consistency of information is vital. It may be appropriate for families to come to school and immediate emotional support could be a possibility.
- Make arrangements to inform other parents – may need to take advice from EA, especially if there is the possibility of legal liability. CIMT may wish to send a letter to parents, or prepare a leaflet. (Initial information by school text if appropriate).
- Inform teaching and other school staff – staff need to be cautioned about talking to the media or responding to questions from reporters. It is vital that all staff in contact with pupils are kept well informed and feel secure in handling comments or questions from pupils.
- Inform pupils – can be done in small or large groups depending on which is most appropriate. Care needs to be exercised to protect both children and adults closely involved in the incident. It is important that children receive a consistent account of the incident allowing for differences in their ability to understand.
- Encourage people involved to talk – the incident may need to be discussed before children go home for the day, for both pupils and adults.
- Deal with the media – most important to seek advice from EA before agreeing to speak or be interviewed by the media. If this is not an option, then an agreed text for release should be prepared by the CIMT and a designated spokesperson briefed and prepared to respond on the school's behalf.
- Devise a plan for handling the reactions and feelings of people affected – the most common reactions will include denial, distress, guilt, anger and helplessness. CIMT need to consider outside professionals to support and debrief staff and pupils affected by the incident. Those providing support also need support. At this point the CIMT will need to plan their short term reaction to the incident.

(b) Short Term Action – The Next Stage

- Reunion of children with their families – especially where the incident occurs outside the school. Mostly children will need to be brought home, but sometimes parents and families need to visit the scene of the incident to understand how to deal with repercussions in terms of children's fears etc.

- Managing staff – support needs organising for all staff, preferably from within the school, but using outside agencies if appropriate. Staff monitoring should be a priority, even members of the CIMT. If a crisis persists over many hours, staff become tired, weary and upset and this affects their powers to make sensible decisions.
- Encourage pupils to talk – activate strategies for enabling young people to talk about the incident, and their feelings, using outside agencies if appropriate. Staff will need briefing about ways to help the children affected by the incident, and how to identify patterns of behaviour etc. This may have implications for the wider curriculum i.e. training in bereavement counselling for staff, provision of a range of books, PDMU discussions etc.
- Debriefing meeting – it may be appropriate to hold a debriefing meeting for staff, children and parents to:
 - clarify what has happened
 - allow for sharing reactions
 - reassure people that reactions are normal
 - mobilise resources e.g. parental support groups

An experienced person, possibly from outside the school community, should lead this meeting.

- Formal and informal recognition of rituals – it is important to remember to express sympathy to families of the hurt or bereaved. Visits to children/staff in hospital. Pupils may wish to send cards and letters. The school may also need to consider attendance at funerals, and/or the desirability of holding special assemblies or memorial services. Anniversaries are also key times when support and sensitivity are required.
- Re-establishing routines – every attempt should be made to provide continuity for the children. The return to school of staff or pupils directly affected by the crisis will need to be managed carefully and with sensitivity but the re-establishment of routine is an important stage in emotional recovery.

(c) Medium Term Action

- Return to school for staff or pupils after long absence – reintegration will need to be planned carefully, and may involve home visits prior to return, part time attendance initially, reducing workloads, putting in place mentoring process etc.
- Consulting professionals – consideration should be given to consulting the Educational Psychology Service for support and guidance, especially to help those showing unusual or prolonged reaction to the incident.
- Keeping parents informed – it may be appropriate to produce a leaflet for parents giving guidance on the possible delayed reactions of pupils to an incident and making suggestions to help them deal with these.
- Support for staff – ongoing monitoring and support for staff is a major consideration. CIMT especially will not be immune to reaction from their ordeal.

(d) Long Term Action

- Monitoring the vulnerable – the effects of a crisis can reverberate for years, and it is especially important that new staff and pupils are briefed in the school's history to help them understand and deal with potential repercussions especially at anniversary times.
- Marking anniversaries – these difficult times need to be treated with sensitivity. Some suggestions for schools to mark anniversaries are by annual concerts, memorial services, memorial prize giving ceremonies, memorial gardens etc.
- Legal processes – the length of time taken over some legal processes can prolong the recovery process following a critical incident. CIMT may need to plan for this especially where staff may be involved attending legal processes, and facing extended emotional trauma.

- Curriculum implications – it may be appropriate to schedule INSET training for staff in loss counselling, bereavement etc.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES IN A CRITICAL INCIDENT

Investigate / Ensure Safety	Mr Hutchinson or most senior member of staff present
Administer First Aid	Mr I Hutchinson and Mrs Overend
Contact Emergency Services	Mrs Wylie or any other member of staff
Contact BOG and EA	Mr Hutchinson
Contact parents	Whole team: Principal, Senior management Team, Secretary or any teacher/classroom assistant using Seesaw service if appropriate
Inform and liaise with staff	Mr Hutchinson / Senior Management Team
Reassure children	All staff especially class teacher
Contact support services	Mr Hutchinson / Senior Management Team
Official agencies Liaise with media	Principal Principal via EA

CONTACT NUMBERS

Police / Fire / Ambulance		999
Chair of BOG	Mrs Tracy Douds	07751309785
EA Critical Incident Line		028 3751 2515
EA Property Services/ Health and Safety		028 2566 1333
Psychology Service		028 2566 1298
Social Services	Gateway Slemish Children's Services, Ballymena Regional Emergency Social Work service (evenings & weekends)	0300 1234 333 028 2563 5640 028 9504 9999
Local Hospitals	Antrim RVH - Children	028 9074 1211 9063 6621 / 9063 3398
Local Clergy	Rev Roland Watt Rev David McMillan Rev Alistair McCracken	07751 000513 / 2568 5090 07955 379877 07923 349273
Educational Welfare		028 2564 5687
Children and Young People's Services, EA		028 2566 1499
Schools Branch, EA		028 9448 2213