

Corpus Christi National School **Critical Incident Policy**



Corpus Christi National School is a primary school under the patronage of the Catholic Archbishop of Dublin. It operates according to the rules for national schools, laid down by the Department of Education and Science. As outlined in the school mission statement, *'Corpus Christi is a Catholic Primary school in which we strive to learn together in a happy and safe environment, where everyone is valued, respected and encouraged to do their best.'*

As a Catholic school, we have the responsibility to ensure that:

- Our duty of care to pupils and staff is fulfilled to the best of our ability and in line with statutory responsibilities.
- Our practices reflect our belief in our Catholic community and are inspired by the Gospel values of care, respect, dignity compassion, love and forgiveness.
- The physical, emotional and spiritual wellbeing of the school community is safeguarded
- A positive ethos and learning environment is encouraged whereby all pupils, including those with special educational needs, feel welcome and experience a sense of community and belonging
- an emphasis is placed on promoting pupils' participation and active engagement in their learning and in the life of the school
- A commitment is fostered to develop a pupils' academic, social, emotional and independent living skills
- A focus on high aspirations and on improving outcomes for all pupils is maintained

This critical incident policy was initially drawn up by the teaching staff at the school development planning day in December 2008 and forms part of the pastoral care in the school. The Critical Incident Guidelines issued by the Department of Education and those issued by the INTO have been used in the formulation of this policy. This policy was reviewed in 2013, 2020 and in November 2023.

Definition of a Critical Incident

'A critical incident is any incident or sequence of events which overwhelms the normal coping mechanism of the school and disrupts the running of the school.'

Critical incidents may involve pupils, staff, other members of the school or local community. Examples may include:

- A serious accident or tragedy in the school community.
- Death, major illness/outbreak of disease
- Criminal incident
- Serious damage to the school through fire, flooding, vandalism etc
- A physical assault on a pupil or staff member
- The disappearance of a member of the school community

- The death of a member of the school community through sudden death, accident, suicide or illness
- Intrusion into the school
- Unexpected evacuation of the school. (e.g. bomb threat)
- Unauthorized removal of pupil from school or home
- Closure of the school because of infectious diseases
- World events that may affect the student body/ staff.

Introduction

A critical incident may occur at the school or offsite at another location. In some cases, emergency services may have responsibility for dealing with and managing the situation. In others, the incident may be more localized. The Board of Management places no obligation on any staff member to intervene in a critical incident situation if by so doing she/he is placing her/himself or others at risk. Each situation will require a different response. We are mindful that people respond to a critical incident in different ways according to their attitudes, experiences, and beliefs. At all times the Board of Management and the staff of Corpus Christi School have a responsibility to protect the good name and privacy of those involved in a critical incident and will be sensitive to the consequences of any public statement.

The aims of the critical incident plan are as follows;

1. To help staff react quickly and effectively in the event of a critical incident and to maintain control of the situation.
2. To restore the school to normality as soon as possible and to limit the effects of the incident on pupils and staff.

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
- Regular maintenance of school hazards and machinery
- Corridor doors are locked during school time
- Security measures for pupils
- Schoolyard rules (see Code of Behavior)
- School tour procedures (see School Tour Policy)
- Updated contact details for pupils and staff
- Updated contact details for parents/guardians
- Record of pupils who may have specific medical needs

A number of policies also support the psychological safety of the pupils and staff.

- The Child Safeguarding Statement and Risk Assessment
- Social, Personal, and Health Education Programme.
- The Anti-bullying policy.
- The Code of Behaviour and Discipline
- Acceptable Use Policy- Social Media Policy, Remote Learning Policy

External Resources

In the event of a critical incident, the school may contact NEPS, the Irish National Teachers Organisation, and the Catholic Primary School Management Association as necessary to access support. The chaplain to the school is our local parish priest. At the moment this is Monsignor Martin O'Shea. The current Chairperson of the Board of Management is Aidan Savage.

Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT)

The team leader will be the Principal, or in her absence, the Deputy Principal. The members of the team are selected from the In-school leadership team (Appendix 1). The members of the team will meet annually to review and update the policy and plan. All staff members will be given a copy of the policy. There will be an option to co-opt members onto the team if this becomes necessary.

Contact details for parents are kept in the secretary's office. A copy of emergency numbers will be made available in the office and the staffroom.

The types of responses needed in the event of an incident are outlined below. However, as each situation is different, tasks may vary from one incident to another. Critical incident management will affect all staff. Even if not directly involved in the team, staff will be making sure that normal schoolwork continues and will be providing support to pupils and colleagues.

Roles and Responsibilities of the Team.

Team Leader:

- Confirms the event
- Alerts team members to the incident and convenes a meeting of the team
- Clarifies the facts surrounding the incident
- Coordinates and delegates tasks to the team members
- Liaises with the Board of Management, with the Department of Education and Science and with any outside agencies involved as appropriate
- Contacts the Trustees in the event of damage to the building
- In cases of bereavement liaise with the family
- Acts as a spokesperson to the media if necessary
- Ensures provision of ongoing support to pupils and staff
- Decide with the team how the news will be communicated to staff, pupils, and parents
- Ensuring telephone lines are available for important incoming and outgoing calls
- Liaises with the Gardaí/Emergency services
- Maintains contact with relevant outside agencies
- Maintains an up-to-date list of contact numbers for teachers, parents/guardians, external agencies, and support services
- Postvention- provides support to pupils and staff, facilitates appropriate memorial events
- Review plan

Communication Role

- With the Critical Response Team, prepare a public statement
- Organise a designated room to address media promptly

- Ensure telephone lines are free for outgoing and important incoming calls
- Designate mobile numbers for contact
- Liaise with relevant outside support agencies
- Postvention- review the effectiveness of the communication response

Staff Liaison Role:

It is very important that staff is kept informed and feel secure in handling questions and comments from both pupils and parents.

- Briefing and advising staff on the facts as known and noting their feelings and concerns/questions
- Keeping staff updated on developments
- Noting which staff members are missing an update and passing on the information to them
- Provide resource material for staff from the folder
- Liaising with the school chaplain
- Arrange supervision cover for class if necessary
- Maintains a record of staff contact with external agencies
- Agree with staff on how and what information will be given to pupils
- Maintain links with absent staff as necessary

Pupil Liaison Role:

- Gathering information from the class teacher regarding the child's friends, absentees, and anyone who may need to be contacted
- Disseminating information to pupils
- Gathering information from the class teacher/SET regarding the needs of the class or particular students as a result of the incident
- Organizing an assembly/ prayer service or Mass for the school community to congregate
- Alerting teachers other than class teachers to vulnerable students as appropriate
- Provide materials for staff
- Keeping records of pupils seen by external agency staff. e.g. NEPS
- Postvention-provide support to vulnerable students
- Where necessary, monitor the class most affected
- Review and evaluate plan

Chaplaincy Role:

- Visiting the classroom and providing support to the class
- Visiting the staff and providing support
- Conducting the funeral service if appropriate
- Conducting a prayer service/mass with the school community
- Review and evaluate

Family Liaison Role:

- Coordinate contact with family (following contact from Principal)
- Visiting the bereaved family with the team leader

- Arranging meeting for parents if necessary
- Maintaining a record of parents seen by external agencies as appropriate
- Providing appropriate material for parents from the incident folder
- Checking different religious beliefs about death and funeral services if relevant
- Assist with all communication dealing with parents of any student affected by a critical incident
- Postvention- provide support to families affected by the incident
- Involve as appropriate the family in school liturgies/ memorial services
- Review and evaluate

Staff responsibilities

At all times teaching staff have a responsibility to

- Safeguard the welfare of pupils and colleagues
- Control the flow of information by pupils with mobile phones
- Liaise with other staff to ensure the safety of pupils
- Assist in gathering information
- Supervising their own or colleagues' classes
- Assisting in identifying and supporting students at risk or in distress.
- Maintaining normal procedures
- Maintaining confidentiality

Ancillary staff will also have the responsibility to maintain normal procedures. In addition, the school secretary will ensure that the reception office is staffed at all times and that phone lines are available for important incoming and outgoing calls.

Contact Details for Pupils and Staff

Contact details for parents and guardians of all pupils are stored on Aladdin and in the secretary's office. Contact details for all staff members are kept by the Principal and Deputy Principal. A copy is also held on file in the Principal's office. Details for parents, guardians, and staff are updated annually. Parents are asked to inform the school office should their contact details change. A list of emergency numbers is on display in both the principal's and secretary's offices and on the staffroom notice board.

Phone/Email Contacts

In the event of an emergency, the main school line will be kept open for incoming calls only. The phone number for this line is 8379745. The email address for the Principal is ccgns.principal@gmail.com

Dealing with the Media.

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.

Members of the media must report to the reception office, identify themselves, and state their business in the school. Members of the media will not be allowed beyond the reception office 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 and Deputy Principal 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

Some pointers in relation to dealing with the media are included in Appendix 2.

Record Keeping

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. All phone calls will be logged by the school secretary/staff member.

Immediate/Short-term Actions

Every incident will require a different response. A critical incident may occur on or off-site and will consequently require a different response. However, the following will serve as a guide to the types of responses necessary. Evacuate the building if necessary.

- Inform emergency services
- Take emergency action to ensure safety at onsite incidents
- Limit further injury at onsite incidents
- Account for all pupils, personnel, and visitors
- Care for the injured parties
- Gather accurate information
- Inform the Chairperson of the Board of Management
- Inform solicitors and insurance companies as appropriate
- Convene a meeting of the CIMT
- Organise a staff meeting if appropriate
- Organise a timetable for the day ensuring a normal routine is kept where possible
- Inform the staff and update them on any arrangements as necessary
- Contact appropriate agencies and organize support
- Arrange for supervision of pupils
- Inform pupils and parents
- Contact the affected /bereaved family
- Respond to the media
- Report to the health and safety authority if necessary
- Arrange a visit to the affected /bereaved family
- Identify high-risk students
- Designate particular areas for parents, media, friends, etc. to avoid large groups congregating in particular areas, blocking entrances, etc.
- Have regard for different religious traditions and faiths
- Ensure absent staff are kept informed

Medium Term Actions (24-72 hours)

- Meeting of the CIMT
- Review the events of the first 24 hours
- Arrange support for staff /pupils
- Decide on the mechanism for getting feedback from teachers on vulnerable pupils
- If relevant plan visits to the injured

- School closure if appropriate following agreement from the Board of Management
- If relevant, prepare staff/students for attending the funeral
- If appropriate and if agreed by the affected family, involve the pupils or staff in the funeral
- Maintain contact with absent staff and pupils
- Plan for the reintegration of pupils and staff e.g. those injured, those who were directly affected, absentees, etc.
- Hold a prayer service for the pupils and staff
- Arrange for pupil and staff response to those affected. e.g. cards, flowers, etc.
- Maintain the normal timetables/school day to make sure pupils are unsettled as little as possible
- Provide information to families on the kind of support available to them and their children
- Hold information/support meetings for parents/students if deemed necessary by NEPs
- Plan for the re-integration of pupils and staff-pupil liaison leader to liaise with affected pupils

Long Term Actions

- Monitor pupils for signs of anxiety, distress
- Liaise with parents regarding vulnerable pupils
- Liaise with external agencies regarding referrals
- Arrange for school memorial service/ anniversary if relevant
- Review and evaluate the plan in light of the incident
- Formalise the Critical Incident Plan for the future
 - Consult with NEPS
 - Inform new staff/new school pupils affected by Critical incidents where appropriate
 - Ensure staff are aware of which pupils were affected in any recent incident and in what way
 - When affected pupils are transferring to a new school, The Principal should brief the Principal of the new school
 - Decide on appropriate ways to deal with anniversaries
- Update and amend school records
- Ensure new staff is aware of the policy and which pupils/staff are affected by an incident
- Evaluate legal and insurance consequences
- Written report for the DES and the Board of Management

Ratification and Review

Following discussion and some amendments, the Board of Management at the meeting in February 2009 ratified this policy. The policy was reviewed in 2013, 2020 and 2023 and details are updated annually.

Signed: *Niamh Greene*

Principal

Signed: *Aidan Savage*

Chairperson of the Board of Management

Date: 27/11/23

Appendix 1.

Critical Incident Management Team

Role	Name	Telephone Number
Team Leader		
Staff Liaison		
Pupil Liaison		
Chaplain		
Family Liaison		

Appendix 2

Dealing with the Media.

In some instances, it may be necessary to deal with the media, either print or television. Only the Principal, Deputy Principal or Chairperson will speak to the media on behalf of the school community. The following guidance points will be used in dealing with the media.

1. An agreed text will be prepared for release to the media.
2. Secretarial staff or those dealing with phone calls will be briefed on how to respond to calls.
3. Names of those involved in the incident will not be released unless with the agreement of the families involved.

Tips when facing news media:

- Do respond to 'what' and 'when' questions.
- Do ask for the questions in advance.
- Do tell the story quickly and accurately and get the message across.
- Do choose a time suitable to the incident when to respond to the media.
- Do prepare and rehearse so that everybody has the same story.
- Do stop talking when you have answered the question. If there is silence ask the reporter if he/she has any further questions.
- Do answer one question at a time only.

Things to avoid in facing news media.

- Don't reply to 'why' or 'how' questions.
- Don't speculate.
- Don't make 'off the record' comments. (e.g. don't say anything you don't want reported)
- Don't respond to 'blind quotes' (e.g. one of your staff tells me that do you agree?)
- Don't say 'no comment'- explain why you cannot comment.
- Don't allow words to be put in your mouth (e.g. would you agree that?)
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Appendix 3

Emergency Phone numbers

Emergency Services:	999 or 112
Ballymun Garda Station:	(01) 6664400
Beaumont Hospital:	(01) 8093000
Temple Street Hospital:	(01) 8784200
Principal:	01 8379745
Tusla:	(01) 7718500
INTO:	(01) 8047700
Parish Priest:	(01) 8378552 (House) or (01) 8360085 (Sacristy)
Department of Education and Skills:	(01) 8896400
National Educational Psychological Services:	(01) 8892700
Chairperson BOM:	01-8379745

Appendix 4

Sample letters will be kept on computer by the principal and the school secretary. Sample copies will also be kept by members of the critical incident team. They will be adapted as necessary should the need arise. These samples include;

1. A sample consent letter to be used by the school if seeking parental consent for a child to be seen in a group or individually by a NEPS psychologist.
2. A sample letter to parents regarding a sudden death or accident.
3. A sample announcement to the media.
4. A sample letter to parents regarding a violent death.