Scoil Chaitríona Senior
Critical Incident Policy

Introduction:

In Scoil Chaitríona Senior, we aim to protect the well being of our pupils and staff by providing a safe, tolerant and well catered for environment as outlined in our school mission statement.

The BoM, through the Principal and the Staff, has drawn up a critical incident management plan. They have established a Critical Incidents Management Team to steer the development and implementation of the plan.

Scoil Chaitríona Senior aims to protect the well-being of its students by providing a safe and nurturing environment at all times. This is reflected in our Mission Statement and is further supported by the school's Health & Safety and Child Protection Policies.

Scoil Chaitríona Senior has taken a number of measures to create a coping, supportive and caring ethos in the school. The school has formulated a number of policies and procedures to be followed, with a view to ensuring the physical and psychological safety of staff and students, both in ordinary time and in the event of a critical incident.

What is a Critical Incident?

In line with the National Educational Psychological Services [NEPS] publication 'Responding to Critical Incidents in Schools', Scoil Chaitríona Senior 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 the local community. Types of incidents might include:

- Death, major illness/outbreak of disease (Foot & Mouth, Covid 19, individual unexpected death of staff member or pupil)
- Suicide
- Attempted suicide and attempted murder
- Criminal incidents to include significant vandalism (e.g. Dunblane shooting, Shooting at first communion in Ballymun)
- Major accidents, serious injury (e.g. Navan bus crash)
- Civil unrest, war (foreign nationals may be traumatised by events that happened in their country of origin)
- Fire, natural and technological disaster, including flooding (e.g. school ceiling collapsing in Cork)
- Disappearance of student from home or school (e.g. Middleton incident in Cork)
- Disappearance of any member of school community
- Sexual assault/rape on the school premises
- Physical assault of any individual on school premises by any person
- Unauthorised removal of student from school or home (e.g. kidnapping, abduction)
- World events that may affect the student body and/or staff. May be a need for provision of discussion and involvement in ceremonies e.g. 9/11, tsunami

Aim

Recognising that planning is the key to the effective management of critical incidents, Scoil Chaitríona Senior has developed this Critical Incident Management Policy [CIMP] 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 professionalism and control. The Policy and Plan should also help the school return to normality as soon as possible and to ensure that the effects on pupils and staff will be limited.

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

We have put systems in place to lessen the probability of the occurrence of any incident. These include measures to address both the physical and psychological safety of pupils and staff alike.

Physical safety:

Please see our Health & Safety Plan.

- Evacuation plan formulated
- Regular fire drills occur
- Fire exits & extinguishers are regularly checked
- Rules of the playground
- Code of Behaviour

Psychological safety

Scoil Chaitríona Senior aims to continue to create an open and encouraging environment in the school, where pupils can feel secure and, should they arise, talk about their difficulties and seek help for same. Specifically,

• The school supports the unique relationship which naturally develops between the pupil and his/her class teacher.
• SPHE programmes are included in the curriculum to address issues such as grief & loss, communication skills, stress & anger management, conflict management, problem solving, help-seeking, decision making, prevention of alcohol & drug abuse, Well-Being Departmental Guidelines – all in a child-centred and age-appropriate manner.
- The school's involvement with the School Completion Programme ensures, in so far as is practicable, that children at risk of neglect, dealing with attendance issues, sickness or loss of a significant nature are assisted
• The school's Code of Behaviour includes an approach to bullying as well as a discreet Reform Not Blame Anti-Bullying Programme
• Staff are informed of difficulties affecting individual students and are aware of and vigilant regarding their needs.
• Staff have access to books and resources relating to difficulties affecting the primary school child.
• The school has developed links with outside agencies which may be utilised in the event of an emergency and also used for onward referral and support.

Critical Incident Management Team [CIMT]

A Critical Incident Team is defined *as*

'a group of individuals from the staff of the school who know the community, the students and each other well enough to make the necessary decisions called for when an incident occurs' (Mary Schoenfeldt).

Scoil Chaitríona Senior has set up a CIMT in line with best practice and will maintain this team in future. The members of the team were approved by the Principal and School Management Team. All accepted the nomination and will retain their roles for at least one school year unless, following a Critical Incident, members of the CIMT express a desire to be released from their

duties and/or members of the CIMT feel that it would be in the best interests of the overall effectiveness of the Critical Incident Management Policy that a person or persons should be relieved of their duties. The Principal, in consultation with the Senior Management Team, will decide on this matter.

Each member of the CIMT will have a copy of the CIMP and the Principal will retain a 'Ready to Go' pack with relevant materials, to be used in the event of an incident in an agreed, accessible location in her office.

Members of The Critical Incident Management Team:

Leadership Role: Marianne Brady (Principal); Ciara Doyle (Deputy Principal); Máire Fenton (Assistant Principal)
Communication Role: Ciara Doyle, Marianne Brady and Mr. Brian O'Keefe (Deputy Principal, Principal, Chairperson of BoM) (This includes the role of Parent Liaison)
Student Liaison/ Counselling Role: Marianne Brady, Ciara Doyle, Máire Fenton, relevant class teacher, as applicable; Overseeing Counselling Role – Mairéad Fagan
Chaplaincy Role: Fr. Declan Lohan
Family Liaison Role: (a) immediately affected family – Marianne Brady (Principal); (b) multiple affected families – Ciara Doyle (Deputy Principal) and David Gleeson (HSCL)
Parents Association Rep: N/A
B.O.M. Rep: Mr. Brian O'Keefe, Chairperson, BoM and Mary O'Brien, Health and Safety Representative on Board of Management
Community Liaison: Mr. Brian O'Keefe (Chairperson BoM)
Agency Liaison: David Gleeson; Eleanor O'Grady
Media Liaison: Marianne Brady (Principal) and Ciara Doyle (Deputy Principal)
Garda Liaison: Marianne Brady (Principal) and Ciara Doyle (Deputy Principal)
Staff Liaison: Ciara Doyle (Deputy Principal), Máire Fenton (Assistant Principal), David Gleeson, Eleanor O'Grady, Mairéad Fagan (CIMT Team)
Administrator(s): Bernie Kelly, ; Eleanor O'Grady

The first-named person has the responsibility as defined.

The second-named person assists and only assumes responsibility on the absence of the first-named.

Outline of Roles

Exact details of the action plan for each team-member are available in the 'Ready to Go' pack. Briefly, the roles are as follows:

Team Leader

- Alerts the Board of Management and NEPS
- Alerts the team members to the crisis and convenes a meeting of the CIMT in the Principal's Office.
- Coordinates the tasks of the team.
- Liaises with the Board of Management and the Department of Education & Science [DES], including DES Inspectors etc.
- In conjunction with the Class teacher, the Team Leader liaises with the bereaved family, if applicable

Staff Liaison

- Contacts staff in the event of a critical incident.
- In the absence of the Principal, leads meetings to brief staff on the facts as known; gives staff members an opportunity to express their feelings; outlines the routine for the day.
- Advises staff on the identification of vulnerable students.
- Is alert to vulnerable staff members and makes contact with them individually.
- Provides information for staff-support services, outside of the school.
- Prepares and provides materials to staff from the 'Ready to Go' pack.

Student Liaison

- Sets up and maintains the 'Quiet Room' space. In this school, the Quiet Room is the school library
- Prepares and provides child-centred and age-appropriate support for class teachers, as required.
- Prepares and provides teachers with suitable materials for use by pupils, from the 'Ready to Go' pack.

Community Liaison

- Liaises with agencies in the community for support and onward referral. These may include community Garda, SCP workers, NEPS, Barnardos, Tusla and HSE
- Updates team members on the involvement of external agencies.
- Coordinates the involvement of these agencies.
- Compiles and maintains up-to-date lists of all emergency support services and other external community contacts and resources.

Parent Liaison

- Liaises with school administrator and Principal regarding the content, signing, photocopying and dissemination of 'parents' information letter' – advising parents in the first instance of the nature of the critical incident.
- Visits the bereaved family, together with the Principal/Class Teacher.
- Facilitates 'questions & answer' meetings with groups of parents.
- Contacts/meets with individual parents, especially parents who may be particularly affected by the specific critical incident.
- Provides materials for parents from the 'Ready to Go' pack.

Media Liaison

In preparing for the role, media liaison personnel will consider issues that may arise during an incident and how they might be responded to (e.g. pupils/staff being interviewed, photographers on the premises, etc.)

- In the event of an incident, media liaison personnel will, where necessary, liaise with the Communications Section of the DES.

- Administrative & Secretarial Tasks
- Office administrator will maintain and have available up-to-date lists of contact numbers of parents/guardians, staff and emergency support services.
- Liaise with Parent Liaison, Staff Liaison and Community Liaison sections of CIMT as changes to the database occur.
- Use one nominated school telephone number for incoming 'critical incident' Calls–e.g. 086 0235248 (Principal's school mobile telephone number) the other telephone number to be used for other school business (direct landline – 091 753613).
- Liaise with Principal regarding the procurement of Mass Cards, floral tributes etc. on behalf of the Board of Management and staff
- Caretaker to ensure that school and grounds are opened, as required.
- Caretaker to advise Fire Service, if necessary, of location of all fire-fighting equipment
- Mairéad Fagan to liaise with Student Liaison group re: supervision & pastoral care elements of Quiet Room and pupil/staff support.
- Following a Critical Incident, the Administrator updates the school records and database to reflect any changes. This should ensure that any additional distress to bereaved families is avoided.

Record Keeping

In the aftermath of the incident, after a reasonable period has elapsed to allow all parties to recover, the CIM Team will meet to create a log of steps taken to address the incident.

Letter to Parents

Using the templates provided (IT on office computer and hard copies contained in CIMT file), school secretary will liaise with the Principal/Deputy Principal regarding the exact content of the brief letter. Staff will be consulted in relation to the content of this letter before issue -

It may include:

- the sympathy of the school community for the affected/bereaved family, as applicable
- positive information or comments about the deceased/injured, as applicable
- The facts of the incident
- What has been done
- What is going to be done

Confidentiality and good name considerations

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. The members of the school staff will bear this in mind, and will seek to ensure that pupils do so also. [For instance, the term 'suicide' will not be used without the consent of the family involved or until it has been established categorically that the person's death was a result of suicide. The phrases 'tragic death' or 'sudden death' may be used instead.]

Critical Incident Room(s)

The Principal's Office is the nominated 'Critical Incident Room'. In the event of a critical incident, the following rooms will serve the purposes stated below:

Principal's Office
- Critical Incident Management Team meetings
- Meetings with Chairperson of Board of Management
- individual visitors, support workers, directly affected parents & pupils

Secretary's Office
- reserved primarily for all administrative tasks associated with the critical incident, Staff are asked, insofar as is possible, not to use the school office in Day 1 and 2 of a Critical Incident.

School Hall -
- for meeting with larger groups of parents (if necessary)

'Quiet Room' – see Appendix B.

Staff Room
- Reserved solely for use by staff.

Broad Roles and Responsibilities - General

1. Leadership Role:
Intervention

- Confirm the event
- Activate the Critical Incident response team
- Liaise with the Gardaí/Emergency services
- Lead briefing meetings for staff on the facts as known, give staff members an opportunity to express their feelings and ask questions, outlines the routine for the day
- Express sympathy to family
- Clarify facts surrounding event
- Make contact with other relevant agencies
- Decide how news will be communicated to different groups (staff, pupils, outside school)

Postvention

- Ensure provision of ongoing support to staff and students
- Facilitate any appropriate memorial events
- Review Plan

2. Communication Role:

Intervention

- With Team, prepare a public statement
- Ensure telephone lines are free for outgoing and important incoming calls
- Designate mobile numbers for contact
- Liaise with relevant outside support agencies

Postvention

- Review and evaluate effectiveness of communication response

3. Student Liaison/ Pastoral Care Role:

Intervention

- Advise the staff on the procedures for identification of vulnerable pupils
- Alert staff to vulnerable pupils
- Outline specific services available in the school
- Put in place clear referral procedures
- Address immediate needs of staff
- Provide information
- Provide pastoral support

Postvention

- Provide ongoing support to vulnerable students
- Monitor class most affected
- Refer as appropriate
- Review and evaluate Plan

4. Chaplaincy Role:

Intervention

- Visit home(s), if appropriate
- Assist with prayer services
- Make contact with other local clergy
- Be available as personal and spiritual support to staff

Postvention

- Provide follow-up support to families in conjunction with Home School Community Liaison
- Work in partnership with Critical Incident team
- Review and Evaluate Plan

4. Family Liaison Role:

Intervention

- Co-ordinate contact with families (following first contact by Principal)
- Consult with family around involvement of school in e.g. funeral service
- Assist with all communication dealing with parents of any student affected by critical incident

Postvention

- Provide ongoing support to families affected by the incident
- Involve as appropriate the family in school liturgies/memorial services
- Offer to link family with community support groups
- Review and evaluate plan

Action plan

SHORT-TERM ACTIONS (Day 1)

- Immediate contact with family/families
- Consult with the family regarding appropriate support from the school
- Ensure that a quiet place can be made for students/staff-see Appendix B

Media Briefing (if appropriate)

- Designate a spokesperson (Leader)
- Gather accurate information
- Protect the family's privacy
- It is important to obtain accurate information about the incident
    1. What happened, where and when?
    2. What is the extent of the injuries?
    3. How many are involved and what are their names?
    4. Is there a risk of further injury?
    5. What agencies have been contacted already?
- Contact appropriate agencies
    1. Emergency services
    2. Medical services
    3. H.S.E. Psychology Departments/Community Care Services

4. NEPS

5. BOM – involvement as defined in CIM Plan

6. DES/Schools Inspector – to advise, as required on incident by incident basis.

Team Leader and CIMT -

- Convene a meeting with Key Staff/Critical Management Team
- Organize a staff meeting, if appropriate
- Ensure any absent staff members are kept informed
- Organise timetable/routine for the day. (Adhering to the normal school routine is important, if this is possible)
- Class teachers to take note of any absentees who might need to be contacted, list of friends etc, or any other relevant information. This is to be given to the Student Liaison person
- Arrange supervision of students
- Liaise with the family regarding funeral arrangements/memorial service
- The Chaplain/Principal will liaise with the family, to extend sympathy and clarify the family's wishes regarding the school's involvement in funeral/memorial service
- Arrange a home visit by two staff representatives within 24 hours, if appropriate. (Student Liaison person and relevant Class teacher)
- Have regard for different religious traditions and faiths

MEDIUM-TERM ACTIONS (24-72 HOURS)

- Preparation of students/staff attending funeral, if applicable
- Involvement of students/staff in liturgy if agreed by bereaved family, if applicable

- Facilitation of students/staffs responses, e.g. Sympathy cards, flowers, Book of Condolences, etc. as applicable
- Ritual within the school, the nature of which will be agreed by staff
- Review the events of the first 24 hours
- Reconvene Key Staff/Critical Incident Management Team and review current status of incident
- Decide arrangements for support meetings for parents/students/staff
- Decide on mechanism for feedback from teachers on vulnerable students
- Establish contact with absent staff and pupils
- Arrange support for individual students, groups of students, and parents, if necessary
- Hold support/information meeting for parents/students, if necessary, in order to clarify what has happened
- Give any teacher who feels uncomfortable with involvement in support meetings the choice of opting out
- Plan for the re-integration of students and staff e.g. absentees, injured, siblings, close relative etc)
- Student Liaison person to liaise with above on their return to school.
- Plan visits to injured
    - Family Liaison person, Relevant Class Teacher and Principal to visit home/hospital, if acceptable to family
    - Attendance and participation at funeral/memorial service (To be decided, in consultation with affected parties)
    - Decide this in accordance with parent's wishes, staff, school management decisions and in consultation with close school friends
- School closure (if appropriate)
- Request a decision on this from school management

LONGER TERM ACTIONS

Monitor students for signs of continuing distress

If over a prolonged period of time, a student continues to display the following, he/she may need assistance of e.g. a medical, social or pastoral nature. Constant communication with family is essential in this regard.

- Uncharacteristic behaviour
- Deterioration in academic performance
- Physical symptoms — e.g. weight loss/gain, lack of attention to appearance, tiredness, restlessness
- Inappropriate emotional reactions
- Increased absenteeism

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?
- Is there any unfinished business?

Formalise the Critical Incident Plan for the future

- Consult with NEPS Psychologist
- Inform new staff/new school pupils affected by Critical Incidents where appropriate
- Ensure that new staff members are aware of the school policy and procedures in this area
- Ensure they are aware of which pupils were affected in any recent incident and in what way
- 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

Decide on appropriate ways to deal with anniversaries (Be sensitive to special days and events)

- Anniversaries may trigger emotional responses in students/staff and they may need additional support at this time
- Acknowledge the anniversary with the family
- Need to be sensitive to significant days like Birthdays, Christmas, Mother's Day, and Father's Day

- Plan a school memorial service
- Care of deceased person's possessions. What are the parent's/family's wishes?
- Update and amend school records

Development and communication of this Critical Incident Policy & Plan

Members of the Critical Incident Management Team referred to Critical Incident Management Policies and Plans currently in use in other schools and had regard to current literature, including DES Guidelines, in the preparation of this Policy & Plan. The draft plan was offered for consideration at a general Staff Meeting, where the views of staff were taken into account. The final Policy and Plan was passed to the Board of Management for approval in December 2013.
Each member of staff has a personal copy of the Policy and agrees to abide by the provisions of same. Eleanor O'Grady will distribute a copy of the Policy to all new and temporary staff.
Each member of the Critical Incident Management Team [CIMT] has a personal copy of the Policy and the Plan. The Board of Management authorises the members of the CIMT to hold a copy of the relevant contacts off-site, in a secure location (e.g. locked filing cabinet) to ensure that the Plan can be put into place should the school itself be inaccessible.
Members of the CIMT undertake to use all contact details strictly for the purposes of this Critical Incident Management Plan and not to disclose staff or pupil details to any third party.
Members of the CIMT undertake to return all contact details to the school on the cessation of their employment and/or their stepping down from the CIMT.
Members of the CIMT undertake to keep confidential, and to treat with sensitivity, all information received in connection with the implementation of this Critical Incident Policy & Plan. See Confidentiality Agreement attached at ***Appendix H***.

See attached appendices for further details.

Feedback, Assessment & Review

This policy will be reviewed in the first term annually, or within three months of any critical incident, whichever is the earlier.

Signed: Marianne Brady 20/10/22

Marianne Brady, Principal.

Signed: Brian O Keeffe 20/10/22

Brian O'Keefe, Chairperson, Board of Management.

Note: The name of the Deputy Principal was replaced in October 2024