**Managing Critical Incidents**

**Introduction**

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.

St Patrick’ s Primary School Critical Incidents Management strategy seeks to recognise events in the school or community, which may adversely affect some or all members of the school community. The staff aim is to respond to incidents in an informed and effective manner.

At all times our practices will be informed by DENI iMatter A Guide to Managing Critical Incidents in School.

The types of critical incidents that can affect a school are:

 Sudden death of 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 a pupil or a staff member as a result of a road traffic accident;

 Serious assault on a pupil or a staff member in school;

 Violent/disturbed intruder on the school premises during the school day;

 Serious damage to the school building or property through fire, flood or vandalism;

 Civil disturbance in the local community;

 Pupil with a contagious illness;

 Pupil/Staff Member with COVID-19;

 Immediate evacuation of the school with no likelihood of return for a number of hours.

Every school is unique and has a distinct ethos and culture. These guidelines have been drawn up to assist the Principal and School Staff who are faced with the sudden unexpected death of a student or member of the wider school community or a critical incident as defined above. They are not comprehensive, but hopefully will assist in the management of a critical incident.

**School Closure**

Depending on the nature of the critical incident and its impact on the school, it may be necessary to suspend the normal timetable for a period of time to permit an appropriate response. In very exceptional circumstances, such as a death on school premises, it may be necessary to close the school.

**Critical Incidents during Weekends and School Holidays**

Contact details for all members of CMRT are shared with the school staff. We are conscious of the challenges faced by our school community because of the COVID-19 pandemic and we do recognise that there may be aspects of our response which will have to change accordingly.

**During the Incident**

**The key tasks will include:**

 responding to any inevitable risk or threat e.g. evacuation or first aid;

 notifying the emergency services / other relevant authorities and agreed parties;

 Contacting parents/guardians especially those with children involved in the crisis as soon as possible

 mobilising the Critical Incident Management Team;

 Agreeing the school routine for that day;

 Informing all school staff, teachers, classroom assistants, site manager and office staff;

 Establishing a dedicated, telephone line;

 Setting up recovery/designated room;

 Informing pupils and parents;

 Preparing/adapting a media statement; and

 Assessing initial impact of the critical incident on staff and pupils

 (Staff/pupils/parents must not be left alone in distress)

**Communication**

The Central Information Point is designated as the Principal’s office. The school secretary who will have been briefed with accurate information will man the telephone line.

Particular attention will be given to

 how essential telephone lines kept clear to receive important messages whilst ensuring that key information is given out;

 staff receiving incoming calls;

 methods for staff to deal with distressed parents by phone/in person;

 the use of the school messaging service

 Informing parents and pupils in small groups if at all possible

 Keeping all staff, whether directly or indirectly involved, up to date answering all their questions factually

 Informing all staff including non-teaching staff of events and proposed actions

 use of a prepared statement; and

 How to deal with the media. (in accordance to CCMS guidelines)

**Handling the Media**

The school principal is the appointed spokesperson on behalf of the school.

The school will liaise with CCMS, EA Communications Office, police, ambulance and fire and rescue services where appropriate, before making a statement.

Additionally in the event of a critical incident

 the relevant CCMS, EA Schools’ Communications Officer will be contacted for advice on the statement;

 a decision will be taken on whether all media enquiries and follow up enquiries are handled by the Principal or another designated member of the Critical Incident Management Team;

 an accurate, factual report will be prepared as background to any questions;

 no other staff will comment or provide comment on the incident;

 news media will not be permitted on school property without the prior approval of the Principal. This applies to television, radio, print media and photographers.

**After the incident**

The aim of the work carried out in school following a critical incident is to help its immediate and broader community cope with and recover from, the critical incident. A return to normal routine requires careful and sensitive planning, timing and implementation. The Critical Incidents Management Team and the wider staff community will continue to monitor pupils’ emotional wellbeing and be attentive to pupils with on-going difficulties. It may be necessary to source and provide support and counselling for the following groups:

 Pupils

 Bereaved Families

 Staff

It may also be necessary to decide on the school routine for the period up to the burial of a deceased member of the school community in certain circumstances.

The Principal and members of the school staff will discuss and decide on a routine for the school to follow during the period up to the burial. This routine will reflect the decision taken concerning closure of the school, participation of pupils in church services, procedure for informing classmates and the wide school community. This will be done in consultation with all affected parties.

**Review**

A review will be carried out which will address the following questions:

 What went well?

 What was most/least helpful?

 Were there any gaps?

 Have all necessary referrals to support services been made?

 Is there any unfinished business?

 Have all records relevant to the Critical Incident been secured?

 Are there any identified training needs?

 Does the plan need to be reviewed/changed/updated?

**On-going tasks**

 The Critical Incident Management Team will meet on an annual basis (or as needed) to discuss the Critical Incident Plan and ensure that it is fit for purpose, including considering the recent experiences of other schools.

 Any Professional Development in relation to Critical Incidents management to be identified

 There will be a regular review of the Critical Incident Management Plan

Date Ratified by Governors:

Date of review: August 2023