Critical Incident Policy

Scoil Mhuire

Ballymore Eustace

Introduction

Scoil Mhuire aims to protect and promote the well-being of children and staff by providing a safe and nurturing environment. This document outlines Scoil Mhuire's policy to recognise and respond to a Critical Incident impacting the life of school including its staff and children.

The management and staff of Scoil Mhuire recognise a Critical Incident as an incident or event or sequence of events that overwhelms the normal coping mechanism of the school. Critical incidents may involve one or more children or staff members and/or members of our local community. The following are some examples of a Critical Incident:

- The death of a member of the school community through accident, violence, suicide or suspected suicide or other unexpected death
- An intrusion into the school
- An accident involving a member/members of the school community
- An accident/tragedy in the wider community
- Serious damage to the school building through fire, flood, vandalism, etc
- The disappearance of a member of the school community.

Review and Research

This Critical Incident policy has been developed in line with the national policy document, 'Responding to Critical Incidents: NEPS1 Guidelines and Resources for Schools' including the resources for responding to critical incidents listed in the final section (p. 95-96). This policy was also informed by 'Well-Being in Primary Schools: Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion' and the HSE publication, 'Suicide Prevention in the Community - A Practical Guide'. In developing this policy, staff have also reviewed updated information and templates available to schools concerning their Critical Incident Policy on the national websites for: Department of Education (DE) and National Educational Psychological Services (NEPS).

Levels of Response

Three levels of critical incident and response have been identified with level 3 representing the most challenging and significant level of response:

- *Response Level 1*: Death of a student or staff member who was terminally ill; death of parent or sibling; or fire or damage to school property.
- *Response Level 2*: Sudden death of a student or staff member.
- *Response Level 3*: An accident/event involving a number of pupils; a violent death; an incident with high media profile; or an event that involves a number of schools.

Policy Aim

This Critical Incident Policy aims to help Scoil Mhuire's management and staff to react quickly and effectively in the event of an incident, to enable us to maintain a sense of control in complex and demanding circumstances, and to ensure that appropriate

support is offered to pupils and staff. Having a good plan should help minimise the negative effects of a critical incident on school children and staff. The policy should also enable us to effect a return to normality as soon as possible.

Physical and Psychological Safety
All staff are responsible for contributing to a supportive and caring ethos at Scoil Mhuire. We support all children to be as well as they can be physically and psychologically (personally and socially) and to develop positive outlooks on learning and life. This includes thinking positively as well as developing resilience and resourcefulness in the face of difficulty or when things go wrong.

Physical Safety
Scoil Mhuire's policies and practices include the following measures to safeguard children's physical wellbeing:

- Evacuation plan in place
- Regular fire drills completed
- Fire exits and extinguishers regularly checked
- School yard supervision rota
- Supervision during specific activities and excursions increased
- Rules of the playground and designated areas of play assigned
- Safety Statement in place
- Health and Safety Audit carried out regularly

Psychological safety
The management and staff of Scoil Mhuire also use available programmes and resources to address the personal and social development of pupils, to enhance a sense of safety and security in the school and to provide opportunities for reflection and discussion.

Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE)
- It is integrated into the work of the school. It is addressed in the curriculum by including issues such as grief and loss; communication skills; stress and anger management; resilience; conflict management; problem solving; help-seeking; bullying; decision making and prevention of alcohol and drug misuse. Promotion of mental health is an integral part of this provision.
- Staff have access to training for their role within SPHE.
- School staff have engaged with CPD opportunities for using a range of educational programmes and interventions to promote children's wellbeing during all eight primary years. Some of the programmes currently in use at the school and for which staff have experience and expertise include: Incredible Years and Weaving Wellbeing.
- Scoil Mhuire uses the Continuum of Support framework to enable our school to gather and analyse student data around their learning but also their emotional wellbeing to plan and review the progress of individual children. Using the framework, we can look at a child's needs in context and implement

a range of resources to respond to each child's particular needs as early as possible ensuring that children with the greatest level of need have access to the greatest levels of support. This approach is also supported by information and engagement with external professionals, as required.

- Staff are familiar with the Child Protection Guidelines and Procedures and details of how to proceed with suspicions or disclosures.
- Books and resources on difficulties affecting the primary school student are available.
- The school has developed links with a range of external agencies e.g. HSE/Community Care/NEPS/Local Gardaí.
- Inputs to pupils by external providers are carefully considered in the light of criteria about student safety, the appropriateness of the content, and the expertise of the providers.
- The school has a clear policy on bullying and deals with bullying in accordance with this policy.
- There is a care system in place in the school.
- Pupils who are identified as being at risk are referred to the Designated Liaison Person (DLP). Concerns are examined and the appropriate level of assistance and support is identified and provided. This is set out through the Listen, Protect, Connect, Model and Teach approach to helping pupils in time of crisis or emergency set out in the document, Responding to Critical Incidents (p.92-94). Parents are informed, and where appropriate, a referral is made to an appropriate agency.
- Staff are informed about how to access support themselves.

Critical Incident Procedures

When an incident occurs, staff will immediately alert the Principal or designated person. It is the responsibility of the Principal, or member of staff with delegated responsibility, to determine whether the incident is deemed to be critical. The Principal, or designated person will lead the response as outlined below.

Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT)

The Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT) includes all five members of the In-school Management Team (Principal, Deputy Principal & Assistant Principals) and the Secretary. Each member of the team has a dedicated critical incident folder which contains a copy of this policy and plans and materials particular to their role, to be used in the event of an incident. The team will meet annually to review and update this policy.

Role	Responsibilities
Principal	
Team Leader	- Alerts CIMT (team) members to the crisis and convenes a meeting. - Coordinates the tasks of the team. - Liaises with the Board of Management, DE, NEPS and external agencies, as appropriate.

	• Liaises with the bereaved family.
Community and Agency Liaison	• Maintains up to date lists of contact information of: key parents, such as members of the Parents' Association committee, Emergency support services and other external contacts and resources. • Liaises with agencies in the community for support and onward referral. • Is alert to the need to check credentials of individuals offering support. • Coordinates the involvement of these agencies. • Reminds agency staff to wear name badges. • Updates team members on the involvement of external agencies.
Garda Liaison	• Liaises with the Gardaí (in conjunction with the Chairperson of the Board of Management). • Ensures that information about deaths or other developments is checked out for accuracy before being shared.
Media Liaison	• Considers issues that may arise and may advise on the school's response to these (e.g. pupils being interviewed, photographers on the premises, etc). • Draws up a press statement and may give media briefings and interviews (as agreed by school management).
Deputy Principal	
Leadership	• Supports/assists the Principal with some of the leadership and liaison tasks
Staff Liaison	• Leads briefing meetings for staff on the facts as known, gives staff members an opportunity to express their feelings and askquestions, outlines the routine for the day. • Advises staff on the procedures for identification of vulnerable pupils. • Provides materials for staff (for their Critical Incident Folder). • Keeps staff updated as the day progresses. • Is alert to vulnerable staff members and makes contact with them individually. • Advises them of the availability of the EAS and gives them the contact number.
Most Senior Assistant Principal II	

Parent Liaison:	• Visits the bereaved family with the team leader • Arranges parent meetings, if held • May facilitate such meetings, and manage 'questions and answers' • Manages the 'consent' issues in accordance with agreed school policy • Ensures that sample letters are typed up, on the school's system and ready for adaptation • Meets with individual parents • Provides appropriate materials for parents (from their critical incident folder)
2nd Assistant Principal II	
Student Liaison:	• May co-ordinate information from teachers about pupils for whom they are concerned. • Alerts other staff to vulnerable pupils (as appropriate). • Provides materials for pupils (from their critical incident folder). • Maintains student contact records. • Looks after setting up and supervision of 'quiet' room whereagreed.
3rd Assistant Principal II	
Assistance	• Will assist the Deputy Principal, other Assistant Principals with their duties • Will assist the Secretary with his/her duties
School Secretary	
Administrator:	• Maintains up-to-date telephone numbers of parents, teachers and emergency services. • Takes telephone calls and notes those that require response. • Ensures that templates are on the schools system in advanceand ready for adaptation. • Prepares and sends out letters, emails and texts andphotocopies materials needed. • Sets up room for meetings with parents • Maintains a record of parents seen • Maintains all other records as required.
Records Management:	• Receives and logs telephone calls, sends letters, etc. regarding the critical incident and supports members of the CIMT to do the same. In the event of an incident each member of the team will keep records of phone calls made and received, letters sent and received, meetings held,persons met, interventions used, material used etc.

Record Keeping

In the event of an incident, each member of the team will keep records of phone calls made and received, letters sent and received, meetings held, persons met,

interventions used, material used etc. The school secretary will have a key role in receiving and logging telephone calls, sending letters, photocopying materials, etc.

Confidentiality and Good Name Considerations

The management and staff of Scoil Mhuire have 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 unless there is solid information that death was due to suicide, and that the family involved consents to its use. The phrases, 'tragic death' or 'sudden death' may be used instead. Similarly, the word 'murder' should not be used until it is legally established that a murder was committed. The term 'violent death' may be used instead.

Critical Incident Rooms

In the event of a critical incident:
- The Staff Room will be the main room used to meet the staff
- The Hall for meetings with pupils
- Support rooms for meeting small groups of pupils.
- Support rooms or offices for use by NEPS Psychologists.
- The Hall or Library for parents
- The Library for media
- The Library or office for other visitors

Consultation and Communication Regarding the Plan

All staff were consulted and regard was given to their views in the preparation of this policy and plan. Parent representatives were also consulted and asked for their comments. Our school's final policy and plan in relation to responding to critical incidents has been presented to all staff. Each member of the critical incident team has access to a personal copy of the plan. All new and temporary staff will be informed of the details of the plan by the Deputy Principal.

Appendices to the Plan

The following three Appendix items are included with this policy. All staff have a copy of the policy and appendix items. The policy is published on our website without the appendix items as these include personal contact information for school staff.

- Appendix A: Sample Consent Letters
- Appendix B: Important Contact Information
- Appendix C: Staff, Key Parents and Board of Management Contact Information
- Appendix D: Emergency Critical Incident Action Plan
- Appendix E: Emergency Operational Log

Ratification and Communication

Following discussion and engagement with staff, parents and the Board of Management, this Critical Incident Policy was finalised and published on the school's website. Hardcopies of the policy are available to parents on request.

This Critical Incident Policy was adopted by the Board of Management at their meeting on September 14th 2023. The Appendices to this policy will be reviewed by staff at the beginning of each academic year and shortly after changes to the in-school management team or after significant staff changes. The full policy will be reviewed before the end of June 2025.

_____   14/09/2023
John McCarville (Chairperson)   Date

_____   14/09/2023
Peter Roche (Principal)   Date

Appendices to this policy are available directly from the school, if required.