



# Critical Incident Policy

## **Introduction to the Critical Incident Policy**

### **Purpose of this policy**

The purpose of this policy is to outline the duties and responsibilities of all those should a critical incident occur in Kilmacanogue National School. Following a review of this policy, a Critical Incident Team will be put in place. This policy will also inform the Critical Incident Team (CINT) and indeed all personnel of what to do and what not to do.

### **Scope of this policy**

This policy applies to all members of the Board of Management, all teachers and individuals employed by the school and all members of the Critical Incident Management team (CINT).

### **Responsibility for implementation of this policy**

It is the responsibility of the Board of Management to write, approve, adopt and review this policy as per its review frequency requirements. It may be necessary to update the Policy in advance of its planned review date, if the Critical Incident Management team (CINT) recommend improvements following a Critical Incident. It is the responsibility of the Critical Incident Management team (CINT) to implement the policy in the event of a Critical Incident (CI) happening.

## **1. Introduction and reference materials**

As outlined in our Mission statement, Kilmacanogue National School strives to provide a safe, secure, and supportive environment for all pupils and staff, where each individual is valued and difference is respected. Consequently, the school has implemented a number of policies and procedures which will ensure the physical and psychological safety of pupils and staff, both in ordinary time and in the event of a critical incident. These include the Child Safeguarding Statement, Code of Behaviour, Anti-Bullying Policy, Safety Statement, and this Critical Incident Policy. Other policies such as Fire Safety and School Evacuation will also be prepared.

The key to managing a critical incident is planning and the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) psychologists report that schools that have developed a school policy and implemented a Critical Incident Management Plan (CIMP) are able to cope more effectively in the aftermath of an incident. Having a plan enables staff to react quickly and effectively and to maintain a sense of control. It may also ensure that normality returns as soon as possible and that the effects on pupils and staff are limited. Research suggests that an effective response by

the school during the first 48 hours is crucial. It is therefore important for all schools to prepare a Critical Incident Management Plan.

Consequently in following expert advice and in-line with Best Practice, the BoM of Kilmacanogue National School has written this policy and contained within it are a description of the Critical Incident Management Plan (CIMP) and the composition of the Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT). This team will implement the plan in the event of a critical incident and will review its effectiveness after an incident.

The primary reference sources for this policy are four documents issued by the Dept. Of Education and Skills (DES) in conjunction with the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS), in 2007, 2014 and 2016

- Responding to Critical Incidents – Guidelines for schools (DES, 2007)
- Responding to Critical Incidents – Resource Materials for schools (DES, 2007)
- Guidance on Social Media Use and Critical Incidents (2014)
- Responding to Critical Incidents: Guidelines & Resource Materials for Schools (2016) 3rd edition

Each document contains a significant amount of very useful additional information and all members of the CIMT must consult them in the event of a CI happening.

Included in the appendices of this policy are a number of sample documents that can be used during a CI e.g. sample NEPS consent forms, sample letters to parents, sample announcement to the media etc

## **2. What is a Critical Incident?**

In a school context NEPS defines a critical incident as ‘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 one or more pupils or staff members, or members of our local community. Examples of CIs include

- Death or major illness/outbreak of disease e.g. Foot & Mouth outbreak, Swine Flu
- Criminal incidents or intrusions on school premises or at school events e.g. Dunblane shooting, Shooting at first communion in Ballymun.
- Major accidents or serious injury e.g. Navan bus crash
- The sudden death of a pupil or staff member by accident, terminal illness or suicide
- Civil unrest or war where foreign nationals may be traumatised by events happening in their country of origin e.g. the Arab Spring

- Fire, natural and technological disaster e.g. school ceiling collapsing in Cork
- Disappearance of pupil from home or school e.g. Middleton incident in Cork
- Unauthorised removal of pupil from school or home.
- World events that may affect the student body and/or staff. There may be a need for provision of discussion and involvement in ceremonies e.g. 9/11, Tsunami
- An accident or tragedy in the wider school community

### **3. Critical Incident Management Team**

A Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT) has been established. The members of the team will need to be fully aware of his/her role and how to behave appropriately at a critical time. Each member of the team will be supplied with a Ready-to-Go pack containing all relevant material they will require in the event of a Critical Incident e.g. a copy of this policy, template forms, template letters, check lists, activity lists, contact numbers etc.

In the aftermath of a CI the members of the CIMT will review the effectiveness of the CIMP and document any necessary improvements. These will be forwarded to the BoM for inclusion in an updated version of the Critical Incident Policy. In the event of no CIs happening, the CIMT will review the CIMP on an annual basis and forward any recommendations to the BoM for inclusion in the annual review of the Critical Incident Policy.

The list below contains suggested and current members of a CIMT.

<b>MEMBER</b>	<b>SUGGESTED PERSON TO FILL THIS ROLE</b>	<b>PERSONNEL 2024-2025</b>
Team Leader & Garda Liaison	School Principal	Mark Sheekey
Staff Liaison	Deputy Principal	Chris O'Farrell
Pupil Liaison	Member of staff	Sally Burnham
Parent Liaison	Member of staff or BOM	Craig O'Neill
Community/Agency Liaison	Chairperson BOM	Judy O'Toole
Media Liaison	School Principal	Mark Sheekey
Administrator	School Secretary	Fiona Power & Siobhán Wolohan

#### **4. Critical Incident Management Team - members' roles & responsibilities**

Outlined below are the key responsibilities of each role.

##### **4.1 Team Leader & Garda Liaison**

The Team Leader on a CIMT must be a person who carries authority and can make decisions during a crisis. Consequently for Kilmacanogue National School this role will be filled by the Acting Principal, Mark Sheekey. His responsibilities will be as follows:

- Confirms the event and alerts the CIMT members to the crisis and convenes a meeting
- Coordinates the tasks of the team
- Liaises with the Board of Management, Dept. of Education and Skills and NEPS
- Liaises with the bereaved/affected family or families
- Liaises with the Gardaí/Emergency services
- Ensures that information about deaths or other developments is checked out for accuracy before being shared
- After the event – ensure provision of ongoing support to staff and pupils/facilitate any appropriate memorial events/review the CIMP
- In the event that the School Principal is absent, this role will be filled by the Acting Deputy Principal.

##### **4.2 Staff liaison person**

Whoever will take this position on the CIMT will:

- Lead briefing meetings for staff on the facts as known, giving staff members an opportunity to express their feelings and ask questions
- Ensure that any absent staff are informed
- Outline the routine/timetable for the day
- Advise staff on the procedures for identification of vulnerable pupils
- Provide materials for staff (from their critical incident folder)
- Keep staff updated as the day progresses
- Is alert to vulnerable staff members and makes contact with them individually
- Advise them of the availability of the Employee Assistance Service (EAS) and give them the contact number.
- After the event – provide ongoing support to vulnerable pupils and staff/monitor class most affected by the CI/ keep staff updated/review the CIMP
- In the event that he/she is absent this role, will be filled by the Principal.

##### **4.3 Pupil liaison**

This role should be filled by a trusted and familiar figure to the pupils such as a teacher or SNA in the school. His/her responsibilities would be as follows:

- Provide agreed information about the CI to pupils

- Alerts other staff to vulnerable pupils (appropriately)
- Provides materials for pupils from his/her critical incident folder
- Outline specific services available in the school e.g. NEPS
- Implement clear referral procedures for pupils
- Keep records of pupils seen by external agency staff
- Look after setting up and supervision of 'quiet' room if established
- After the event – provide ongoing support to vulnerable pupils and staff/monitor class most affected by the CI/ refer pupils to support services as appropriate/ keep pupils updated /review the CIMP

In the event that the Pupil Liaison is absent or unavailable, this role will be filled by another member of staff.

#### **4.4 Community/Agency liaison**

This role should be filled by a member of the Board of Management who has good contacts with agencies and relevant individuals in the community. His/her responsibilities would be as follows:

- Maintain up to date lists of contact numbers of
- Key parents, such as members of the Parents Council
- Emergency support services and other external contacts and resources
- Local religious personnel including priests, ministers etc
- Local community leaders
- Liaise with agencies in the community for support and onward referral
- Arrange with appropriate religious personnel to provide 'chaplaincy/spiritual support' to affected families if they would like it
- Coordinate the involvement of these agencies
- Check credentials of individuals offering support
- Remind agency staff to wear name badges
- Update team members on the involvement of external agencies
- After the event – review the CIMP

In the event that the Community/Agency Liaison is absent or unavailable, this role would be filled by another member of the Board of Management.

#### **4.5 Parent liaison**

This role should be filled by a member of staff or the Board of Management, who is known to parents and is comfortable speaking before a large audience. His/her responsibilities would be as follows:

- Visit the bereaved/affected family or families with the team leader
- Coordinate contact with family following initial contact with Principal
- Consult with family regarding school involvement in funeral, memorial event etc
- Arrange parent meetings, if any are being held
- May facilitate such meetings, and manage 'questions and answers'
- Manage the 'consent' issues in accordance with agreed school policy
- Ensure that sample letters are typed up, on the school's system and ready for adaptation
- Set up room for meetings with parents
- Maintain a record of parents contacted/visited
- Assist in any communication activities with parents of children affected by the CI
- Meet with individual parents
- Provide appropriate materials for parents (from their critical incident folder)
- After the event – provide ongoing support to family affected/ involve as appropriate the family in any school liturgies or memorial services/offer to link family with community support groups/ review the CIMP

In the event he/she is absent or unavailable, this role would be filled by another member of the BOM.

#### **4.6 Media liaison**

The Media liaison role requires good interpersonal skills, an ability to communicate clearly and concisely but with empathy, an ability to talk to the media in person or by telephone and an ability to set limits or boundaries for the media without being offensive. His/her responsibilities would be as follows:

- In advance of an incident and with the BoM and the Deputy Principal, consider issues that may arise and plan responses to them e.g. pupils being interviewed by the media, photographers arriving on the school grounds etc
- In the event of an incident, will liaise where necessary with teacher unions
- Prepare a press statement, give media briefings and interviews (as agreed by the BoM and CIMP)
- Promptly organise a designated room for media briefings
- Ensure telephone lines are free for outgoing and important incoming calls
- Designate a mobile phone number that the media are to use for contacting the school
- After the event – review and evaluate the effectiveness of the communication response/ review the CIMP
- Review the Guidelines issued by DES in 2014 - Guidance on Social Media Use and Critical Incidents (2014) when deciding on Communication strategy and actions. Whilst it

is primarily aimed at second level schools it may have some application to our school.

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In the event that the Media Liaison is absent or unavailable, this role will be filled by another member of the CIMT or the Board of Management.

#### **4.7 Administrator**

This role would be filled by the school secretary with responsibilities such as follows:

- Maintenance of up to date telephone numbers of:
  - Parents or guardians
  - Teachers
  - Emergency services
- Take telephone calls and identify those that need to be responded to first
- Ensure that templates are on the schools system in advance and ready for adaptation
- Prepare and send out letters, emails and faxes
- Photocopy materials needed
- Maintain records
- After the event – collate and organises any records created by other CIMT members/  
review the CIMP

In the event that the Administrator is absent or unavailable, this role will be filled by another member of the CIMT, school staff or Board of Management.

#### **5. Record keeping**

In the event of an incident each member of the team will keep detailed records of phone calls made and received, letters sent and received, meetings held, minutes of those meetings, persons met, key decisions taken, interventions used, material used etc. The CIMT Administrator (School Secretary) will have a key role in receiving and logging telephone calls, sending letters, photocopying materials, etc.

Decisions will be made on the retention and storage of these records as part of the After Event review which will be carried out by the CIMT and in accordance with the school's Data Protection and Record Retention Policy.

#### **6. Confidentiality and good name considerations**

The management and staff of Kilmacanogue National School 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.

## **7. Designation of Critical incident rooms**

In the event of a critical incident, the following rooms will be used to meet the various groups.

Staff room	Staff
Individual classrooms	Pupils
School Hall	Parents
Local hotel function room	Media
SET classrooms	Individual sessions with pupils
Principal's office	Other visitors

## **8. Action plan**

In the event that a Critical Incident occurs a number of actions must be carried out by the CIMT as a whole and by individual members of the team. These can be categorised as short term actions which occur on Day 1 of the incident, medium term actions which will occur on Days 2 and 3 and longer term actions which occur after Day 3 and may continue on for a significant time after the CI has ended. Below is a description of those actions.

### **8.1 Short term actions (Day 1)**

- Principal to gather accurate information on the CI i.e. Who, what, when, where?
- Inform BoM and convene a CIMT meeting – specify time and place clearly
- Contact external agencies
- Arrange supervision for pupils/ are any currently on school trips or off school premises?
- Hold meeting for all staff and brief them on the Critical Incident /Inform absent staff
- Agree schedule for the day
- The school should try and adhere to normal routine/timetable if possible
- Have administration staff photocopy appropriate literature
- Inform students – (close friends and pupils with learning difficulties may need to be told separately). Consider informing absent pupils
- Compile a list of vulnerable students
- Contact/visit the bereaved family
- Prepare and agree media statement and deal with media
- Hold an end of day CIMT meeting to review progress and schedule an early morning meeting for Day 2
- Inform parents
- Hold end of day staff briefing

### **8.2 Medium term actions (Day 2 and 3)**

- Convene a CIMT meeting to review the events of Day 1
- Meet external agencies
- Meet whole staff
- Arrange support for pupils, staff, parents
- Hold support/information meeting for parents/pupils, if necessary, in order to clarify what has happened
- Arrange, in consultation, with outside agencies, individual or group debriefings or support meetings with parental permission Decide on mechanism for feedback from teachers on vulnerable pupils
- Give any teacher who feels uncomfortable with involvement in support meetings the choice of opting out
- Establish contact with absent staff and pupils
- Arrange support for individual pupils, groups of pupils, and parents, if necessary
- Visit the injured
- Liaise with bereaved family regarding funeral arrangements i.e. involvement of pupils/staff in liturgy if agreed by bereaved family
- Agree on attendance and participation at funeral service of staff and pupils

- Facilitation of pupils/staffs responses, e.g. Sympathy cards, flowers, Book of Condolences, etc
- Make decisions about school closure in conjunction with BoM
- Plan for the re-integration of pupils and staff e.g. absentees, injured, siblings, close relative etc). Pupil Liaison person to liaise with them on their return to school

### **8.3 Longer term actions**

- Monitor pupils for signs of continuing distress. If over a prolonged period of time, a pupil continues to display the following; 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., he/she may need assistance from the NEPS or the HSE.
- Constant communication with family is essential.
- Liaise with agencies regarding referrals
- Plan for return of bereaved pupils(s)
- Plan for giving of 'memory box' containing personal school items to bereaved family
- Decide on memorials and anniversaries and acknowledge the anniversary with the family
- Evaluate response to incident and amend Critical Incident Management Plan appropriately by evaluating as follows;
  - 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?
- Update and amend school records.
- Ensure that new staff are aware of the Critical Incident policy. If a CI has occurred previously, ensure that new staff are briefed on what happened and ensure they are aware of which pupils were affected 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.

## **9. Emergency Contact List**

To be displayed throughout the school including staff room, school office and Principal's office.

<b>AGENCY</b>	<b>CONTACT NUMBERS</b>
GARDA - Bray Garda Station	01 666 5300
AMBULANCE SERVICE	999
PRIMARY CARE CENTRE - Bray	01 7786020
FIRE BRIGADE	999
LOCAL GP	Southern Cross Medical 012551558
NEPS	01 8892700
Dept. of Education & Skills	01 889 6400
INTO	01 804 7700
CLERGY / PARISH OFFICE	Kilmacanogue parish office 01 2021882 Enniskerry parish office 012760030 Fr. Bernard Kennedy 01 2863506 / 0863606148 Fr. Hyacinth Nwakuna 0876492737
EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE SERVICE	1800 411 057

## **10. Ratification of the policy**

A version of this policy was first ratified several years ago by the Board of Management. This new version was ratified in May 2025.

### **Ratification & Review**

This policy will be in operation from May 2025 and will be reviewed as deemed necessary.

Signed by Judy O'Toole (Chairperson) \_\_\_\_\_

Signed by Mark Sheekey (Acting Principal) \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_