

# Heritage Park Primary School

## Critical Incident Policy



**Approved by:** Karen Bell (Headteacher)

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## **Heritage Park Primary School**

### **Critical Incident Policy**

This policy sets out the procedures to be followed to promote the safety and protection of the whole school community in the event of a critical incident and should be read in conjunction with the Heritage Park Primary School Emergency Plan, a first point of reference in managing evacuations and other emergency scenarios.

#### **Definition of a Critical Incident**

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 school. The incident or events may be imminent or in progress. It may occur on school property, in the local community or out of school, for example, on a school trip.

Examples of possible critical incidents include:

- Death or serious injury of a pupil or staff member
- A major accident on the school site
- A major accident, off school site, i.e. road traffic accident or incident on a school trip.
- Fire (including arson attacks), flood or building collapse
- Gas leak or explosion
- An environmental incident, for example, the release of hazardous substances
- Disasters/emergencies/epidemic at school or in local community, acts of civil disturbance/ terrorism, such as a bomb threat or explosion, or a deliberate act of violence/vandalism, such as a knife attack or the use of a firearm
- Abduction/disappearance, including hostage taking
- An external security risk or incident requiring the lockdown of the school premises, e.g. an intruder on school site.
- An incident which affects access to the school
- An incident off site whilst members of the school community are on a school visit
- A transport related incident near to the school
- School used in an emergency

In the event of such an incident the priorities of those adults in charge of the school or trip at the time must be to:

- Save life
- Minimise personal injury
- Safeguard the interests of pupils and staff
- Minimise loss and to return to normal working quickly

#### **Non Critical Incidents:**

Some incidents might be non-critical and examples include:

- Death of a person associated with the school
- Lower scale health issues
- External incident requiring enhanced awareness

- Short term loss of staff or infrastructure
- Expected death of a pupil or member of staff

### **Preventative and precautionary measures**

Critical incidents tend to disorientate and may overwhelm those involved. Whilst no amount of planning can totally prevent accidents and problems occurring, it is hoped that some can be prevented and the effects of others minimised by taking these sensible precautionary measures.

All staff and pupils will be:

- Familiar with the school routines and procedures for fire and emergencies as set out in the School Emergency Plan
- Familiar with the school's security procedures, that all visitors not wearing a visitor's lanyard should be questioned by a member of staff and escorted to the school entrance area. Security arrangements also include the use of a green button to allow visitors to enter school upon production of suitable identification and to allow exit from school. This entrance to the school building should only be opened by an adult.

All staff will:

- Sign in and out of the school premises
- Ensure staff never leave the school site alone to deal with a potentially violent situation
- Wear identification lanyards, with a safety breakaway clip, excluding times when completing practical activities where wearing a lanyard may be a hindrance
- Be made aware of pupils in their class or group with health or custodial problems and the way in which these should be treated
- Ensure that the external doors are closed during teaching sessions. Arrangements during lunch and playtimes are contained within the Staff handbook.
- Be familiar with the routines and procedures for dealing with emergencies (as detailed in this Policy).
- Ensure they follow risk assessments created for in school and out of school activities and procedures.
- Be responsible for assessing risks to themselves and pupils before undertaking an activity
- Ensure pupils report to the office if they should arrive late or need to leave school before the end of the school day

Teachers will:

- Complete registers accurately and promptly
- Follow the correct procedures when organising school trips and visits, ensuring all staff that accompany the children have a copy of the relevant risk assessments, including the school risk assessment signed off by the Headteacher or Deputy Headteacher and any provided by external providers
- Be aware of pupils with medical needs or health problems
- Assess associated risks to children before carrying out a curriculum or other activity

In the event of an intruder damaging property or making threats towards staff, pupils or parents, or somebody is behaving in a violent matter, the police should be called immediately, using 999. The police will decide upon the subsequent course of action.

### **Decisions and planning**

The Headteacher is in overall charge in an emergency and will make the decision to initiate the School Emergency Plan.

On the absence of the Headteacher, the Deputy Head assumes this role. In the absence of the Deputy Head, the third member of the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) takes responsibility. The police will take charge of many aspects of dealing with a critical incident and the person in charge will liaise with them as appropriate.

The person in overall charge should meet with as many members of the SLT as is possible, to carry out the implementation of the plan. Additional staff may be assigned roles as part of a School Emergency Management Team (SEMT), as appropriate. If a class teacher is assigned a role, they will designate a member of staff without a class to take charge of their class. Staff manning the school telephone lines will keep a written record of all conversations.

### **Responding to a critical incident**

The school's reaction to a critical incident can be divided into the following categories:

- i. Immediate action
- ii. Short term action
- iii. Medium term action
- iv. Long term action

#### **Immediate Action**

This occurs within hours of the incident occurring:

- Obtain and collate information relating to the incident – uncertainty breeds rumour and accurate information is essential;
- Gather and brief the relevant staff - allocate roles and responsibilities;
- Trigger support from the LA and other contacts on emergency list – establish clearly who is going to contact whom;
- Set up an incident management room and dedicated phone – to deal with calls from anxious parents etc.
- SLT should agree a factual statement and avoid speculation;
- Contact families affected – must be done quickly and with sensitivity. Consistency of information is vital. It may be appropriate for families to come to school and immediate emotional support could be a possibility;
- Make arrangements to inform other parents – may need to take advice from LA, especially if there is the possibility of legal liability. SLT may wish to send a letter to parents
- Inform teaching and other school staff – staff need to be cautioned about talking to the media or responding to questions from reporters. It is vital that all staff in contact with pupils are kept well informed and feel secure in handling comments or questions from pupils.

- Inform pupils – can be done in small or large groups depending on which is most appropriate. Care needs to be exercised to protect both children and adults closely involved in the incident. It is important that children receive a consistent account of the incident allowing for differences in their ability to understand.
- Encourage people involved to talk – the incident may need to be discussed before children go home for the day, for both pupils and adults.
- Deal with the media – most important to seek advice from LA before agreeing to speak to or be interviewed by the media. If this is not an option then an agreed text for release should be prepared by the SLT and a designated spokesperson briefed and prepared to respond on the school's behalf.
- Devise a plan for handling the reactions and feelings of people affected – the most common reactions will include denial, distress, guilt, anger and helplessness. SLT need to consider outside professionals to support and debrief staff and pupils affected by the incident. Those providing support also need support. At this point the SLT will need to plan their short term reaction to the incident.

### **Short Term Action**

The next stage of an incident occurring:

- Reunion of children with their families – especially where the incident occurs outside the school. Mostly children will need to be brought home, but sometimes parents and families need to visit the scene of the incident to understand how they deal with repercussions in terms of children's fears etc.
- Managing staff – support needs organising for all staff, preferably from within the school, but using outside agencies if appropriate. Staff monitoring should be a priority, even members of the SLT. If a crisis persists over many hours staff become tired, weary and upset and this affects their powers to make sensible decisions.
- Encourage pupils to talk – activate strategies for enabling young people to talk about the incident, and their feelings, using outside agencies if appropriate. Staff will need briefing about ways to help the children affected by the incident, and how to identify patterns of behaviour etc. This may have implications for the wider curriculum i.e. training in bereavement counselling for staff, provision of a range of books, PSHCE discussions etc.
- Debriefing meeting – it may be appropriate to hold a debriefing meeting for staff, children and parents to:
  - Clarify what has happened
  - Allow for sharing reactions
  - Reassure people that reactions are normal
  - Mobilise resources e.g. parental support groups
  - An experienced person, possibly someone from outside the school community, should lead this meeting.
- Formal and informal recognition of rituals – it is important to remember to express sympathy to families of the hurt or bereaved. Visits to children/staff in hospital. Pupils may wish to send cards and letters. The school may also need to consider attendance at funerals, and/or the desirability of holding special assemblies or memorial services. Anniversaries are also key times when support and sensitivity are required.
- Re-establishing routines – every attempt should be made to provide continuity for the children. The return to school of staff or pupils directly affected by the crisis will need

to be managed carefully and with sensitivity but the re-establishment of routine is an important stage in emotional recovery.

### **Medium Term Action**

- Return to school for staff or pupils after long absence – reintegration will need to be planned carefully, and may involve home visits prior to return, part time attendance initially, reducing workloads, putting in place mentoring process etc.
- Consulting professionals – consideration should be given to consulting the Educational Psychology Service for support and guidance, especially to help those showing unusual or prolonged reaction to the incident.
- Keeping parents informed – it may be appropriate to produce a leaflet for parents giving guidance on the possible delayed reactions of pupils to an incident and making suggestions to help them deal with these.
- Support for staff – ongoing monitoring and support for staff is a major consideration. SLT especially will not be immune to reaction from their ordeal.

### **Long Term Action**

- Monitoring the vulnerable – the effects of a crisis can reverberate for years, and it is especially important that new staff and pupils are briefed in the school's history to help them understand and deal with potential repercussions especially at anniversary times.
- Marking anniversaries – these difficult times need to be treated with sensitivity. Some suggestions for schools to mark anniversaries are by annual concerts, memorial services, memorial prize giving ceremonies, memorial gardens etc.
- Legal processes – the length of time taken over some legal processes can prolong the recovery process following a critical incident. SLT may need to plan for this especially where staff may be involved attending legal processes, and facing extended emotional trauma.
- Curriculum implications – it may be appropriate to schedule INSET training for staff in loss counselling, bereavement etc.

### **Health and Safety Issues**

Prime consideration should be given to health and safety issues. These include:

- Electrical, gas and water systems to be isolated in the event of damage to a building
- Electrical equipment to be tested where it has suffered damage

### **School closure at short notice**

In the event that the school has to close at short notice or as a result of unforeseen circumstances the following procedures will take place. The SLT team will have access to the relevant information, via Scholarpack and Emergency Contact details.

The events covered by this policy:

### **Storms**

Winds forecast in excess of 70mph or storm force 8 could represent a potential danger to some buildings, trees, other structures and people.

The Meteorological Office provides a regional weather forecast

Email: [www.metoffice.gov.uk](http://www.metoffice.gov.uk) Phone No: 0845 300 0300

Safety of pupils, staff and visitors take priority. Lessons may need to be disrupted and school movement kept to a minimum

- Consideration needs to be given to movement outside of school buildings due to the risk of falling tiles, masonry, fencing, fallen branches and trees
- It is likely to be necessary to cancel outside play and other activities. Consideration must be given over the likelihood of pupils being blown off their feet.
- Pupils should not be allowed to cycle home – parents would need to be advised over this possibility.

## **Floods**

Sudden flooding may result in local problems within school, making some rooms uninhabitable. However, of greater significance in terms of health and safety is the potential impact on transport arrangements.

## **Cold Weather**

This may be a problem due to the low temperature in some buildings or may be complicated by heavy snowfalls making access difficult or dangerous.

- The Education (School Premises) Regulations 1999 set a standard of 18C in teaching areas and 15C in the hall, corridors, cloakrooms and toilets where the external air temperature is 1C or above. Failure to reach these temperatures is a maintenance issue, but if there is a breakdown which puts the heating system out of action for any length of time consideration needs to be given as to whether the building can be heated with emergency heating and continue to be occupied.
- Adverse weather conditions may result in difficulties for some staff in reaching school resulting in pupil supervision issues. In such circumstances the overriding priority will be the safety of pupils.

## **Disruption to the School's Water Supply**

Provided sufficient notice that the water supply is to be disconnected is received, it will be possible to make a decision on whether or not to keep the school open. This decision will be based upon

- The duration of the disruption;
- The capacity of the water storage tanks which will generally enable toilets to be flushed.

## **Emergency closure prior to the start of the school day**

It is the policy of the school to make every effort to remain open whenever possible; however in certain situations it may be appropriate in advance to decide that the school should not open. This will generally be as a result of a difficulty where there is advance notice. This could include a planned disruption to water or energy supplies. In such cases, parents will be given as much notice as possible and informed of either a confirmed date

when the school will re-open or advised on how this will be communicated. This will be through the school website and via Scholarpack.

In other situations, weather conditions may worsen dramatically overnight. In such circumstances it will be important that decisions over closure reflect:

- Intelligence over the weather conditions in the school's catchment area;
- The likelihood of a sufficient number of staff being able to reach school to make it safe to operate;
- The timing of any decision, taking account of the travel arrangements of the school.

When the Headteacher decides that severe weather warrants school closure s/he should:

- Inform Chair of Governors
- Inform staff and parents, separately via email
- Ensure that some members of staff who live locally are able to be at the school to inform any parents or children who may not have received the closure message.
- Inform Catering Provider
- Contact local radio stations:
  - Heart FM – 01223 623830 or 01223 623831
  - Connect FM – 01536 513664 or 01702 455061
  - BBC Radio Cambridgeshire – 01223 287003

The school will make all practicable efforts to keep parents informed as to the situation with the school during adverse weather conditions. However parents are expected to check their emails and/or make themselves aware of the radio broadcasts when it is clear that a closure is a possibility.

The school appreciates that during bad weather children may arrive later than normal; parents should endeavour to contact the school to let them know they are on their way if likely to be delayed. It is important that if a parent feels it is unsafe to travel they should not attempt the journey, but must inform the school of their decision.

The school recognises there will be isolated instances where families are cut off, even where the clear majority of children can get into school. In such instances parents should inform the school of the circumstances of this exceptional situation. Parents acting on the assumption that the school would be closed without gaining confirmation, risks their child being registered as an un-authorized absence. Where the school is officially closed, all absence is counted as authorised.

### **Sending Pupils Home**

When parents arrive at school earlier than the normal collection time, due to a critical incident that has taken place during the school day, they may be asked to wait until an appropriate time before collecting their child, particularly when their child has not been directly affected by the incident.

The school office must be informed of any pupil that is going home after a critical incident has occurred.

No pupil will be sent home unaccompanied after a critical incident has occurred, unless parental permission is obtained. With parental permission, another parent, relative or adult may take a child home.

In some exceptional circumstances, a review of the local situation may lead a Head to decide that the school, or part of the school, should be closed early. Such a decision should not be taken without first consulting appropriate persons, such as, the Chair of Governors, or the School Improvement Adviser. Such temporary and emergency closures do not count against the requirement for a school in the maintained sector to meet the minimum number of sessions each year.

A number of factors will be considered in making this decision including:

- It may often be safer to keep pupils in certain parts of the school rather than send them home early.
- Contacting a large number of parents/carers, especially during the day.
- Changing transport and school meal arrangements at short notice (free school meal pupils)
- Any decision over sending pupils home early must also include an informed assessment over their safety.

In the event of the school having to close during the day parents will be contacted by phone and/or email to be asked to collect their child/children.

## **Casualties**

Where a critical incident involves multiple casualties on site the person in charge should delegate a member of staff to take the names of those injured and the hospital to which they are taken. One of the SLT should inform parents as soon as possible. The police may undertake this task.

## **Briefing Stakeholders**

### **Parents/Carers:**

If appropriate, the large school hall and the non-fiction library may be used for briefing and/or counselling parents. Information should be given to parents regarding sources of help that are available. School should advise parents of all pupils at the school that their child may be upset, even if not directly involved in the incident.

### **Staff and Pupils:**

For all incidents the person in charge must decide which pupils are to be briefed and by whom. It may be appropriate to hold daily staff briefings with staff being told what, if anything, to tell pupils. In such cases, briefing notes would ensure consistency. Subsequent briefings may advise staff and pupils of available help, e.g., counselling.

Where an incident occurs during a school holiday the Headteacher should decide which members of staff and which pupils should be informed.

## **Governors**

The Chair of Governors should be informed as soon as possible, as detailed in the School Emergency Plan. The person in charge should ensure that parents and governors are kept informed in writing, where applicable.

## **Local Authority**

Advice and support should be sought from the Local Authority and they should be kept informed as set out within the School Emergency Plan.

## **Media Management**

Media Management information is contained within the School Emergency Plan and any actions taken must be in line with the directions contained within the plan and should ensure:

1. The needs of children or staff at the centre of a critical incident should take precedence and next of kin should be informed first and kept up to date. An initial media 'blackout' may be appropriate. (see 3).
2. Child Protection, Data protection and other confidentiality issues or legal issues should be considered before releasing info. The person in charge should authorise any releases.
3. A media 'blackout' will not be sustained beyond the necessary period as information from other sources can spread very quickly and it is often better for all involved to have reliable information put into the public domain to quell speculation.

In putting any information out to the media the school will:

- Inform: Provide the facts as they stand while being sensitive to the issues outlined in 2 above.
- Reassure: Give reassurance that the school is using all resources at its disposal in dealing with the incident and that the public can be confident that the school will act swiftly towards resolving the issue.
- Appeal: Appeal to parents/public to take on board any message or action that may be useful in helping the school to deal with the situation – this may be an appeal for privacy to be respected or an appeal for parents to seek medical advice or contact a particular agency.

## **Reporting Post Incident**

Critical incidents and injuries should be reported online by a member of the SLT or the Health and Safety Representative via [www.reportincident.co.uk/peterborough](http://www.reportincident.co.uk/peterborough)

This includes possible reporting to the health and Safety Executive (HSE) under the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations (RIDDOR).

Ofsted must be notified within 14 days, or as soon as is reasonably practicable, of any serious accident, illness, injury to or death of any child in the Early Years Foundation Stage whilst at school and of any action taken.

## **Post Incident Care**

Communication during and following an incident is imperative. All pupils, staff and parents may need post incident care and school will utilise all school counselling services available, to provide the level of support required. Sources of support and advice in the event of a critical incident are listed in Appendix 1 of the School Emergency Plan.

## **Conclusion**

By following this policy, in conjunction with the procedures laid out in the School Emergency Plan, the response to any critical incident will be in an informed manner where the physical, social and psychological health of all stakeholders within our school community is prioritised.

This policy will be reviewed following any incident we determine to be critical, or as deemed necessary in light of developments or changes.