



CRITICAL INCIDENT POLICY

There can be no rigid formula for responding to incidents, but broadly speaking, it has been assumed that where damage to premises is the focus, the Local Authority (L.A.) will take the leading role in managing the crisis in collaboration with the school and other agencies. Where the crisis is related to people, such as in the event of a death or serious injury, the assumption is that the school is likely to take the lead, with the support of the L.A. as necessary.

Handling crises is a normal part of school life. Some incidents however, are of a more critical and overwhelming character in which staff, pupils and parents may experience acute, sometimes prolonged distress.

This policy is not intended to be prescriptive or to attempt to cover all possible events. A major fire at a weekend, a serious accident on a school trip each require different types and scales of response. However, there is evidence that where a school has anticipated a major critical incident and made plans for managing a response, it is likely to handle the actual event more effectively and confidently. This policy will aim to identify:

- Who will assume key roles.
- That checklists and procedures are in place.
- That contact lists are accurate.
- That there is a tested framework for communications.
- That there are some developed skills to draw on.
- That the response to a crisis will be more assured than that based on improvisation.

GENERAL PLANNING

The head teacher and deputy will be the "Incident Managers", unless one of them is not available and then it will be the assistant head teacher, senior teacher and school administrator in that order. The chair of Governors or in their absence the Vice Chair of Governors will also be identified to take a lead responsibility for liaison with the emergency services and the Local Authority in the event of a crisis.

In the event of an emergency all staff will be notified as soon as is practically possible.

The school office will be the central liaison point for all incidents, as this is where the phone and fax lines are based.

In the aftermath of an incident there is the possibility of the school phone being inundated with incoming calls. The fax line/heads phone may need to be a

dedicated out going line. Alternatively, it may be most appropriate to use dedicated mobile phones to separate incoming and outgoing calls. If necessary the HCC emergency mobile control vehicle will be called to the site for use as the central liaison point.

Those dealing with incoming calls should provide an agreed factual statement along with reassurance of action being taken at the incident site. **It is important to avoid speculation or developments unless you are confident that they will be available.**

In the event of a critical incident it will be possible, by agreement, for the Herts Customer Service Centre to assist in contacting parents and other key people. This service is available by telephoning **01 438 737261 Monday to Friday 8:00 – 20:00 and Saturday 9:00 – 16:00. At all other times, 0800 547547.**

Callers to the above numbers should be prepared to provide the following information, if possible.

1. That you are calling about a school in Hertfordshire.
2. The name and address of school, including the town and street.
3. Your phone number or that of another available contact.
4. The nature of the incident. (A critical incident will be one involving very serious injury, loss of life, or an event likely to cause the closure of the school.)

As a result of the call all people and departments at County Hall and other appropriate support services will be notified as necessary.

CONTACTING PARENTS

It may be necessary to invite parents to come to a meeting. It might be necessary to choose a venue away from the public and press.

POSSIBLE MAJOR INCIDENTS

FIRE

If there is a fire during a working day the school fire and evacuation plan details action to be taken. This can be found in the staff handbook.

If there is a fire overnight or in school holidays the LEA has a support team that will help. However, there is some information that is vital to the running of the school which is held both on and off site.

This includes:

- Pupil and staff database.
- School financial accounts.
- Anything that is stored on the networked computers which includes most curriculum documents and policies.
- Premises and sites plan of the school including critical locations, copy of asbestos log book.

The police have a list of key holders with telephone contacts.

The staff emergency contact procedures should be started. The L.A. need to be informed so they can send out their emergency team.

BOMB ALERT

If there was reason to believe that there might be a bomb in school, the fire evacuation plan would operate.

SEVERE WEATHER

If there is a sudden heavy overnight fall of snow/hurricane etc. The most senior member of staff will contact local radio stations to alert them that the school may open later than usual/close. There is a password for this system which is organised by the L.A. The head and deputy will keep a copy of the password off site. The most senior teacher will contact school transport organisers to inform them of the arrangements for that day. Staff emergency contact procedures will be initiated. This system could be used for other major incidents.

ACCIDENT IN THE SCHOOL MINI-BUS

The action would depend on the severity of the accident and the distance from school. School should be alerted as soon as possible. (A mobile phone should accompany any out of school activity. The number of that phone should be recorded on the out of school slip.)

Parents will be informed via school and school will organise transport as appropriate to get parents to the hospital where our pupils may have been taken. Trauma for both parents and pupils can be reduced by bringing them together as soon as possible. The most senior and available teacher will inform County Hall Media Relations Department so that a press release can be prepared. The critical incident Governor needs to be informed as soon as possible as the press may want to get in touch. All other staff not involved in the incident will be briefed with up to date information and reminded not to talk to the media.

When the situation is most immediately under control parents, staff and pupils may benefit from counselling, which school/the Education Welfare Officer can organise.

SCHOOL JOURNEY OUT OF HOURS

The most senior teacher will keep a copy of all pupils and staff and their contact details when pupils are engaged in school activities out of schools hours. If there is an accident the above arrangements will still apply.

PUPIL DIES IN SCHOOL

Following on from current well practised call alarm procedures, the ambulance will be called.

Other pupils will be led from the same classroom while first aiders/school nurse try to save the pupil. If they witness death or near death they will need opportunities to talk about their feelings and counselling.

Parents will be informed in most sensitive way possible.

A calm member of staff may have to collect parent of the dead/dying child and take them to hospital or wherever is deemed appropriate.

Their religious leader may need to be informed if they have one.

Be prepared for grief to show in the form of anger.

Refer all questions that are difficult to the Head.

School governors are to be informed as soon as possible and briefed about speaking to the press.

Counselling for all concerned to be brought in to school. Educational psychology and EWO services can provide emergency counselling.

All press enquiries to be routed through head, Chair of Govs and LA media team.

ANY OTHER DIFFICULT TO PREDICT OCCURRENCES

At time of a national emergency such as a petrol crisis or issues following on from 11th September, the L.A. will organise briefing information/meetings for heads and key personnel with advice on how to protect schools and pupils and procedures to be followed if an event should occur.

GENERAL ADVICE FOR DEALING WITH THE MEDIA

Today's media operate very quickly. They are likely to contact you before the contingency plan is in place. The following includes some key points:

Whatever the incident, and particularly if it involves injury or death on a school trip, the likelihood is that information will be sketchy at best and possibly inaccurate.

Prior to the arrival of the press office

- Buy time, e.g. the head is not available, but will call you back.
- Be clear about which staff/governors are designated to talk to the press and who are not.
- Be prepared to accept that a designated person may not be the most appropriate person to handle the situation in some circumstances.
- Do not talk to a journalist by yourself; have a colleague with you to take notes of what is said.
- Do not provide anything other than facts.
- Give a prepared statement rather than an interview.
- Arrange a later time to undertake an interview.
- Be sensitive about personal information
- Do not apportion blame or admit liability to anyone, even in conversation.
- Establish who you are talking to and their organisation (name of journalist and short notes of what you have said).

DO NOT SPEAK OFF THE RECORD

This policy, guidelines and checklists will be reviewed at least once a term. This will help to ensure that the plan is a working document and kept up to date.