



Critical Incident Policy and Procedures

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Signed:

Date:

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Heltwate School has adopted policies and procedures to minimise risks to students and staff, and has a Health and Safety policy and procedures that are regularly reviewed. The Governing body recognises that not all circumstances are under the control of the school and that emergencies and disasters may happen.

Aims

The aims of this policy are:

- To prepare Governors, staff and students for any emergencies that may occur;
- To ensure that there is a plan that can be implemented swiftly in the case of an emergency caused by a disaster;
- To be a guide to actions in circumstances that are liable to strain the capacity of those handling the situation to think clearly; and
- To ensure that the school can still function to the best of its ability under adverse situations.

Legal Framework

The full schools critical incident plan is a controlled document of Heltwate School, meaning its contents should not be normally disclosed to anyone who does not require the plan for the normal performance of their duties

In the event of a critical incident affecting Heltwate School it is possible there may be legal ramifications. Whilst these should be considered the prompt implementation of the plan should take priority.

Introduction

The handling of a crisis is a normal part of school life, but some incidents are of a critical, more overwhelming nature, and sadly in recent years, incidents previously deemed unthinkable, have occurred in schools in the UK.

This policy is our school's contingency plan designed to provide a framework for handling a critical incident. The formulation of this policy is intended to clearly define the roles, responsibilities and procedures to follow, for school staff dealing with such an incident.

Each critical incident is unique, and it is not possible to plan for every eventuality, but similarly each critical incident can be shocking and disorientating so a prepared procedure is essential to ensure that the school's reaction is effective and efficient. The details contained within this document will form the basis of the school's approach to such a crisis

This policy is written with reference to Peterborough City Councils folder entitled CSE Coping with a School Emergency

The Senior Emergency Management Team (SEMT)

A Senior Emergency Management Team will comprise of staff the following staff:

- Senior Leadership Team
- Teaching Staff
- School Administrators
- Chair and Vice Chair of Governors

Potential accidents which could affect Heltwate School are considered to be:-

- Serious injury within school
- Serious injury on out of school visits
- Death of pupil or member of staff
- Fire/flood

- Health risk – outbreak of contagious illness/disease like meningitis
- Major arson attack
- Fatal road traffic accident
- Natural disaster within the community
- Consequences of terrorist or criminal Activity
- Air traffic emergency/crash

The above is by no means an exhaustive list, and clearly all situations will be individual in nature and need. Therefore, the guidance within this document must allow for a degree of flexibility in establishing the appropriate response to any event.

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

- Immediate action
- Short term action
- Medium term action
- Longer term action

Immediate action – i.e. within hours of the incident occurring

The Headteacher or, in his absence, the Deputy Headteacher will call the SEMT to meet.

The Chair of Governors will be contacted immediately or, if unavailable, the Vice Chair. Failing either, another nominated governor will be contacted. The relevant governor will be asked to join the team at the school.

1. The Headteacher decides if the SEMT (Senior Emergency Management Team) needs to be gathered together or contacted – brief the team, allocate roles and responsibilities; the Chair of Governors will usually chair the SEMT.
2. Trigger support from LA and other contacts on emergency list – establish clearly who is going to contact whom;
3. Set up an incident management room and dedicated phone line, to deal with calls from anxious parents etc. SEMT should agree a factual statement and avoid speculation;
4. Inform 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.
5. 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;
6. Make arrangements to inform other parents, may need to take advice from LA, especially if there is the possibility of legal liability. SEMT may wish to send a letter to parents, or prepare a leaflet.
7. 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 the ability to understand.
8. Encourage people involved to talk, the incident may need to be discussed before children go home for the day, for both pupils and adults.
9. Deal with the media, most important to seek advice from the LA before agreeing to speak to or to be interviewed by the media. If this is not an option then an agreed text for release should be prepared by the SEMT and Headteacher who will be briefed and prepared to respond on the school's behalf.
10. Devise a plan for handling the reactions and feelings of people affected, the most common reactions will include denial, distress, guilt, anger and helplessness. SEMT 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 SEMT will need to plan their short term reaction to the incident.
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Short term action

1. 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 to deal with repercussions in terms of children's fears etc.

2. 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 CIMT. If a crisis persists over many hours staff become tired, weary and upset and this affects their powers to make sensible decisions.
3. 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, PSHE discussions etc...
4. Debriefing meeting – it may be appropriate to hold a debriefing meeting for staff, children and parents to:
 - a. clarify what has happened
 - b. allow for sharing reactions
 - c. reassure people that reactions are normal
 - d. mobilise resources e.g. parental support groups an experienced person, possibly someone from outside the school community, should lead this meeting.
 - e. 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.
 - f. 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.
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Medium term action

1. Return to school for staff or children 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.
2. 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.
3. Keeping parents informed – it may be appropriate to produce a leaflet for parents giving guidance on the possible delayed reactions of children to an incident and making suggestions to help them deal with these.
4. Support for staff – on-going monitoring and support for staff is a major consideration. SEMT especially will not be immune to reaction from their ordeal.

Long term action

1. Monitoring the vulnerable – the effects of a crisis can reverberate for years, and it is especially important that new staff and children are briefed in the school's history to help them understand and deal with potential repercussions especially at anniversary times.
2. 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.
3. Legal processes – the length of time taken over some legal processes can prolong the recovery process following a critical incident. SEMT may need to plan for this especially where staff may be involved attending legal processes, and facing extended emotional trauma.
4. Curriculum implications – it may be appropriate to schedule INSET training for staff in loss counselling, bereavement etc.