



Kesh Primary School and Community Nursery

Managing Critical Incidents' Policy



Ratified by Board of Governors in:
March 2024

Signed:
Chairman of Board of Governors

Next Review:
March 2027

Signed:
Principal

Kesh Primary School aims to protect the well-being of its pupils and staff by providing a safe and nurturing environment at all times.

The Board of Governors, through our school's Senior Leadership Team, have drawn up a Critical Incident Management Plan (CIMP) as one element of the school's policies and plans within the Pastoral Care arrangements.

The Governors and staff of Kesh Primary School recognise a critical incident to be 'an incident or sequence of events that overwhelms the normal coping mechanism of the school.' Critical incidents may involve one or more pupils or staff members, or members of our local community.

Types of incidents might include:

- 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 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.

A critical incident, especially one which results in the tragic death of a young person, exerts enormous pressures on individuals and the whole school community. The resulting wave of emotion is intense, difficult to deal with and can be over-whelming. The prior establishing, maintenance and on-going promotion of a school ethos as one of a caring and supportive community is an important pre-requisite for helping everyone-staff and pupils, to cope and feel valued at a time of great stress.

Response strategies, everyone's role in them and sources of help and support need to be in place in every school as part of a pre-planned proactive process of staff development as opposed to being hastily thought out at a time of a sad event.

Teaching and support staff have an important role to play in maintaining a purposeful and supportive environment while sensitively helping restore harmony and routine back to the lives of pupils and the whole school community.

This document aims to provide the guidance necessary for an effective response to any future critical incident in Kesh Primary School and Community Nursery. It is our intention to work to ensure that our response is proportionate and appropriate.

In Kesh Primary School and Community Nursery School the following definition of a Critical Incident will apply

A critical incident may be defined as any sudden and unexpected incident or sequence of events which causes trauma within our school community and which overwhelms our normal coping mechanisms.

Aim

The aim of the CIMP is to help school management and staff to react quickly and effectively in the event of an incident, to enable us to maintain a sense of control and to ensure that appropriate support is offered to pupils and staff. Having a good plan should also help ensure that the effects on the pupils and staff are as limited as reasonably possible.

Creation of a coping supportive and caring ethos in the school

Our curriculum and pastoral care arrangements aim to help and support both staff and pupils, thus preparing them to cope with a range of life events. These include measures to address both the physical and emotional needs of the school community.

Physical Needs

- Evacuation plan formulated
- Regular fire drills occur
- Fire exits and extinguishers are regularly checked
- Public access doors are locked during school hours
- School doors are security locked during class time
- Rules of the playground are agreed and known by the school community

Emotional Needs

The Governors and staff of Kesh Primary aim to 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. Further details can be found within other relevant policies such as Pastoral Care, Child Protection and Addressing Bullying.

Staff are familiar with the Child Protection Guidelines and Procedures and details of how to proceed with suspicions or disclosures

Emotional health and well-being are an integral part of the school curriculum

The school may use a range of external agencies for support

Input to pupils by external providers are carefully considered in the light of criteria about pupil safety, the appropriateness of the content, and the expertise of the providers.

The school has a clear policy on addressing bullying and deals with bullying in accordance with this policy.

There is a comprehensive Pastoral Care System in place in the school.

Pupils who are identified as being at risk are referred to the designated staff member, concerns are explored, and the appropriate level of assistance and support is provided. Parents are informed, and where appropriate, a referral is made to an appropriate agency.

Members of staff are informed about how to access support for themselves.

Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT)

A CIMT has been established in line with best practice. Members bring a wealth of experience and expertise to the team and were selected on a voluntary basis. The members of the team will meet biannually and after an incident to review and, if necessary, update the policy and plan. Each member of the team has a dedicated critical incident folder. This contains a copy of the policy, a site plan and materials particular to their role, to be used in the event of an incident.

Roles

The key roles covered are as follows:

- Team Leader - Mr Stewart
- PSNI liaison - Mr Stewart
- Staff liaison - Mrs Irvine
- Pupil liaison - Mrs Irvine
- Parent liaison - Mr Stewart
- Community liaison - Mr Stewart
- Media liaison - Mr Stewart
- Administrator - Secretary

KEY RESPONSIBILITIES OF CRITICAL INCIDENT TEAM MEMBERS

Team leader

- Alerts the team members to the crisis and convenes a meeting
- Coordinates the tasks of the team
- Liaises with the Board of Governors
- Liaises with the bereaved family

In the absence of the team leader, the Vice Principal will assume the lead.

PSNI liaison

- Liaises with the PSNI
- Ensures that information about deaths or other developments is checked out for accuracy before being shared

Staff liaison

- Leads briefing meetings for staff on the facts as known, gives staff members an opportunity to express their feelings and ask questions, outlines the routine for the day
- Advises staff on the procedures for identification of vulnerable pupils
- Refers staff to materials from their critical incident folders
- 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 Staff Care Services and gives them the contact number

Pupil liaison

- Alerts other staff to vulnerable pupils (appropriately)
- Provides materials for pupils (from their critical incident folder)
- Keeps records of pupils seen by external agency staff
- Looks after setting up and supervision of 'quiet' room where agreed

Community/agency liaison

- Maintains up to date lists of relevant contact numbers such as emergency support services and other external contacts and resources
- Liaises with agencies in the community for support and onward referral
- Coordinates the involvement of agencies
- Reminds agency staff to wear name/visitor badges
- Updates team members on the involvement of external agencies

Parent liaison

- Arranges parent meetings, if held
- May facilitate such meetings, and manage 'questions and answers'
- Ensures that sample letters are typed up, on the school's system and ready for adaptation
- Sets up room for meetings with parents
- Maintains a record of parents seen
- Meets with individual parents
- Provides appropriate materials for parents

Media liaison

- Will draw up a press statement, give media briefings and interviews (as agreed by school management). Will consult Communications Officer EAWR.
- Where appropriate, may liaise with the EAWR Legal Services and relevant teacher unions

Administrator - Maintains up to date telephone numbers of

- Parents or guardians
- Teachers
- Emergency services
- Takes telephone calls and notes those that need to be responded to
- Ensures that templates are on the schools system in advance and ready for adaptation
- Prepares and sends out letters, emails and faxes
- Photocopies materials needed
- Maintains records of all correspondence

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 secretary will have a key role in receiving and logging telephone calls, sending letters, photocopying materials etc. (Appendix 1)

Confidentiality

The management and staff of Kesh Primary School and Community Nursery 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.

Critical incident rooms

In the event of a critical incident the following rooms will be used:

- Staff Room - to meet the staff
- Group Room / Assembly Hall - for meetings with pupils
- Group Room / Assembly Hall - for parents
- Principal's Office for media (if required)
- Principal's Office/ Group Room for other visitors

(Immediate, short and medium term actions are detailed in appendix 2)

Breaking the News to Pupils

It is important to inform pupils of a critical incident as soon as possible. Delaying a formal announcement may make the situation worse, as rumour can add another dimension to the existing problem and pupils may feel that a delay communicates lack of concern or sensitivity by the school staff.

In Kesh Primary School and Community Nursery the best person to communicate this difficult news will usually be the class teacher (supported by SLT) who is familiar to the pupils and trusted by them.

We are aware that there will likely be a range of different groups among the pupils with whom we will need to communicate. We will be mindful of pupils with SENs and other needs, those with English as a second language, 'Looked after Children' and those recently bereaved.

We are mindful that the manner in which a critical incident is announced to the pupils can have a major impact on the emotional responses of the whole school community. Before making the announcement of a traumatic event, such as an accident or sudden death, which is not already widely known in the school or community Kesh Primary School and Community Nursery will give careful attention as to the content of what pupils are to be told by:

Carefully wording the content of the announcement and providing written copies to teachers for use

Ensuring that the family's right to privacy is respected. In the case of suspected suicide, we will respect the wishes of the family being careful about language using the term sudden death instead of suicide

Making a straightforward sympathetic announcement of a loss with a simple statement of condolence. As pupils may have heard rumours via text messages or word of mouth it is important therefore that the broad facts of the event, once verified, are communicated to the pupils in an appropriate manner (calm, controlled, caring, sensitive and containing). This will help minimise rumour, provide an opportunity for the pupils to talk, express their reactions and help to prevent hysteria developing. Making the announcement simultaneously so that all pupils in the building will hear about it at the same time

Reducing the potential for creating a highly charged emotional climate and providing a 'safe container' by informing pupils in small groups for example in their class group and in their regular classroom setting

Allowing sufficient time for pupils to begin to discuss their feelings and assuring them that they will be kept updated as information is available.

Staff will be encouraged to remain calm and to listen to the pupils. They should not feel that they need to have all the answers to pupils' questions (as they will not) and

indeed it may not be appropriate to give out detailed information. Theirs is a listening, supportive and containing role.

Be as truthful as possible when responding to the questions of pupils, but keep in mind that early information available about a traumatic event may not be accurate.

Monitor the reactions of the pupils.

Monitor resource areas and school playgrounds to ensure pupils are appropriately observed and supported.

Provide designated area/areas for pupils should they wish to come out of their class.

They may wish to go to a quiet place (where they can be supervised) or to talk to someone for example the school nurse, school counsellor, member of the school's Safeguarding team or a member of the critical incident team supporting the school. Staff members need to be able to respond to pupil's needs and reactions in a calm, caring, compassionate and containing manner. They need to know that they will be supported and affirmed in their efforts to maintain this level of control.

It is important to communicate that the staff care about those affected by the critical incident and to model appropriate concern.

Normal School Routine

Our school aims to restore normal school routine as soon as feasible following the news of a critical incident. Sustaining the normal routine with timetabling flexibility will allow pupils and staff to access support and will also maintain a sense of continuity and stability for the whole school community. In some schools some of the pupils/staff may not be overwhelmed by the incident and therefore will maintain normal timetabling throughout the response.

Pupils Off-Site

In Kesh Primary School and Community Nursery it is our intention to be mindful of pupils who are off site because of educational trips etc. As with all other pupils, thought will need to be given as to how they are contacted, informed and supported. The school's CIMT will agree on the most sensitive and practical ways of breaking the news.

Pupils who are absent from school due to illness will be informed through a parent link. This is of particular importance if the absent pupil is in the same class or is the friend of a child who has died. In such a case, early contact should be made with the pupil's parent/carer. A pupil's return to school in any of these circumstances will be sensitively managed.

Pupils with Special Needs

Pupils with special needs including pupils with learning and communication difficulties will require special consideration from staff as they may be at a different developmental level to their peers, which may affect their understanding of trauma and death. These pupils will be told the news separately, if deemed necessary, by using short simple sentences in language appropriate to their level of understanding. They may ask the same questions repeatedly and may need extra patience and support. Non-verbal approaches such as pictures, drawings and photographs may help them to explore and express their feelings and concerns will be considered. Due to the diverse nature of pupils' special educational needs, the school's Learning Support Co-ordinator (LSC) will be consulted about the best approach for each child.

Contact with Parents/Carers

When a critical incident occurs parents will need to be informed. Parents of pupils directly involved will receive a telephone call or visited. If the death of a child has

occurred we will be mindful of the bereaved parents' needs. The Principal will make contact as soon as possible to express sympathy, liaise over messages of condolence from staff/pupils and be apprised of funeral arrangements.

Other parents, as appropriate, will also need to be informed via phone call/app message/email. The communication may contain information about what has occurred and the school's response/intended response. Looked after children in residential accommodation should also be considered and carers notified. Consideration should also be given to the needs of parents of children whose first language is other than English.

We will provide parents/carers as required with information on how young people react to a traumatic event will be helpful and reassuring e.g. pupils may be anxious, lack concentration, and be restless or unable to sleep. Giving parents some practical and constructive suggestions on how to support their child will also be helpful i.e. make time for the child; let them talk; do not leave them unsupervised as bad news may cause them to become anxious and unsettled; keep them with familiar adults and keep a familiar structure for them. Where there are vulnerable pupils, some parents may need to be contacted personally.

It needs to be remembered that a school cannot 'contain' information that is being shared within the community; it will 'leak out'. Bearing this in mind, consideration needs to be given to the use of social media and how to deal with some of the repercussions it can have.

Funeral Arrangements

In Kesh Primary School and Community Nursery School, the attendance at a funeral following a critical incident will be considered in line with our Safeguarding Policy. At all times the welfare of all our pupils and staff is paramount.

Managing the Media

In Kesh Primary School and Community Nursery School, all media enquiries will be channelled through one person who may be the Principal or nominee. Staff will be reminded about this school policy and will be advised not to speak with the media directly. It is necessary to respond to questions accurately and factually as information becomes accessible. However, it may be necessary to explain to the media that it is not possible to answer their questions at a particular time because of the sensitive nature of the incident or because the information is not available for various reasons. The delegated person will liaise directly with the media as more details become known. It may be necessary to check with the police, ambulance, fire and rescue service, EA Communications Officers, as appropriate, before making a statement. The school accepts that co-operation with the media can make the difference between inaccurate reporting, resulting in a story that reflects negatively on the school and one which shows the school's caring role and ability to respond effectively in a crisis.

For safeguarding reasons and to ensure that 'normal' school life is disrupted as little as possible, the news media will not be permitted on school property without the approval of the Principal. The news media does not have legal access to school property without such consent. This applies to television, radio, print media and photographers.

Dealing with a death by suspected suicide

Legally and ethically the term suicide should not be used until this is determined by a Coroner's Court. This can be one to two years after the actual death. Despite this, pupils and members of the community might still be inclined to describe a death as a

suicide before this has been established. The term 'suicide,' however, will not be used by the school until it has been categorically established that this was the case. Phrases such as 'tragic death' or 'sudden death' will be used instead. When talking to pupils it is especially important not to dwell on the cause of death.

In the aftermath of such a tragic event, any threat of suicide among pupils will be taken seriously and the pupil(s) referred immediately to the Designated Teacher for Child Protection and Safeguarding who will take appropriate action. Care should be taken to identify potentially vulnerable pupils and remind them of supports available, including talking to their teachers.

Potentially vulnerable pupils may include:

- Close friends and relatives of the deceased
- Pupils with a history of self harm, suicidal behaviour
- Pupils who have experienced a recent loss or separation
- Pupils who have been bereaved by suicide in the past
- Pupils with mental health difficulties
- Pupils with a history of substance abuse
- Pupils with child protection needs
- Non-communicative pupils who have difficulty talking about their feelings
- Pupils experiencing serious family difficulties, including mental or physical illness
- Pupils with special needs

In our school it is our intention to be vigilant around the time of the inquest, court cases and the anniversary of a death.

As with any death, our school community will wish to remember the person who has died and to pay tribute to their memory. When an apparent suicide has occurred, staff in Kesh Primary School and Community Nursery will be careful to remember the person rather than the incident/means of death.

We also acknowledge that it is important for events to be reported in a sensitive and measured way so that other vulnerable young people are not put at risk. The language used is very important.

Staff Welfare

The promotion of a school ethos of a caring, supportive community is an important pre-requisite for helping all staff to feel valued and to cope at times of great stress. In addition to support arrangements for all staff from within Kesh Primary School and Community Nursery, external sources of help will be identified and made known to all. During a crisis, consideration will be given to the provision of opportunities for staff, as individuals or in groups, to discuss their own reactions to what has happened, to assess the climate of the school and to share their observations on the monitoring of vulnerable pupils.

The Principal will endeavour to ensure that staff are well supported at all times during the school year and even more so during a crisis. In order to support pupils effectively, staff will be kept informed, given clarification regarding their role and given support. The needs of all staff will be monitored so that vulnerable individuals can be identified and supported. There are a number of ways in which this will be done, through school and external support, both formally and informally.

Informal support in school may operate through colleagues who are also friends of a member of staff and who can look out for them and support them.

Formal support can be arranged by a staff member by contacting Inspire Workplaces.
https://cdn.mentalhealthatwork.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/28105312/Professional-Services-Brochure.pdf?_gl=1*1689s54*_ga*NTk1MTMwODc1LjE3MDk4MzAxMDc.*_ga_CCQWD346SE*MTcwOTgzMDEwNy4xLjAuMTcwOTgzMDEwNy4wLjAuMA

The needs of the Principal and other senior members of staff, who are expected to exercise sensitive and strong leadership during the incident, will also be provided for in the planned support arrangements. While this group of senior staff may be well supported from within the school, it is likely that support will also come from outside the school.

School Closures

Depending on the nature of the critical incident and its impact on the school and wider community, it may be necessary to suspend the normal timetable for a short while to permit an appropriate response. In very exceptional circumstances, such as a death on school premises, it may be necessary to close the school. Further advice with regard to exceptional closures and the procedures to be followed are contained in the Department of Education circular, Circular Number: 2018/20
Date of Issue: 14 December 2018.

Critical Incidents during School Holidays

In Kesh Primary School and Community Nursery School if a critical incident occurs during the school holidays we will inform staff and parents (who will in turn inform their child). When the school opens we will support the pupils as appropriate and plan a memorial to remember the deceased, if appropriate.

Unsolicited Support/Advice

In Kesh Primary School and Community Nursery we are aware that, during a critical incident, offers of help and support will come from many sources, some welcome and part of our planned response, and others which, though well intentioned, may only serve to complicate that response. Careful consideration will be given to the benefits to be gained for our school community of accepting help from any source, other than those which had been planned for. All contact with pupils from any agency or individuals will be governed by our current Safeguarding and Child Protection in Schools Policy.

Police Investigation

In Kesh Primary School and Community Nursery we are also aware that the sudden death of a pupil may trigger an investigation and involve a number of agencies. This will depend on individual circumstances pertaining to the pupil. School staff may be asked to co-operate with enquiries by the PSNI or other investigating authorities. Such protocols, though necessary, can bring additional stress to bear during an already difficult time. The Principal and Senior Leadership Team have an important role to play in facilitating this process as well as providing the necessary support and reassurance for those staff who may be involved.

After the Event

The aim of the work carried out in Kesh Primary School and Community Nursery during the weeks, months and sometimes years following a critical incident is to help its immediate and broader community cope with and recover from the tragedy and trauma of the event. The restoration of harmony and return to normal routine require careful and sensitive planning, timing and implementation. Alongside the maintenance of a purposeful and supportive environment will be the need for a high level of staff vigilance for pupils' emotional wellbeing (watchful waiting) and the monitoring of those individuals with on-going difficulties. Reactions and emotions may not surface for months, even years following the event. Painful feelings and reactions can be triggered by seemingly innocuous events.

Ongoing Support for Pupils

Following a critical incident, it is likely that there will be considerable distress evident among many pupils, especially close friends and relations. Our staff will be on the lookout for signs of delayed or complicated grief reactions. In Kesh Primary School and Community Nursery, pupils who continue to show signs of significant distress after a number of months and who are finding the return to normal functioning difficult, will be considered for referral to appropriate personnel for specialist intervention.

The Safeguarding Team will also consider the need for action plans of support for individuals and groups, and continue close liaison with external agencies for guidance and reassurance. This period of high-level vigilance (watchful waiting) for pupils' emotional wellbeing and the on-going identification of pupils 'at risk' may need to be maintained for some time. It is important to realise that safeguarding children is a multi-agency concern and can become a child protection issue. The welfare of the child or young person must always be paramount.

Within our school environment, teachers may have to cope with relevant issues as they arise during teaching and learning. The curriculum will also provide opportunities to deal with these issues in a more extensive way. It would be unwise to focus obsessively on the critical incident, yet issues arising from the event should not be avoided by staff.

When a bereaved pupil is due to return to school, the Safeguarding Team and class teacher will give due consideration as to how best to facilitate this and plan support for the pupil and his/her peers.

When a pupil moves school and has been subjected to a trauma, the transferring school will be informed.

Support for Families

The families affected by the incident will require support for a long time after the tragic event. Family members may also attend our school and have difficulty in adjusting to their loss. In the event of the death of a child, parents may wish to have mementos of their son/daughter's involvement in the life of the school and to hear about his/her achievements. The return of personal belongings and/or school work to the family, perhaps in a 'memory folder' or 'memory box' will be handled sensitively. Consideration will also be given with regard to events that the deceased pupil would have been part of, for example award ceremonies.

Anniversaries and other significant times

Anniversaries may revive deep feelings among pupils and staff and will receive careful handling if new problems are not to be created. Additional support for pupils and staff may be required at this time. Teachers will also need to be sensitive to significant days such as Birthdays, Christmas, Mother's Day and Father's Day. In addition, there will be a need to take account of any long-term legal processes, e.g. a court case or an inquest, possible media interest and any related public events which may be unsettling for the school community.

Monitoring and Review of Critical Incident Management Plan

In light of experience, the Critical Incident Management Team will review and evaluate our provision for coping with critical incidents after a critical incident, termly and annually. What went well? What was most/least helpful? Were there any gaps? Have all necessary referrals to support services been made? Is there any unfinished business? This review will be undertaken in collaboration with those support agencies involved and will include consultation with all parties concerned.

APPENDICES

DE - A Guide to Managing Critical Incidents in Schools

Please see link below to the all the appendices:

<https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/guide-managing-critical-incidents-schools-appendices>

Critical Incident Management Guide - Initial Report and Running Record

<https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/de/appendix-3.pdf>

Appendix 1

Kesh Primary School - Critical Incident Log Sheet

Completed by _____ Role: _____ Date: _____

Time	From/to (Organisation, Name, Role)	Details	Any Action/ decision required/taken

Sheet No____

Appendix 2

Critical Incident Management Plan

It is important to remember that no two incidents are alike. Always assess needs first using these guidelines flexibly and in relation to the information available.

Day 1

Immediate actions

Assess the danger, gather factual information and take appropriate action

1. Initiate agreed school evacuation procedures if necessary, arrange for first aid
2. Establish a 'command' centre, identify who is in charge and set regular briefing times
3. Notify the emergency services/other relevant authorities, Chairperson Board of Governors
4. Maintain structures and routines where possible
5. Liaise with EAWR
6. Create a calm, purposeful environment

Co-ordinate school's response, meet with staff

1. Liaise and delegate, discuss intervention plan, agree how and what other pupils will be told
2. Collect, record, verify and update details (time, place, those involved etc)
3. Continue to liaise with Chairperson of Board of Governors/EAWR
4. Prepare media statement
5. Set up a recovery room in the school (provide fluids, tissues, comfortable chairs, support personnel)

Organise contact with pupils and parents

1. Give the facts of the critical incident, keeping in mind legal implications and respecting privacy
2. Inform parents by 'phone or in person if their child is involved, as soon as the initial information is confirmed. NB the media and/or children with mobile phones may have reached them first with inaccurate information.
3. Continue to liaise with Chairperson of Board of Governors/EAWR
4. Ensure a correct and consistent message is given
5. Provide sources of help for pupils and families and encourage communication between parents and school
6. Suggest possible reactions of pupils
7. Confirm the school's response plans

Short term actions

Restore the school to regular routine as soon as practicable

1. Plan visits to injured and bereaved
2. Continue to liaise with Chairperson of BoG/SELB/CCMS
3. Plan rituals and assemblies
4. Monitor pupils and staff

Obtain updated factual information

1. Continue to inform staff, pupils and parents
2. Principal consults with the families affected to determine their wishes concerning public announcements and information for school staff and pupils
3. Continue to liaise with Chairperson of BoG/SELB/CCMS

Continue to monitor well-being of students and staff

1. Organise assistance, such as transport home, for staff or students who are distressed. Try to ensure that they are not alone on the evening after a critical incident
2. Identify at risk pupils, staff, arrange for follow-up support, involvement with other professionals, referrals as necessary
3. Assess the need for debriefing of staff and pupils with expert help
4. Arrange for support of Critical Incident Response Team
5. Continue to liaise with Chairperson of BoG/EAWR

