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St Nicholas Critical Incident Policy

Aims of a Critical Incident Policy.

St. Nicholas's School aims to protect the well-being of its students and staff by providing a safe and nurturing environment at all time. St. Nicholas's School has taken a number of measures to create a coping, supportive and caring ethos in the school. This is reflected in the school's Mission Statement and is further supported by the Health and Safety Policy, the Anti-Bullying Policy, the Child Protection Policy and the Code of Behaviour. These policies and procedures have been formulated with a view to ensuring the physical and psychological safety of both staff and students during the normal course of a school day and in the event of a critical incident.

The Board of Management, through the Principal and teaching staff, has drawn up a Critical Incident Management Plan (CIMP) as one element of the school's policies and plans. A Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT) has been established to steer the development of the plan and to take responsibility for its implementation.

The CIMT consult resource documents provided to schools as well as

- Responding to Critical Incidents; Guidelines for Schools. (NEPS 2007).
- Responding to Critical Incidents; Resource Materials for Schools. (NEPS 2007).
- When Tragedy Strikes: Guidelines for Effective Critical Incident Management in Schools. (INTO/Ulster Teachers Union 2000).

Definition of a Critical Incident.

The management and staff of St. Nicholas's School recognise a critical incident to be '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 students or staff members, or members of our local community.

Types of incidents might include:

- The death of a member of the school community through sudden death, accident, terminal illness or suicide.
- A physical attack on a staff member or student.
- An intrusion into the school.
- An accident/tragedy involving members of the school community on or off the school premises.
- Serious damage to the school building through fire, flooding, vandalism, etc.

- The disappearance of a member of the school community.

Aims of the Critical Incident Management Plan.

The aims of the Critical Incident Management Plan are:

- to help school management and staff to react quickly and effectively in the event of an incident;
- to enable the school community to maintain a sense of control;
- to ensure that appropriate support is offered to students and staff;
- to ensure that the effects on the students and staff will be limited;
- to enable school management and staff to effect a return to normality as soon as possible.

Creation of a Coping, Supportive and Caring Ethos in the School

St. Nicholas's School have put systems in place to help build resilience in both staff and students, thus preparing them to cope with a range of life events. These include measures to address both the physical and psychological safety of the school community.

Physical Safety

A Health and Safety Policy is in place and in accordance with this policy the school has established a safety management system to meet the requirements of the Health and Safety Act 2005 and all other relevant legislation, standards and codes of practice. Measures to address the physical safety of the school community are as follows:

- An evacuation plan has been formulated.
- Fire drills are held at least once a term.
- Fire exits and fire extinguishers are regularly inspected.
- A 'buzzer' system of entry has been installed at the main entrance.
- External camera surveillance has been installed.
- Internal camera surveillance has been installed on the corridors.
- The Supervision Policy includes supervision for yard time, wet days, illnesses, movement between classes and 'time out' for the purpose of calming down when students are extracted from classes.
- Students cannot be taken from school during school hours without informing the Principal.

Psychological Safety

The management and staff of St. Nicholas's aim to use available programmes and resources to address the personal and social development of students, to enhance a sense of safety and security in the school and to provide opportunities for reflection and discussion.

- Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) is integrated into the work of the school. It is addressed in the curriculum by addressing issues such as grief and loss; communication skills; stress and anger management; resilience; conflict management; problem solving; help-seeking; bullying; decision making and prevention of alcohol and drug misuse. Promotion of mental health is an integral part of this provision.

- Staff have access to training for their role in SPHE.
 - Staff are familiar with the Child Protection Guidelines and Procedures and details of how to proceed with suspicions and disclosures.
 - St. Nicholas's has a clear policy on bullying and deals with bullying in accordance with the policy.
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- The staff is informed of difficulties affecting individual students and is aware and vigilant to their needs.
 - The staff have access to books and resources on difficulties affecting the Special Needs School Child.
 - Information is provided on mental health in general and such specific areas as signs and symptoms of depression and anxiety.
 - The school has developed links with a range of external agencies such as N.E.P.S, H.S.E, S.E.S.S, the Guards, I.N.T.O., the local Priests.
 - Inputs to students by external providers are carefully considered in the light of criteria about student safety, the appropriateness of the content, and the expertise of the providers.
 - There is a care system in place in the school.
 - Students who are identified as being at risk are referred to the Principal, 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.
 - Staff are informed as to how to access support for themselves.

The Critical Incident Management Team.

A Critical Incident Management team has been established in line with best practice. The team leader is the Principal or, in her absence, the Deputy Principal. The members of the team are selected on a voluntary basis and retain their roles for at least one school year. The members of the team meet annually to review and update the policy and plan. Each member of the team has a dedicated critical incident folder. This contains a copy of the policy and plan and materials, particular to their role, to be used in the event of an incident. All staff members will be given a copy of the plan.

Team Leader

- Alerts the team members to the crisis and convenes a meeting;
- Clarifies the facts surrounding the incident;
- Coordinates the tasks of the team;
- Liaises with the Board of Management, Department of Education and Science, NEPS.;
- In the case of bereavement liaises with the bereaved family.
- Ensures provision of ongoing support to pupils and staff.

Garda Liaison

- Liaises with the Gardaí;

- 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 students;
- Provides material for staff (from the critical incident folder);
- 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 the EAS and gives them the contact number;

Student Liaison

- Liaises with parents and teachers;
- Alerts other staff to vulnerable students;
- Provides materials for students (from the critical incident folder);
- Keeps records of students seen by external agency staff;
- Prepares an 'Incident Room'.

Parent Liaison

- Visits the bereaved family with the team leader;
- Arranges meetings with parents/guardians;
- Sets up a room for meeting with parents/guardians;
- Meets with individual parents/guardians;
- Facilitates such meetings with 'questions and answers' ;
- Provides materials for parents (from the critical incident folder);
- Maintains a record of parents/guardians seen;
- Manages the 'consent' issues in accordance with agreed school policy;
- Ensures that sample letters are typed up on the school's system and are ready for adaption.

Community Liaison

- Maintains up to date lists of contact numbers of key parents such as members of the Parents Association, emergency support services and other external contacts and agencies;
- Liaises with agencies in the community for support and onward referral;
- Coordinates the involvement of these agencies in the school;
- Updates team members on the involvement of external agencies.

Media Liaison

- Considers, in advance of a Critical Incident, issues that may arise in relation to access to students, interviews, photographers and journalists on the premises;
- In the event of an incident liaises, where necessary, with the Communications Section of the DES, the SEC, the relevant teacher unions, etc.
- Prepares a press statement and gives media briefings and interviews (as agreed by school management).

Administrator

- Maintains an up to date list of contact numbers for school staff, parents and guardians and their next of kin and emergency support services;
- Responds to telephone calls;
- Sends letters, e-mails and faxes;
- Photocopies essential materials;
- Maintains records;
- Ensures that templates are on the school's system in advance and are ready for adaptation.

Record Keeping

In the event of a critical incident each member of the team will keep detailed records of phone calls made and received, letters sent and received, meetings held, persons met, interventions used, materials used, etc. the school secretary will have a key role in receiving and logging telephone calls, sending letters, photocopying materials, etc.

Confidentiality and Good Name Considerations.

The management and staff of St. Nicholas's have a responsibility to protect the privacy and the good public statement. 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 use it. 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.

Critical Incident Room

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

- | | |
|--------------------|---|
| Principal's Office | - Critical Incident Management Team Meetings.
Meetings with Chairman of the Board of Management.
Meetings with the Media. |
| Meeting Room | - Meetings with individual visitors, support workers, parents and pupils directly involved in an incident. |
| Main Hall | - The School Staff. |
| Own Classrooms. | - Senior School Students. |
| Own Classrooms | - Junior School Students. |
| Main Office. | - Reserved primarily for all administrative tasks associated with the critical incident. |

Consultation and Communication Regarding the Plan

All staff were consulted and their views canvassed in the preparation of this policy and plan. The final policy and plan was passed to the Board of Management for approval in November 2024.

Each member of the staff has a personal copy of the Policy and agrees to abide by the provisions of same.

Each member of the Critical Incident Management Team has a personal copy of the Policy and Plan. Members of the CIMT undertake to use all contact details strictly for the purposes of this Critical Incident Management Plan and not to disclose staff or pupil details to any third party. Members of the CIMT undertake to return all contact details to the school on the cessation of their employment and/or their stepping down from the CIMT.

Members of the CIMT undertake to keep confidential and to treat with sensitivity all information received in connection with the implementation of this Critical Incident policy and plan.

Feedback, Assessment and Review

This policy will be reviewed in April annually or within three months of any critical incident, whichever is the earlier.

Ratification, Dissemination and Review.

This policy is a collaborative document and is disseminated to the school community.

Storage Procedures: In St. Nicholas's School.

Ratified by: Board of Management, St. Nicholas's School .

Date: 27/01/2025

Signed by Chairperson:  Date: 27/1/25

Mr. Simon Beale.

Review: Annually

Reviewed by _____ . Date _____

Emergency Contact List

Agency	Contact Numbers
BALLINA GARDA	09620560
MAYO UNIVERSITY HOSPITAL	0949021733
AMBULANCE	999/112
FIRE BRIGADE	999/112
SCHOOL INSPECTOR Christina Casserly	087 0923275
N.E.P.S. School Psychologist: Catriona Whelan	087205079
D.E.S. Dublin Athlone	01 8896400 090 6483600
I.N.T.O. Branch Secretary: Aileen Horkan	0876105842
FORSA	01 8171500 087 7611391
PARISH CLERGY, PRESBYTERY Parish Priest, Fr. Ciaran	09670555

Critical Incident Rooms

Room	Use
Principal's Office	Critical Incident Management Team Meetings Meetings with Chairman of the Board of Management Meetings with the Media
Meeting Room	Meetings with Individual visitors, support workers, parents and pupils directly involved in incident.
Main Hall	The School Staff
Own Classrooms	Senior School Students
Own Classrooms	Junior School Students
Main Office	Reserved primarily for all administrative tasks associated with the critical incident.



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Critical Incident Response Plan for St. Nicholas's Special School

A critical incident is '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 students or staff members, or members of our local community.

Types of incidents which could affect St. Nicholas's School might include:

- The death of a member of the school community through sudden death, accident, terminal illness or suicide.
- A physical attack on a staff member or student.
- An intrusion into the school.
- An accident/tragedy involving members of the school community on or off the school premises.
- Serious damage to the school building through fire, flooding, vandalism, etc.
- The disappearance of a member of the school community.

The Critical Incident Management Team in St. Nicholas's Special School comprises of a group of staff members with practical skills which can be drawn upon in the event of a critical incident arising. The team will meet annually in September to review the plan. The following staff members form the Critical incident management Team for this academic year:

Team Leader: Thomas Jones

Garda Liaison: Thomas Jones

Staff Liaison: Sinead Leahy

Student Liaison:

Junior School: Donna Jordan

Senior School: Suzann Casey

Parent Liaison:

Junior School: Patria Tierney

Senior School: Helen Conlon

Community Liaison:

Sinead Leahy

Media Liaison:

Thomas Jones

Administrator:

Sandra Lewis

An up-to-date list of contact numbers for staff, students, parents/guardians and emergency support services will be regularly updated and kept in the Secretary's office. The Emergency Contact List will be displayed in the Principal's office, the Secretary's office and the Staff Room. All lists will be dated.

Procedures to be followed in the event of a critical incident.

Short-Term Actions. Day 1

- **Gather accurate information:** Gather accurate information about the incident, what happened, where, when, extent of injuries, location of those injured/not injured, how many were involved and their names, what agencies have been contacted already.
- **Contact appropriate agencies:** Examples of agencies that could be contacted include emergency agencies, medical agencies, psychological agencies and the Board of management.
- **Convene a meeting with the Critical Incident Management Team:** The agenda for the meeting could include the following: (1) Agree a statement of facts for the staff, students and parents/guardians. (2) Delegate responsibility to the Critical Incident management team. (3) Organise a timetable for the day adhering to school routine as far as possible. (4) Organise a staff meeting and arrange for the supervision of the students during the staff meeting.
- **Arrange supervision of students.**
- **Hold a staff meeting:** All staff should be invited to attend the meeting including the Special Needs Assistants, the Secretary and the Caretaking Staff. Items to be covered at the staff meeting should include: (1) An account of the facts as known. (2) An opportunity for the staff to express their views and feelings. (3) Establish an agreed approach on how the facts will be shared with students and parents. (4) An outline for the schedule for the day. (5) Give information to the staff relating to the outside agencies and others involved and the supports being put in place for the students, staff and parents/guardians. (6) Vulnerable students to be identified. (7) Relevant hand-out material to be distributed. Appropriate material is kept on file in the Critical Incident File in the Principal's office.
- **Organise timetable for the day.** As far as possible maintain a normal routine.
- **Inform parents/guardians:** (1) Inform parents/ guardians of students directly involved. (2) Inform parents/ guardians of students not directly involved.

Students Directly Involved.

The Critical Incident Team decide on who should share information with the parents/guardians and how this should be done.

The information shared must be relevant, factual and practical.

All staff should be mindful of parents who are on their own when they arrive in the school and ensure that they are supported.

To avoid duplication make a list of parents/guardians already contacted and those who have still to be contacted.

The Library is to be set aside for distressed students to meet with their parents/guardians.

Give telephone numbers for enquiries.

Students Not Directly Involved.

The parents of other students in the school should be informed of the incident and that their child/children may be upset.

Send a letter to the parents stating the facts and brief details of the incident.

It may not be appropriate at this point to disclose the name/names of those involved.

- **Inform students:** Careful preparation is important when meeting students to inform them of a critical incident. Consideration should be given to the age of the students and the optimum group size. It is best to do it in class groups or sub groups. The suitability of the person informing the students should also be considered, remembering that it is generally thought that support is best given by the adults known to the student/students. If at all possible the teacher should be accompanied by another professional and not meet the class on her/his own.

Give facts and avoid speculation. This will help to dispel rumours which can cause unnecessary distress.

Allow students to ask questions, tell their stories and express their feelings.

Help students realise that overwhelming emotions are natural and normal following a critical incident.

- **Make contact with the bereaved family.**
- **Dealing with the media:** It is the role of the Principal to deal with the media, or should the Principal so direct, this role may be delegated to another member of staff. Any other staff member who speaks to the media will be doing so in a personal capacity and will not be representing the school or the agreed procedures within the Critical Incident Plan.

Prepare a written statement to include:

- the facts about the incident;
- what has been done already;
- what is going to be done;
- positive information or comments about the deceased person.

The statement will be simple, factual and brief.

A room, i.e. the Principal's Office will be set aside for the media to help control their access to staff and students.

- **Organise the reunion of the students with their parents, if necessary:** inform students that their parents/guardians will collect them as soon as possible. Facilitate distressed students and their parents by providing a private room where they can meet following an incident.

Medium-Term Actions. (24 – 72 hours)

- **Review the events of the first 24 hours.**

Re-convene Critical Incident Management Team and any other key staff members who may have become specifically involved.

Briefly check out how each person on the team is coping.

Decide on arrangements for support meetings for parents/guardians, students and staff.

Get feedback from teachers on vulnerable students.

Have review staff meeting with all staff if necessary. Ensure all staff are kept up to date on any developments.

Be sensitive as to how all staff are coping on a personal and professional level.

Establish contact with absent staff and pupils.

Update media if necessary.

- **Arrange support for individual students, groups of students and parents, if necessary.**

Provide a suitable room. The Meeting Room will be made available.

Hold support/information meeting for parents/guardians/students in order to clarify what has happened.

Offer advice and reassurance.

Inform them about support services and provide relevant hand-outs.

Any teacher who feels uncomfortable with involvement in support meetings has the choice of opting out.

Arrange, in consultation with outside agencies, individual or group debriefings or support meetings with parental permission.

- **Plan for the reintegration of students and staff (e.g. absentees, injured, siblings, close relatives, etc.).**

Name key persons to liaise with above on their return to school.

- **Plan visits to injured.**

Key person/persons to visit home/hospital would be any member of the Critical Incident Team or other staff who may have a specific relationship or role.

- **Liaise with the family regarding funeral arrangements/memorial service.**

Designate a staff member to liaise with the family, to extend sympathy and to clarify the family's wishes regarding the school's involvement in the funeral/memorial service.

Arrange a home visit by two staff representatives within 24 hours, if appropriate.

Have regard for different religious traditions and faiths.

Decide on attendance and participation at the funeral/memorial service in accordance with parents'/guardians' wishes and school management decisions and in consultation with close friends.

- **School Closure.**

Request a decision on this from the school management.

Longer-Term Actions

- **Monitor students for signs of continuing distress.**

A referral to outside agencies, e.g. NEPS, may be necessary. For example if, over a prolonged period of time, a student continues to display the following, he/she may need assistance:

- 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.

- **Evaluate response to incident and amend the Critical Incident Management Plan appropriately:**

- 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?

- **Formalize the Critical Incident Plan for the future.**

Consult with NEPS and all relevant personnel involved about this.

- **Inform new staff/new school pupils affected by Critical Incidents where appropriate.**

Ensure that new staff are aware of the school policy and procedures in this area.

Ensure they are aware of which students were affected in any recent incident and in what way.
When individual students or a class of students affected by an incident are transferring to a new school, it would be useful to brief the Principal of the new school about their concerns.

- **Decide on appropriate ways to deal with anniversaries (be sensitive to special days and events)**
Anniversaries may trigger emotional responses in students/staff and they may need additional support at this time.

Acknowledge the anniversary with the family and liaise on any proposed commemoration.

Be sensitive to significant days like birthdays, Christmas, Mother's Day and Father's Day.

SAMPLE LETTER TO PARENTS/GUARDIANS – SUDDEN DEATH or ACCIDENT

Dear Parents,

The school has experienced (the sudden death, accidental injury, etc.) of one of our students/staff members. We are deeply saddened by the death/event.

(Brief details of the incident, and in the event of a death, perhaps some positive remembrances of the person lost.)

Our thoughts are with (family name)

We have support structures in place to help your child cope with this tragedy. (Elaborate)

It is possible your child may have some feelings and questions that he/she may like to discuss with you. You can help your child by taking time to listen and by encouraging him/her to discuss his/her feelings. It is important to give truthful information that is appropriate to his/her age.

If you would like advice you may contact the following people at the school. (Details).

Principal's signature.

SAMPLE LETTER TO PARENTS/GUARDIANS REQUESTING CONSENT FOR INVOLVEMENT OF OUTSIDE PROFESSIONALS

Dear Parents,

Following the recent (tragedy, death of x) we have arranged professional support for students in school who need particular help. (x) is available to help us with this work. The support will usually consist of talking to children, either in small groups or on a one-to-one basis and offering reassurance and advice as appropriate.

Your son/daughter has been identified as one of the students who might benefit from meeting with the (x . . .). If you would like your child to receive this support please sign the attached permission slip and return it to the school by

If you would like further information on the above or if you would like to talk to the psychologist, please indicate this on the slip or contact the school.

Principal's signature.

SAMPLE STATEMENT FOR THE MEDIA

My name is _____. I am principal of St. Nicholas's Special School. We learnt this morning of the death of (one of our students or *Name* of student). This is a terrible tragedy for _____ family(ies), our school and our community. We are deeply saddened by these events. Our sympathy and thoughts are with (*Name*) family and friends.

Name of student/students was a (4th Class boy) and will be greatly missed by all who knew him.

We have been in contact with his/her parents and they have requested that we all understand their need for privacy at this difficult time.

Offers of support have been pouring in and are greatly appreciated. Our school has implemented Our Critical Incident Management Plan.

Psychologists from the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) and (insert other information if relevant) have been with us all day supporting and advising teachers in their efforts to assist our students at this time.

The teachers have been helping students to deal with the tragic event.

The school has been open to parents to support them and to offer them advice and guidance.

We would ask you to respect our privacy at this time.

Thank you.

Critical Incident Management Team

Role	Name
Team Leader	Thomas Jones
Staff Liaison	Sinead Leahy
Student Liaison	Donna Jordan/ Suzann Casey
Parent liaison	Patria Tierney/Helen Conlon
Community liaison	Sinead Leahy
Media liaison	Thomas Jones
Garda liaison	Thomas Jones
Administration	Sandra Lewis