

THE OLD BOROUGH NATIONAL SCHOOL

CRITICAL INCIDENT POLICY



Introduction

The Old Borough NS aims to protect the well-being of its students by providing a safe and nurturing environment at all times. Our mission is to create a human environment which is conducive to the personal development of all members of our school community and to their fruitful interaction.

The School has taken a number of measures to create a coping, supportive and caring ethos. The school has formulated a number of policies and procedures to be followed with a view to ensuring the physical and psychological safety of staff and students, both in ordinary time and in the event of a critical incident.

Definition of a Critical Incident

A critical incident is defined as 'an incident or sequence of events that overwhelms the normal coping mechanism of the school and disrupts the running of the school.' Critical incidents may involve one or more pupils, staff, the school or our local community. Types of incidents might include, but are not limited to:

- The death of a member of the school community through sudden death, accident, terminal illness, etc.
- An accident involving members of the school community.
- A physical attack on staff member(s) or student(s) or an intrusion into the school.
- Serious damage to the school building through fire, flood, vandalism, etc.
- The disappearance of a member of the school community.
- An accident/tragedy in the wider school community.

Aim

The Old Borough NS hopes that in the event of an incident, this policy will help staff to react quickly and effectively and to maintain a sense of control. It should also help us to achieve a return to normality as soon as possible and ensure that the effects on the students and the staff will be limited.

Ethos - Assisted by Support Structures

We have put systems in place to lessen the probability of an incident occurring. These measures address the physical and psychological safety of both staff and students.

Physical Safety:

- Adherence to the Health and Safety Policy.
- Evacuation Plan formulated with Fire Drills each term.
- Fire exits and extinguishers are regularly checked.
- Controlled access to school premises.
- Adherence to the Code of Behaviour.

Psychological Safety:

The School aims to create an open and encouraging environment in the school where students can talk about their difficulties and seek help for the same.

- Our SPHE programme addresses issues such as communication skills, conflict resolution, problem-solving, help-seeking, decision-making, grief and loss.
- Our Code of Behaviour, in conjunction with our SPHE programme and Anti-Bullying Policy, encourages students to develop strategies for dealing with bullying.
- Weaving Wellbeing encourages students to develop the skills they need to improve physical, social, and emotional well-being.
- Our Staff is informed of difficulties affecting individual students and are, therefore, aware and vigilant to their needs.

Critical Incident Management Team

The Old Borough NS has set up a CI Management Team in line with best practice. The members of this team will be reviewed as changes to staffing and Boards of Management occur.

The members of the CI Management Team are:

Critical Incident Management Team:

- 1. Team Leader - Bryan Donovan (Principal)
- 2. Deputy Team Leader - Deirdre Grogan (Deputy Principal)
- 3. Administrator - Gillian Haynes (Secretary)
- 4. Student Liaison - Class teachers
- 5. Chairperson - Revd. Canon David Gillespie

It may also include:

- The Chairperson of the PTA
- A member of An Garda Siochana
- A member of the Fire Brigade
- The Rector may be available to provide support and spiritual guidance both during the immediate aftermath of a critical incident and in the period after the critical incident as appropriate. They may also provide appropriate pastoral support in accordance with the school ethos.

The CI Management Team will consult with the relevant authorities listed on the Emergency Contact List as appropriate in the event of an incident.

Critical Incident Rooms:

In the event of a critical incident, the Hall, where practical will be the main room used to meet the staff, students, parents and visitors involved.

Contact Numbers/Emergency Information

The Secretary has responsibility for maintaining an up-to-date list of contact numbers for students and their parent(s)/guardian(s). The school secretary has responsibility for maintaining an up-to-date list of contact numbers for staff. The Health and Safety Representative has responsibility for ensuring that a list of contact numbers for the emergency support services is displayed in the Office.

Evacuation Procedures

The evacuation procedures (Fire Drill) are practised at least once a term.

Training and Staff Development

The school will endeavour to provide opportunities for staff and members of the Board of Management to attend briefing/awareness meetings on issues such as suicide, grieving, and first aid.

Visitors

Visitors, including parents, must report to the school's secretary's office, identify themselves and state their business in the school. Visitors will not be allowed beyond the school's reception office except at the invitation of a member of staff.

The Media

Members of the media must report to the office, identify themselves and state their business in the school. Members of the media will not be allowed beyond the office except at the invitation of the Principal or Deputy Principal. In certain circumstances, it may be necessary to request the media to remain outside the school gate.

Only the Principal, Deputy Principal or Chairperson of the BOM will communicate with the media. Students and staff have a responsibility to protect the privacy and good name of the people involved in the incident and need to be sensitive to the consequences of any public statement.

The Principal and Deputy Principal, in consultation with the CI Management Team, if possible, will prepare a brief, written statement, which may include some or all of the following:

- The sympathy of the school community for the affected/bereaved family.
- Positive information or comments about the deceased/injured person(s).
- The facts about the incident (following consultation with the affected/bereaved families).
- What has been done.
- What is going to be done.

Parents are requested to refer the media to the school management.

Procedures to be Followed in the Event of a Critical Incident

Short-Term Actions (Day One)

- Ensure the safety of students, staff and visitors.
- **GATHER ACCURATE INFORMATION - designated persons should seek accurate information as discreetly as possible.**
- Convene a meeting of the Critical Incident Management Team and ensure everyone knows their duties/responsibilities. Decide on facts to be shared and the appropriate course of action.
- Identify high-risk students who may need additional support.
- Inform staff (School Principal) of the facts as known.
- Appoint people to assist the secretary and caretaker in handling phone enquiries and manning the office and the front gate.
- Inform students and parents.
- Contact appropriate agencies and organise support.
- Contact DES, the BOM, NEPS and the PTA.
- Arrange contact with the affected/bereaved family.
- Prepare a brief media statement. Where appropriate, address the facts, the person, and sympathise with the family. Establish rules of engagement/means of communication with media outlets. Principal, Deputy Principal or Chairperson only to respond to the media.
- Organise a timetable for the day.
- Arrange the supervision of students.
- Organise reunion of students with their parents.
- Hold a staff meeting and distribute resource material. Information of employee welfare supports should be shared as appropriate.
- Report to the Health and Safety Authority if necessary.

As far as possible, maintain a normal school routine.

Medium Term Actions (24 - 72 Hours)

- Convene a meeting of the Critical Incident Management Team to review the events of the first 24 hours and to ensure everyone is aware of their roles. Ensure that updated facts are reported to staff and monitor staff welfare.
- Arrange support for students, staff and parents. Contact NEPS for advice. Materials such as books or activities for children may be provided to explore the situation in a sensitive way.
- Update staff and parents.
- Update the DES, the BOM, the PTA and the relevant external agencies.
- Update the media, if necessary.
- Plan visits to the affected person(s) as appropriate. Make contact prior to visit to ensure this is acceptable.
- Liaise with the family and clarify the school's involvement in funeral/memorial services. Decide, in the case of an extreme critical incident, on school closure with advice from NEPS and permission of the BOM.
- Plan for the reintegration of students and staff.
- Assess the roles of the Board of Management and the PTA.

- Plan for the restoration of normal school routine.

Long Term Actions

- Monitor students and staff for signs of continuing distress. Ensure that staff are aware of the appropriate supports.
- Continue to liaise with external agencies.
- Plan for return of bereaved.
- Plan for return of personal items to bereaved family.
- Plan for appropriate ceremonies. As a faith school, an appropriate event may be held some time after the critical incident with permission from the bereaved/those affected.
- Plan long-term counselling needs of individuals.
- Evaluate the school's response to the critical incident and amend the Critical Incident Policy appropriately.
- Evaluate the effect on the student/teacher relationships.
- Evaluate the long term effect on the educational progress of students.
- Ensure that new staff are aware of the Critical Incident Policy and are informed of which students/staff were affected in any recent incident.
- Report to the BOM, the PTA and the DES.

Monitoring, Review and Evaluation

The Critical Incident Policy committee will review the policy as necessary but at a minimum within a 2 year period. Ongoing review and evaluation will take cognisance of changing information, legislation, developments in the school-based programme and feedback from parents/guardians, teachers and students. The policy will be revised as necessary in the light of such review and evaluation and within the framework of school planning.

Reviewed

1st October 2025

Signed: *David Gillespie*

Revd. Canon David Gillespie

Chairperson, Board of Management

