



CRITICAL INCIDENT PROCEDURE / LOCKDOWN POLICY

Reviewed and updated autumn 2025 | Next review autumn 2026

Definition

A critical incident can be defined as a sudden, unexpected and tragic event or sequence of events which causes trauma and confusion within a school community and which overwhelms its normal coping mechanism. It may affect pupils, staff, parents and governors; may relate directly to the safety of the school community or may involve an incident beyond the school premises.

A critical incident is any event where the safety of employees or pupils may be put at significant risk or which causes substantial damage to any part of the school buildings or to its grounds. A risk may be physical as well as emotional/psychological. A critical incident is likely to have a severe impact upon the school, both in the short and long term. Our aim is to ensure that school strategies and procedures are in place to protect the physical and emotional wellbeing of every member of the school community.

Risks may include, but are not limited to, the following: *death or serious injury to one or more members of the school community and, or, their families either at school, journeying to or from school, participating in a school related activity, at home or in some other context; an accident involving a student or member of staff; a deliberate act of violence; a school fire and subsequent infrastructural damage; flooding; an explosion (for example, in a laboratory); civil disturbance; adverse weather conditions; gas explosions; significant road traffic accidents nearby (psychological impact); terrorism; malevolent intruder; aeroplane crashes; dangerous animals on site.*

The Critical Incident Policy cannot cover every aspect of a critical incident. Occurrences may arise which cannot be foreseen. The critical incident may occur during the school day, during the evening, during the school holidays or on a school trip. The Headmistress, SMT and Maintenance Team have responsibility for ensuring that procedures are properly addressed at times of high emotion.

The following must be remembered in relation to a critical incident:

- that the policy is followed as closely as possible;
- that designated personnel understand their tasks and are competent to carry them out;
- that other people do not take unilateral actions;
- that consideration and sensitivity is shown by all;
- that pupils, staff and parents are protected from press intrusion;
- that normal routines be resumed as soon as possible;
- there is a realisation that total recovery may take a long time.

The aims of any procedures in relation to a Critical Incident are as follows:

- 1) To maintain a duty of care and to ensure that the welfare of pupils and staff is paramount
- 2) To minimise educational and administrative disruption within school
- 3) To enable normal working to be resumed in the shortest possible time
- 4) To ensure that swift and appropriate action is taken in the case of the school being made aware that a critical incident has occurred.
- 5) To ensure that the school responds in a sensitive, consistent and effective manner which reduces confusion, panic and extreme emotion.
- 6) To maintain normality, as far as possible, in parts of the school which are not affected and to restore normality as soon as possible to the parts which are affected.
- 7) To have immediate access to all relevant contact details (including outside agencies).
- 8) To offer sensitive, non-intrusive support in the short and medium term to all those affected directly or indirectly by the incident.

Procedures during school hours

In the event of a Critical Incident occurring during school hours, any member of staff can raise the alarm by contacting the Office or Maintenance Staff by email, phone or word of mouth.

A decision will be taken by the Head and SMT to **ring the Critical Incident bell**. This is the lesson-changeover bell which will be rung continuously for two minutes.

This bell will indicate to all concerned that they should stay in their classrooms and stay away from windows and doors. Teachers should stay with pupils and keep them as calm as possible. Everyone should remain as quiet as possible.

Teachers, pupils and any visitors should not attempt to discover the risk for themselves but should await instructions which will either come via the re-ringing of the bell, which will signal a return to normal, or will come via word of mouth from Office staff, Maintenance staff and/or SMT.

As soon as possible, it may be that the Head informs all staff of the nature of the event and the on-going action that may need to be taken.

Following the ringing of the initial bell which alerts everyone in school to remain in classrooms (see above), and depending on the nature of the Critical Incident, the following procedures may be employed:

- One/two members of staff may be asked to take responsibility for the normal running of the school whilst the Headmistress and SMT are engaged in dealing with an incident.
- Where possible, the Head's Office will become the incident room. A log will be kept of everything as it unfolds: times of actions; personnel involved; telephone conversations; meetings and decisions etc.
- Office staff will keep telephone lines open but will not give information to callers.
- Confirmation will be sought that all visitors are safe and have left the site.
- A brief, initial media statement will be prepared by the Head and SMT, with input from the Maintenance Team and Health and Safety Co-ordinator.
- Assistance may be sought from outside agencies: if necessary the Police, Fire and Ambulance services will be called.
- The Chair of Governors will be notified.
- Arrangements will be made for necessary personnel to be contacted.
- On-going risk assessments will be conducted as the incident unfolds.

- Where appropriate, the school's insurers and loss adjusters will be contacted. If the incident involves legal action, a precise response to the incident should be known and is able to be verified by more than one person.
- Where appropriate, a clarion may be sent to parents and an update placed on the website.

Response guidelines for most common incidents on site

- Contact emergency services if necessary and if not already done
- Get a first-hand report of the incident
- Undertake a preliminary risk assessment to make sure that all personnel, particularly those who arrive on the scene, are safe
- Prepare notes
- Take photographs if appropriate
- Determine immediate health and safety concerns and arrangements
- Take steps to protect any undamaged assets
- Implement any of the following: Emergency Lighting; decontamination/drying out; salvage operations; provision of refreshments; sanitation
- Manage access to the site
- Observe press or other external body activity
- Restore any basic communications
- Contact utilities
- It is likely that a number of factors will need to be taken into consideration about whether and when to continue teaching (or not). Parents and staff will be notified and relevant information displayed on the school's website.
- A short, simple statement of facts will be prepared by the Headmistress and SMT. All contacts from the media will be dealt with by the Headmistress and SMT. The Headmistress and SMT will determine the involvement of parents if appropriate.
- Following the incident, when normal schooling has been resumed, there will be an evaluation of the way in which the incident was managed.
- When the decision to transition to normal operation has been made, an initial meeting of all concerned will take place (The Head; SMT; Maintenance Staff; Health and Safety Co-ordinator). Outcomes will be shared with staff as necessary.

Procedure during non-school hours

In cases where a Critical Incident happens outside of school hours, The Headmistress, SMT and the Maintenance Team may have to assemble either at school or off site, depending on the nature of the incident. The Headmistress and the SMT will co-ordinate the response, which may follow the outline above but will be adapted for the situation.

The recovery following a critical incident/lockdown

On arrival at the scene or faced with a critical scenario, a member of the team mentioned above should undertake the following, where it is safe to do so and where they are adequately equipped with any necessary clothing etc.

This list is neither exhaustive nor in order of importance. Each scenario will present different options and requirements. The most important things to remember are the safety and wellbeing of everyone.

The following risks and considerations will form part of the decision to reopen and continue as normal. The non-exhaustive list is as follows:

- Access to the site or affected parts of the site
- Health and safety issues.
- Provision of counselling services, if necessary.
- Access to toilets and washing facilities.
- Fresh water supply.
- Heating and gas supply.
- Food/kitchen supplies.
- Electricity.
- Building and structural inspections.

Critical incident preventative strategies

To lessen the risk of any critical incidents occurring, regular reviews of relevant policies are undertaken and training is also undertaken where appropriate. This includes: Child Protection; Health and Safety; First Aid training; Fire Drills; Risk Assessments, particularly for trips.