

# CRISIS MANAGEMENT POLICY



## **Introduction**

The purpose of this policy document is to outline suggested guidelines for dealing with a major incident. Types of incidents which could occur and which would be classified in this way could be:

- A transport accident (road, rail, air or sea) involving a school party, leading to injuries and/ or loss of life
- A serious accident involving staff/ pupils/ public and occurring on school premises or at an off-site venue, leading to injuries and/ or loss of life
- A serious breach of security, on or off school premises, involving staff or pupils and leading to injury and/ or loss of life
- A major incident on the school premises (e.g. fire or explosion) leading to injury and/ or loss of life and/ or substantial damage to school property

The school has well-documented Health & Safety procedures and risk assessments, all of which are designed to reduce as far as possible the likelihood of a major incident occurring. Nevertheless, the Governors and Senior Management of the school accept the fact that, despite best efforts, things can still go wrong. It is in this context that the handling of such an incident assumes great importance, and careful handling of the situation can help to reduce:

- Further risk to the safety of staff/ pupils
- Further risk to property
- Damage to the school's reputation through bad publicity
- Damage to the educational welfare of the pupils, and consequential impact on the school as a business
- Risk to the medium and long-term mental and emotional welfare of staff/ pupils

Guidance under each of these headings follows on the following pages.

## **1) Minimizing further risk to staff/ pupil safety**

In the event of a major incident the first priority is to care for the injured and to minimize any further risk to safety for all those involved. The procedures to follow are outlined in the

school's Health & Safety Policies, and the associated risk assessments. All staff are required to be familiar with these procedures, particularly if they are leading a party in an off-site fixture or activity. In essence, following an incident:

- First Aid should be given as appropriate
- Where necessary staff and pupils should be evacuated to safety as soon as possible. This may involve (e.g. in the case of a major fire on the school premises) temporarily re-locating staff and pupils in an adjacent building until parents can be contacted to come and collect
- The emergency services should be called by the senior person who is available at the scene
- The school should be contacted (in the case of an off-site incident) so that the most senior person available on-site can take charge of contacting parents
- Pupils (injured or otherwise) should be closely supervised and comforted by all available staff
- Where appropriate and feasible, staff should accompany injured pupils to hospital until it can be arranged for parents to attend

## **2) Minimizing further risk to property**

In the second phase following an incident, once the injured are fully taken care of, then any available staff should seek to minimize further damage to school premises and property and to the property of individuals. Obviously, what can be done will depend entirely on the particular circumstances and location of the incident. Action which could be taken might include:

- Using an appropriate fire extinguisher to tackle a blaze prior to the arrival of the emergency services. (See Fire and Evacuation Procedures)
- Removing a minibus (if possible) to a place of greater safety once the police have seen the scene of the accident and insurance details have been exchanged.
- Removing luggage from a damaged vehicle and placing it in a safe(r) location.
- Removing valuable or irreplaceable items from school premises (e.g. data disks, documents)

- Any action taken to preserve property should not be carried out if to do so would place the individual(s) in further danger.

### **3) Minimizing damage to the school's reputation**

A major incident, whatever the nature and cause might be, is likely to attract media interest. The way in which the media are handled will do much to avoid compounding the situation and adding to the anguish of any victims and their families through inaccurate, speculative and sensationalist reporting. The following guidelines are based on advice given to all schools to help them handle the media competently and sensitively:

- a) Know all the facts or find them out as fast as possible
- b) Only the Headmaster and Chairman of Governors (or a delegated senior member of staff ) should talk to reporters. Other staff and pupils should not be allowed to speak to reporters and all staff should seek to protect pupils from any media access.
- c) Keep the Chairman of Governors fully informed. Keep staff fully briefed. Keep pupils informed.
- d) Prepare a statement which is brief, factual and correct. Include positive information relevant to the incident (precautions, risk assessments, rules, sanctions). Emphasize appropriate action being taken. Stick to the statement, correcting any factual errors as necessary. Never "No comment" as reporters will assume something is being hidden.
- e) Take full control of communications. If contacted out of the blue by a reporter, then take details, ask what (s)he wants to know and the deadline for response, promise to ring back, prepare response and then ring back. If a reporter or photographer visits, treat with courtesy but do not allow freedom to wander around school or to interview staff or pupils. Be alert to reporters at school gates: only the Headmaster should talk to them. If granting a TV interview then ask for questions beforehand and be firm about which questions you are prepared to answer. For live interviews, read from statement. Pupils should not be allowed to phone parents on mobiles.
- f) Law Breaking. If illegal activity has taken place, police must be informed and their co-operation sought in handling press inquiries. (If criminal charges have been laid or are imminent, the press is strictly limited in what can be reported before case comes to trial).
- g) Keep parents fully informed by letter at the earliest opportunity and preferably before any publicity appears in the press or on TV. Provide parents with updates as appropriate. Parents should also be advised not to talk to the press. Assuming that the school office is

still operational, then man all the telephones and brief office staff on what to say to parents as they phone in. Keep a mobile available for outward calls and give this number to key people who may need to contact the school.

h) After the event, don't try to correct every minor inaccuracy in reporting but, in the case of serious misrepresentation, seek an apology and/ or correction from the editor.

#### **4) Minimizing damage to pupils' educational welfare and to the school as a business**

In the event of extensive damage to school property the functioning of the school on a day-to-day basis during a lengthy period of re-building would present formidable logistical problems. Any appreciable interruption would, of course, seriously impair the pupils' education and would harm the long-term prospects of the school as a business. Insurance cover is in place to allow for re-building after major damage and to allow for temporary accommodation or relocation of the school during this phase. Even so, the process of setting up alternative, temporary arrangements in a short space of time would be very challenging. A working party, consisting of senior management and governors, would need to address the major issues of temporary accommodation, furnishings, timetabling and transport, as well as the re-building programme, whilst all teaching staff would need to participate in the process of ordering the minimum resources necessary to re- start teaching as soon as possible. Assuming that the normal school premises would be unavailable, an administrative base would need to be set up with telephone and computer communication. This would act as a school office, as a base for meetings, as a centre for communications with staff, governors, parents and pupils, and as an address for the delivery of resources. All decisions taken would, of course, be subject to the approval of the Board of Governors and the school's insurers.

#### **Accommodation, Furnishing, Timetabling, Transport & Resources**

In practice the insurers would arrange for the supply of temporary buildings on the school playing fields. The main need would be for classroom accommodation and, if possible, access to a play area, particularly for the younger children.

Once suitable accommodation has been secured then the practicalities of actually using these premises would need to be addressed. Members of the working party would need to order or hire appropriate furniture and basic equipment. Timetables for the temporary sites would need to be prepared. Issues of transport to, from and between sites would need to be resolved. Teaching resources would need to be ordered, for delivery in a short time-scale. Clear communication with all parents would need to be maintained. The aim would be to do the minimum necessary in order to re-start the school within the shortest possible time.

## **Re-building programme**

In the meantime, of course, all the necessary steps would be put into operation, by the Governors and the Senior Management team, to ensure that the re-building programme begins at the earliest opportunity. The first step in this process would be the appointment of a suitable project manager, who would handle the whole project from start to finish, on behalf of the school.

### **5) Minimizing risk to medium/ long-term mental and emotional welfare of staff/ pupils**

Following any major incident it is important to be aware that, both the people directly involved as well as the wider school community are likely to be affected in a variety of ways, possibly over a considerable period of time. In the case of major injury or death, there will almost certainly be differing degrees of shock, emotional trauma and grief. The effects of this could well be more deeply felt and widespread than would at first be apparent. All members of the school community should be made aware of this. Staff in particular should be sensitive to the needs of their pupils but also to their own needs. It would probably prove essential for the school to seek the support of professional counsellors, therapists or consultants who could help individuals and also offer advice to the school as a whole on coping with the trauma in a sensitive and supportive way. Some guidelines which will help to minimize trauma and encourage the healing process are as follows:

Allow staff and pupils to talk about the incident, initially in an open kind of way and then, if necessary on a 1:1 basis, either with a member of staff who feels able to help or with a professional counsellor

Seek to identify those individuals most likely to be at risk following a major incident and be ready to offer further support

Be sensitive to those most closely affected by the incident and to those carrying the main burden of dealing with the crisis. Watch out for each other and make sure that key people are getting adequate support and rest

Help the rest of the school to create a supportive environment by educating them about the possible reactions which people might have to stress, trauma and grief

Be alert to signs of distress in individuals and, in the case of children, maintain close communication with parents to see if patterns of behaviour are emerging which give cause for concern

Be prepared to hold a formal de-briefing meeting with staff and pupils involved in a tragedy. Such a meeting, usually led by an experienced person from outside the school, is

often felt to be an important part of the process of helping people to come to terms with what has happened to them

Express sympathy to pupils, parents and staff who have been injured or bereaved, through letters, cards, flowers, visits or attendance at funerals

Handle carefully the process of helping people to return to school following a traumatic incident and/ or a prolonged absence

Work closely with any consultants/ therapists coming into school to support pupils or staff. Keep parents fully informed of any help being given to individuals and to the school as a whole. Keep records of help given and ensure that parents and appropriate staff have access to these

Be prepared, if deemed appropriate, to hold a special assembly or memorial service or to create a memorial

## **Conclusion**

The guidelines set out in this policy are not exhaustive. Every crisis brings its own unique problems and challenges, which will need to be worked through and for which there is no blueprint. Nevertheless, in setting out such a policy, it is hoped that it will offer a framework for the Governors, Senior Managers and staff of the school, helping to point a way through the initial traumatic experiences and setting individuals and the school on the road to recovery.

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