



Finn Valley College

CRITICAL INCIDENT POLICY

Finn Valley College aims to protect the well being of its students and staff by providing a safe and nurturing environment at all times. The Board of Management, through Mr Thompson, Principal, and the Pastoral Care Team, has drawn up a critical incident management plan as one element of the school's policy and plan.

The staff and management of *Finn Valley College* have formulated a number of policies and procedures to be followed with a view to ensuring the physical and psychological safety of both staff and students, and the creation of a supportive and caring ethos in the school, in ordinary time as well as in the event of a critical incident. Such policies include the school's Admissions Policy; its Pastoral Care Policy; the Special Education Needs Policy; the school's Child Protection Policy; the Anti-Bullying Policy; the Health and Safety Policy and the school's Code of Behaviour. The staff and management have established a Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT) to steer the development and implementation of the plan.

Context for development of the Policy and Plan

In drawing up this policy and plan the CIMT has consulted the following resource documents provided to schools:

- *Responding to a Critical Incident: Pack for Schools* (NEPS 2003)
- *Responding to Critical Incidents; Guidelines for Schools* (NEPS 2007)
- *Template for the development of a Critical Incident Policy and Plan* (NEPS)
- *Suicide Prevention in Schools: Best Practice Guidelines* (IAS, National Suicide Review Group 2002)

Definition of a ‘critical incident’

The staff and management of Finn Valley College recognise a critical incident to be “an incident or sequence of events that overwhelms the normal coping mechanism of the school”.¹ Critical incidents may involve one or more students or staff members, or members of our local community. Types of incidents might include but are not limited to:

- *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 school community*
- *Serious damage to the school building through fire, flood, vandalism, etc*
- *The disappearance of a member of the school community*

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 students and staff. Having a good plan should also help ensure that the effects on the students and staff will be limited. It should enable us to effect a return to normality as soon as possible.

Creation of a coping supportive and caring ethos in the school

We have put systems in place to help to 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.

1. Physical safety:

Some of the measures taken by the school to ensure the physical safety of the students include:

- Evacuation plan formulated and clearly visible in each room
- Regular fire drills occur
- Fully functional and regularly serviced Fire Alarm System
- Fire exits and extinguishers are regularly checked
- Health and Safety Plan (and rules) for all Practical rooms and laboratories
- Supervision in the school before and after school and during all breaks
- Scheduled First Aid providers
- Printing of the Code of Behaviour (with behavioural expectations for the creation of a safe environment) in all Homework Diaries
- Induction for all new students and staff

¹ Source: Responding to Critical Incidents: Guidelines for Schools – NEPS. 20070

2. Psychological safety

The management and staff of Finn Valley College 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 issues and to provide opportunities for reflection and discussion.

Some of the measures taken by the school to ensure the psychological wellbeing of the students include:

- 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 alcohol and drug prevention. Promotion of mental health is included in 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 or disclosures are familiar to all staff
- Books and resources on difficulties affecting the primary/post primary school student are available.
- Information is provided on mental health in general and such specific areas as signs and symptoms of depression and anxiety.
- The school has a designated Pastoral care class each morning in which class teachers can listen to the concerns of students in their care and respond accordingly.
- The school has introduced the Friends for Life Programme to its SPHE course, a WHO recognised course which seeks to build resilience and positive relationships among young people.
- Staff are informed in the area of suicide awareness and interventions for suicidal students.
- Many of the staff have received formal training in suicide prevention through the ASIST training programme.
- The school has developed links with a range of external agencies including:
 - Martin Gallen, Education Psychologist with Donegal ETB
 - National Education Psychological Services (NEPS)
 - HSE
 - Child and Family Mental Health Services (CAMHS)
 - Donegal Education and Training Board (ETB)
 - Social Services
 - National Council for Special Education (NCSE)
 - National Education Welfare Board (NEWB)
 - Túsla
 - Carmel Maguire, Special Education Needs Officer (SENO)
 - Joanne Rafferty, Education Welfare Officer (EWO)
 - Finn Valley Positive Mental Health Alliance
 - Martha Sweeney (SPHE National Coordinator)
 - ASD Therapists
 - Speech and Language Therapists
 - Donegal Youth Services
 - Jigsaw
 - Daybreak
 - Garda

- Neighbouring schools
 - Stranorlar Schools Completion Programme
 - Fr. John Joe Duffy, Chaplain
 - Foróige
 - Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST)
 - Finn Valley Athletic Centre
- 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.
 - The school has a clear policy on bullying and deals with bullying in accordance with this policy.
 - There is a care system in place in the school. The Student Support Team comprised of the principal, the two Career Guidance Counsellors, the SEN Coordinator and the Home School Community Liaison Teacher (HSCL) meet each week to review provision of pastoral care and to address specific cases. Martin Gallen, Educational Psychologist with Donegal ETB also attends for case reviews on a regular basis.
 - Students who are identified as being at risk are referred to the designated staff member (e.g. guidance counsellor or support teacher), 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 about how to access support for themselves

Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT)

A CIMT has been established in line with best practice. The members of the team were selected on a voluntary basis and will retain their roles for at least one school year. The members of the team will 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. Each member of the team has been assigned a key role in line with best practice.

The key roles are as follows:

- Team leader
- Garda liaison
- Staff liaison.
- Student liaison
- Agency liaison
- Parent liaison
- Community liaison
- Communications Officer
- Attendance Tracker
- Administrator

Outlined below are some of the key responsibilities of each role

Team leader

- Alerts the team members to the crisis and convenes a meeting
- Coordinates the tasks of the team
- Liaises with the Board of Management; DES; NEPS; SEC
- Liaises with the bereaved family

Mr Thompson
School Principal

Ms Summerville is the Deputy Team Leader.

Gárda liaison

- Liaises with the Gardaí
- Ensures that information about deaths is checked out before being shared

Mr Thompson

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 materials for staff (from their critical incident folder)
- Keeps staff updated as day progresses
- Is alert to vulnerable staff members and makes contact with them individually. Advises them of availability of EAS and gives them the contact number.

Ms Boland, Ms Ward & Mr White

Student liaison

- At post-primary level, may co-ordinate information from tutors and year heads about students they are concerned about
- Alerts other staff to vulnerable students (appropriately)
- Provides materials for students (from their critical incident folder)
- Keeps records of students seen by external agency staff
- Looks after setting up and supervision of 'quiet' room where agreed

The Student Support Team
under the direction of
Ms Summerville

Agency liaison

- Maintains up to date lists of contact numbers of
 - Key parents, such as members of the parents' council
 - Emergency support services and other external contacts and resources
- Liaises with agencies in the community for support and onward referral
- Is alert to need to check credentials of individuals offering support
- Coordinates the involvement of these agencies
- Reminds agency staff to wear name badges
- Updates team members on the involvement of external agencies

Mr Martin Gallen,
Educational
Psychologist
(Donegal ETB)

Parent liaison

- Visits the bereaved family with the team leader
- Arranges parent meetings, if held
- May facilitate such meetings, and manage 'questions and answers'
- Manages the 'consent' issues in accordance with agreed school policy
- 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 (from their critical incident folder)

The Student Support Team
Under the direction of
Ms Clarke

Community Liaison

- Maintains an up to date list of contact names and numbers for local community organizations.
- Ensures that accurate information is provided to local community groups who are linked in with the school.
- Liaises with organisations in the community for support.
- Provides information on an on-going basis where appropriate.

Ms Boland
& Mr White

Communications Officer

- In advance of an incident, will consider issues that may arise and how they might be responded to (e.g. students being interviewed, photographers on the premises, etc)
- In the event of an incident, will liaise where necessary with the SEC; relevant teacher unions etc.
- Will draw up press statement, give media briefings and interviews (as agreed by school management)
- Will coordinate the monitoring of communications relating to the incident.

Mr Thompson

Administrator

- Maintenance of up to date telephone numbers of
 - ❑ Parents or guardians
 - ❑ Teachers
 - ❑ Emergency support 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

Ms Susan Doyle

Attendance Tracking

- In the immediate aftermath of the critical incident special care will be paid to attendance of students.
- All absences will be carefully monitored.
- Students signing in/out must be accompanied by a parent.

Ms Rozzi Bezas
Class teachers
Subject teachers
Safety Wardens

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.

Ms Susan Doyle 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 ***Finn Valley College*** 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. The members of the school staff will bear this in mind, and will seek to ensure that students 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 its use. 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 rooms

In the event of a critical incident,

- *Room 16* will be the main room used to meet the staff,
- *Room 10 and the library* will be used for meetings with students,
- *Principal's office* for parents,
- *Principal's office* for press,
- *Career Guidance Office* for individual sessions with students, and
- *Room 20 and Pastoral Care Offices* for other visitors

Consultation and communication regarding the plan

The relevant staff was consulted and their views canvassed in the preparation of this policy and plan. Our school's final policy and plan in relation to responding to critical incidents has been presented to all staff for review and agreement. Each member of the critical incident team has a personal copy.

Parent representatives were also consulted and asked for their comments.

All new and temporary staff will be informed of the details of the plan by **Ms Clarke**

The plan will be updated annually (*October of each year*).

Signed:

Chairperson (BOM)

Date: _____

Principal

Date: _____