



## Finn Valley College



### CRITICAL INCIDENT POLICY & PLAN

**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 Mc Fadden, Principal, and the Student Support 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 several policies and procedures to be followed to ensure 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

- Finn Valley College Admissions Policy
- Finn Valley College Student Wellbeing Policy
- Finn Valley College Special Education Needs Policy
- Finn Valley College Child Protection Policy

- Finn Valley College Anti-Bullying Policy
- Finn Valley College Health and Safety Policy
- Finn Valley College Code of Behaviour
- Finn Valley College RSE Policy

The staff and management have established a Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT) to steer the development and implementation of the plan.

### **The context for the 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 Critical Incidents; Guidelines and resource Materials for Schools (NEPS 2016)*
- *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)*
- *Responding To Critical Incidents, NEPS Guidelines & Resource Materials For School, 2016*
- *Responding To Critical Incidents, Guidelines for School, Department of Education, 2007,*
- *Suicide Postvention Toolkit, A Guide for Secondary Schools, Headspace School Support, Australia, 2012,*
- *Help When We Needed It Most, How to Prepare & Respond to Suicide in School. The Samaritans, 2013,*
- *Suicide Prevention in the Community, A Practical Guide, H.S.E. (Dublin: 2011)*
- *Media Guidelines for Reporting Suicide, The Samaritans & Irish Association of Suicidology.*
- *Helping Children & Adolescents Cope with Death & Bereavement, D. Adams & E. Deveau, (New York: Baywood Publishing Company, 1995*
- *Junior Cycle Wellbeing Guidelines 2021*

### **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” - *Responding to Critical Incidents; Guidelines and resource Materials for Schools (NEPS 2016)*. 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*
- *A significant outbreak of contagious disease e.g. A significant Covid-related incident or a significant Covid-19 outbreak*
- *Unauthorised removal of a student from school*
- *Criminal incident during school time*

## **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:

- Health and Safety Statement - annually reviewed and update
- Health and Safety Team
- 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
- SNA designated to supervise specific supervision points/areas
- Scheduled First Aid providers
- Fire Marshall training for selected Fire Safety staff
- 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
- One way systems to minimise congestion
- Use of MIS to capture attendance; use of system to capture lates and students signing out.
- Appropriate cover in place for staff absence i.e. classes not left unattended/AEN students without SNA
- Procedures in place for signing out/leaving school early/not released into care of persons unknown.

### **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 & Safeguarding Guidelines and Procedures and details of how to proceed with concerns or disclosures are familiar to all staff. Staff have availed of the PDST Children First Training.
- Evidence based programmes facilitated by BFL/SET/Autism Teachers/HSCL e.g. ALERT/Retracking
- Establishment of student wellbeing team
- Use of the Student Council to advocate for student body
- 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 Wellbeing class each week in which class teachers can listen to the concerns of students in their care and respond accordingly.
- 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)
  - Child Disability Network Team
  - Donegal Education and Training Board (ETB)
  - 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 Family Resource Centre
  - Martha Sweeney (SPHE National Coordinator)
  - Autism Therapists
  - Speech and Language Therapists
  - Occupational Health Therapists
  - Donegal Youth Services
  - Youth Diversion Programme
  - Jigsaw
  - Daybreak
  - Garda
  - Neighbouring schools
  - Stranorlar Schools Completion Programme
  - Foróige
  - Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST)
  - Finn Valley Athletic Centre
  - Local GP services
  - Parent Support Services - Strengthening Families
- 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 comprises the principal, deputy principal, the two Guidance Counsellors, the SEN Coordinator, the Home School Community Liaison Teacher (HSCL), the Behaviour for Learning Teacher and the Wellbeing teacher 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.
- The Student Support Team put in place a range of supports in line with best practice. Some of these are universal (Supports for All), some are targeted at small groups (Support for Some) while others target individuals with more complex needs (Support for Few).
- Students requiring individual supports are assigned a link teacher.
- 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.
- Students can also make a self-referral to the Student Support Team.
- Staff are informed about how to access support for themselves. This information is contained in the staff handbook and in the staff's shared online resource drive.

# 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**

**Person Responsible - Mr Mc Fadden**

**Ms Boland/Ms Mc Cafferty/Mr White are the Deputy Team Leaders.**

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

## **Garda Liaison**

**Person Responsible - Mr Mc Fadden**

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

## **Staff Liaison**

### **Person(s)Responsible - Ms Boland, Ms Ward & Mr White**

- 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.

## **Student Liaison**

### **Person(s)Responsible - Student Support Team under the leadership of Ms Mc Cafferty**

- At post-primary level, they may coordinate 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
- Advises and supports students in relation to wellbeing

## **Agency Liaison**

### **Person(s)Responsible - Mr Martin Gallen, Educational Psychologist and Mr Mc Fadden**

- 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

## **Parent Liaison**

### **Person(s)Responsible - The Student Support Team under the direction of the HSCL**

- 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)

## **Community Liaison**

### **Person(s) Responsible - Ms Boland & Ms Mc Geehan**

- Maintains an up to date list of contact names and numbers for local community organisations.
- 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.

## **Communications Officer**

### **Person(s) Responsible - Mr Mc Fadden in consultation with Donegal ETB and Ms Mc Geehan**

- 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.

## **Attendance Tracking**

### **Person(s) Responsible - Ms Susan Doyle, Ms L Mc Menamin, All Subject teachers, All Year Heads, HSCL & BFL**

- 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.

## **Administrator**

### **Person(s) Responsible - Ms Susan Doyle**

- 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



## Data Protection & Record Keeping

### 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. All records will be kept in accordance with the Data Protection legislation and policies developed by Donegal ETB.

Ms Susan Doyle will have a key role in receiving and logging telephone calls, sending letters, photocopying materials, etc.

### Confidentiality and good name considerations

All information received or communicated will comply with the Data Protection policies of Donegal ETB and with all Data protection legislation. Only information which is relevant and important will be collected, retained and transmitted.

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.

### Special circumstances

Our school recognises that critical incidents may occur in circumstances outside of the normal school day. Such circumstances may include but are not limited to:

- During State Examinations
- During an out of school activity (e.g a school excursion)
- Outside of the academic calendar (e.g summer holidays)
- Outside of school hours (e.g evenings, weekends etc)

Where a critical incident occurs in such circumstances the school will seek in so far as it is possible to implement the critical incident plan as one would if the incident happened during the school day. The principal and the Critical Incident Management Team will review and adapt the plan as needed in such circumstances.


### Consultation and communication regarding the plan

The relevant staff was consulted and their views were canvassed in the preparation of this policy and plan. Our school's final policy and plan for 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 Molloy & Ms O'Regan**

Signed:



Chairperson (BOM)

Date: 17/09/24

Sean P. Jadhav  
Secretary

Date: 17/9/2024