



Critical Incident Policy

Signed by headteacher: *A Hughes*

Signed by Chair of Governors: *David Bradley*

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Critical Incident Policy

This policy is based on guidance from the UK Trauma Council Critical Incident Policy template for schools.

1. Introduction

A critical incident is an unexpected event that is potentially traumatic and affects a large part, or the whole, of the school community rather than only one or two individuals. It is likely to cause significant distress and may threaten to overwhelm the school's usual capacity to cope.

This policy may also guide a proportionate response to a serious incident affecting one or a small number of pupils or staff. The Headteacher, or the most senior leader available, will decide whether to activate all or part of this plan.

Examples of incidents

Critical incidents may include, but are not limited to:

- death or life-threatening injury involving a pupil, member of staff or visitor, on or off site, including during an educational visit or journey;
- fire, explosion, flooding, structural failure, hazardous substance release, utilities failure or severe weather;
- a violent incident, armed or dangerous intruder, hostage situation, abduction, disappearance, terrorism or serious civil disturbance;
- a transport accident involving members of the school community;
- an outbreak of serious infectious disease or another public-health emergency;
- a serious safeguarding allegation or incident with wide impact;
- a major incident in the local community witnessed by, or directly affecting, pupils or staff;
- significant vandalism, arson or loss of access that prevents the school operating normally; and
- any event likely to attract sustained media attention or require a multi-agency response.

2. Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to help senior leaders, governors and all staff respond rapidly, safely and consistently while supporting psychological recovery and enabling the school to function effectively.

It is intended to:

- protect life, reduce harm and account for everyone;
- provide clear leadership, roles and decision-making arrangements;
- support pupils, staff and families using evidence-informed practice;
- reduce the potential traumatic impact of the event;
- identify people who may need closer monitoring or specialist support;
- maintain accurate records and clear, lawful communications; and
- restore effective school functioning as soon as it is safe and helpful.

3. Five guiding principles

Principle	What this means in practice
Safe	Protect people from further harm; provide clear information, suitable spaces and predictable arrangements.
Calm	Use steady leadership, simple messages, familiar routines and practical strategies that regulate distress.
Connected	Keep pupils, staff and families linked to trusted people, peer support and community networks.

In control	Offer meaningful choices, involve people in decisions where possible and explain what will happen next.
Hopeful	Communicate realistic confidence, recognise strengths and make visible plans for recovery.

4. Related policies and plans

This policy should be implemented alongside the current versions of relevant school documents, including:

- Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy;
- Health and Safety Policy;
- Fire Safety and Evacuation;
- Invacuation, Evacuation and Lockdown Policy;
- First Aid and Supporting Pupils with Medical Conditions Policy;
- Educational Visits Policy;
- Business Continuity;
- Online Safety and Acceptable Use;
- Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND);
- Cyber Response Plan
- Behaviour Policy;
- Data protection and records management; and
- Media and communications.

5. Leadership and responsibilities

5.1 Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT)

The CIMT will be activated by the Headteacher or the most senior leader available. Membership and roles may be adapted to the nature of the incident and who is affected. One person may hold more than one role where necessary. Staff may decline a task they are not currently able to undertake; the CIMT lead will reallocate it.

Role	Named lead(s)	Core responsibility
Overall CIMT lead	Amy Hughes, Headteacher	Activate the plan; set priorities; liaise with police, governors and local authority; approve decisions and statements.
Deputy lead / staff support	Kim Abbott and Amy Southwick, SLT	Deputise; allocate staff; brief and support colleagues; maintain operational oversight.
Site safety and access	Dave Puckett, Caretaker	Support evacuation or lockdown; manage keys, utilities, access and site information; liaise with emergency services.
Administration, records and family enquiries	Kirsty Niziolek, School Business Manager	Establish communications and logging; maintain witness and contact records; coordinate authorised family enquiries.
Governance liaison	David Bradley, Chair of Governors	Provide strategic oversight and support; assist with continuity and review.
First aid	Current qualified first aiders	Administer first aid within training; coordinate equipment and handover to clinicians.

Wider team	Office team and staff allocated by CIMT	Account for people, supervise pupils, operate communications, support reception and practical tasks.
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5.2 Responsibilities of all staff

- Put immediate safety first and follow evacuation, lockdown or shelter instructions.
- Account for pupils and report missing or additional people immediately.
- Record facts and actions accurately; preserve evidence and do not move items unless required to save life or prevent harm.
- Use only approved information. Do not speculate, discuss liability, post online or speak to the media.
- Provide calm, age-appropriate reassurance and report wellbeing or safeguarding concerns.
- Maintain confidentiality while sharing information necessary to protect and support people.

6. Preparation

The school will prepare for a potential incident in ways that help the community feel safe, calm, connected, in control and hopeful.

- Review this policy and site-specific procedures at least annually and after any activation or significant exercise.
- Brief staff and governors, including through induction and periodic training; use UKTC training resources where helpful.
- Practise evacuation, lockdown and other emergency arrangements sensitively and record learning.
- Maintain current staff, pupil, emergency and next-of-kin contact information, including accessible alternatives if digital systems are unavailable.
- Ensure staff know pupils' medical, SEND, communication, mobility and safeguarding needs on a need-to-know basis.
- Maintain grab bags, first-aid resources, keys, torches, high-visibility clothing, class lists, site plans, log sheets and essential communication equipment.
- Ensure educational visits have suitable emergency arrangements and access to contact details.
- Identify suitable internal and off-site control, assembly, reunification and welfare locations.
- Maintain arrangements for the pre-school, which is included in the main school plan.
- Consider reasonable adjustments for pupils, staff or visitors who may need additional support during an emergency.

6.1 Pre-planned locations

Function	Primary location	Purpose
Assembly area	Designated assembly point in the playground	Initial gathering and accounting while awaiting further instruction.
Temporary incident control point	Shelter in the Learning Garden	Safe point for the designated lead, key witnesses and casualties before emergency services establish their own control point.
Off-site safe area / reunification	Bitterne Manor Community Centre	Relocation, confirmatory checks, welfare and controlled collection when the school site cannot be used.
Emergency control centre	School office if not evacuated; otherwise Bitterne Manor Community Centre	CIMT coordination, communications, records and liaison.

Location check The CIMT lead may select a safer alternative if the planned location is affected, inaccessible or conflicts with emergency-service instructions.

7. Immediate response: first minutes and hours

7.1 Any member of staff receiving the alert

1. Take immediate action to protect pupils and others from the threat and move them to a supervised safe place if appropriate.
2. Call 999 where there is immediate danger, serious injury or a suspected crime; do not delay life-saving action while seeking permission.
3. Consider your own safety and do not enter an unsafe area.
4. Check whether anyone needs urgent first aid or other assistance.
5. Notify the Headteacher or most senior leader available, giving concise facts: who, what, where, when and immediate risks.
6. Preserve the scene and note what you saw, heard and did.

7.2 CIMT lead: activation checklist

✓	Action
☐	Confirm immediate safety action and emergency-service contact.
☐	Decide whether to evacuate, invacuate/shelter, lock down or remain in place; include pre-school and off-site groups.
☐	Account for pupils, staff, visitors and contractors; act immediately on missing persons.
☐	Activate and brief the CIMT; allocate roles and appoint a log keeper.
☐	Establish an incident control point and emergency control centre if safe.
☐	Establish verified facts and an agreed information line; record uncertainties.
☐	Liaise with police, medical professionals, social care and other services; agree restrictions on information.
☐	Contact the Chair of Governors, Southampton City Council and other key agencies as appropriate.
☐	Contact families of those directly involved, coordinated with emergency services where required.
☐	Brief staff and inform pupils and families accurately, honestly and sensitively.
☐	Plan for enquiries and media interest; nominate one spokesperson.
☐	Decide whether and how the school can operate; arrange staffing, supervision, food, water, rest and medication.
☐	Identify people who may be especially vulnerable and assign support.
☐	Consider whether a multi-agency Team Around the School is needed.

7.3 Trauma-informed actions

- Restore familiar routines and structure as far as is safe and helpful.
- Explain and normalise common distress reactions without suggesting that everyone will respond in the same way.
- Offer simple regulation strategies and access to trusted adults and peers.
- Provide accessible information, including simple text, visual supports, interpretation or preferred communication methods.
- Give meaningful choices and involve pupils, staff and families in decisions where appropriate.
- Communicate realistic hope: explain the help available and what will happen next.

8. Serious injury or death on site

Priority Call 999, protect life, preserve dignity, keep others away and follow emergency-service instructions.

8.1 Suspected serious injury

1. Do not move the person unless remaining in place presents a greater immediate danger.
2. Send for a qualified first aider, emergency equipment and the Headteacher; call 999 as indicated.
3. Provide first aid within the limits of training, including control of severe bleeding.
4. Keep the person warm, supported and as still as the injury allows; monitor breathing and responsiveness.
5. Record actions and hand over clearly to ambulance staff.

8.2 Suspected death

1. Clear and secure the immediate area, protecting pupils and unnecessary observers from exposure.
2. Call 999 and activate this plan. Only an authorised medical professional may confirm death.
3. Do not move the person or disturb the scene unless necessary to save life or prevent further harm.
4. Maintain dignity and arrange for an appropriate adult to remain nearby at a safe distance until emergency services take control.
5. Do not notify next of kin independently where police or another lead agency is responsible; agree the approach with them.

9. Communication and information management

Communication must be accurate, timely, compassionate and coordinated. The Headteacher is responsible for the communications strategy and will agree messages with the police, local authority or other lead agency where necessary.

Audience	Approach
Pupils	Use age-appropriate, factual language; avoid graphic detail; allow questions; say when something is not yet known; provide accessible formats.
Staff	Brief directly where possible; state confirmed facts, required actions, confidentiality expectations and available support. Include absent and peripatetic staff.
Parents and carers	Use agreed messaging systems, email, website or letters. Give clear safety, collection and support information and a route for questions.
Directly affected families	Provide a named contact and private, coordinated communication. Check preferences and avoid repeated requests for the same information.
Governors and agencies	Share concise verified updates, decisions, risks and requests for support through named contacts.

Media and public	Only the nominated spokesperson responds. Use an agreed holding statement and refer media to the local-authority communications team where appropriate.
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9.1 Communication rules

- Keep a chronological log of incoming and outgoing communications, decisions and approvals.
- Use confirmed information and distinguish clearly between fact, inference and unknowns.
- Protect personal data and do not identify injured, deceased or bereaved people before authorised notification.
- Do not speculate about cause, blame or liability.
- Do not post incident information, images or commentary on personal social-media accounts.
- Monitor misinformation and correct it through official channels when appropriate.
- Retain records securely in line with data-protection and records-management requirements.

9.2 Reunification and collection

If the school site cannot be used, Bitterne Manor Community Centre is the planned off-site safe area, subject to safety and availability. The CIMT will establish a controlled collection point, verify the identity and authority of collectors, record each handover, keep access routes clear and maintain supervision until every pupil is safely transferred or alternative arrangements are agreed.

10. Medium-term response: first days and weeks

- Provide regular updates as verified information becomes available and explain how services are keeping the community safe.
- Re-establish routines while allowing proportionate flexibility for those affected.
- Use the vulnerability and support record to identify pupils and staff needing closer monitoring, targeted support or personalised plans.
- Consider those directly exposed, bereaved or injured; those with previous trauma, loss, mental-health needs or SEND; siblings and close friends; witnesses; first responders; and staff carrying demanding roles.
- Monitor attendance, behaviour, learning, relationships, sleep-related reports, physical symptoms and staff wellbeing without pathologising ordinary reactions.
- Offer accessible information about common reactions, self-care and routes to help.
- Coordinate external expertise and, where appropriate, a Team Around the School.
- Create safe opportunities for peer and community support; consult affected families before memorial activity.
- Review staffing, workload, cover and support for the CIMT and other responders.
- Make practical plans that look ahead and restore a sense of influence and hope.

11. Ongoing response: months and years

- Develop a sustainable 'new normal', retaining routines and supports that have helped.
- Refer pupils or staff for specialist support where difficulties are severe, persistent or impairing; involve pupils and parents or carers in decisions wherever possible.
- Anticipate anniversaries, legal proceedings, media coverage, inquests, funerals, transitions and other triggers; plan support and communications.
- Consult bereaved families and the school community about remembrance, memorials and legacy; avoid rushed permanent decisions.
- Seek feedback, hold a structured debrief, record lessons and amend plans, training and resources.
- Recognise progress and the ways individuals and the community have coped, while respecting continuing grief and difficulty.

12. External support

The CIMT will draw on services that can support the five guiding principles and the school's statutory duties. Current contact details must be held in the Emergency Response File rather than relied upon solely within this policy.

Service or organisation	Potential role
Emergency services	Immediate life safety, incident command, investigation and public protection.
Southampton City Council critical incident / education team	Local-authority coordination, advice, continuity and access to specialist support.
Educational Psychology Service	Consultation, staff guidance, assessment and recovery support.
Local authority Child Death Lead / child death arrangements	Coordination and advice following a child death.
Children's social care and safeguarding partners	Safeguarding, family support and multi-agency planning.
Local-authority communications team	Media strategy, holding statements and spokesperson support.
GPs, CAMHS and Mental Health Support Teams	Assessment and specialist mental-health support where indicated.
Bereavement, counselling, family-hub and youth services	Targeted practical, emotional and community support.
Specialist organisations	Incident-specific expertise, for example following suicide, terrorism or traumatic bereavement.

13. Dissemination, training and review

- The approved policy will be shared with staff and governors and its location explained during induction.
- Operational contact details, personal data and sensitive site information will be stored securely in the Emergency Response File and restricted appropriately.
- The Headteacher and SLT own the annual review. The governing body approves substantive changes.
- An additional review will follow any activation, exercise, significant near miss, change in staffing or location, or relevant national or local guidance.
- Debriefing will focus on welfare, learning and improvement. It will not require people to give detailed emotional accounts or participate in a single-session psychological debrief.

14. UK Trauma Council resources

The school may use the UKTC Critical Incidents guidance, staff INSET materials, age-banded lesson plans, Working with Parents and Carers resources, Traumatic Bereavement resources and the further organisations listed in the UKTC guidance supplements.

Acknowledgement: this policy was developed using the UK Trauma Council Critical Incidents policy template and associated resources.