



## Saint Mary's Aughlisnafin

### Critical Incident Policy – Reviewed October 2022

At St. Mary's we aim to promote the ethos of a Catholic School by creating a safe and happy School Community where: Everyone feels valued as a member of our inclusive team in an atmosphere of fairness and respectfulness. High standards of learning and teaching take place in a fun, caring and stimulating environment which enables everyone to reach their full potential.

Within any school there will be occasions when individuals, or groups of individuals, are affected by traumatic events, as indeed, there will be occasions when members of the school need to respond to circumstances created by tragedy, disaster or a threat to the safety and well-being of pupils and/or staff.

Forward planning for such an event may help the school to cope more effectively and may also play a part in reducing distress.

#### Risks

During the course of their work teachers may be at risk from e.g.

- Verbal abuse
- Threats
- False allegations
- Assaults
- Vandalism, or
- Other forms of intimidation

This behaviour may come from pupils, parents, guardians, members of the school staff or other persons whose business brings them about the premises. Such behaviour may also occur in respect of contact with the teachers during the discharge of their duties elsewhere, e.g. supervising visits.

### Policy

Employing authorities and the Board of Governors are conscious of their obligations under the Health & Safety at Work (Northern Ireland) Order 1978. As part of their Health and Safety Policy and in relation to paragraph 1 above Employing Authorities and relevant bodies are committed to:-

- Promoting preventative measures;
- Supporting staff who have been subjected to belligerent behaviour, inline with “Security and Personal Safety in Schools”

### Promoting Preventive Measures

The operation of the school’s policy on the discipline and pastoral care of its pupils may expose a teacher’s person or property to harm or loss from either a pupil or a parent, a guardian or other adult.

#### (i) Involving Pupils

The school will explain to the pupils its rules and the reasons for these. Sanctions for infringement of the rules should include provision for the suspension or expulsion of any pupil who has behaved violently towards a member of the staff.

#### (ii) Involving Parents

The school annually issues and explains to parents its policy for the discipline and pastoral care of the pupils. In the interests of avoiding any misunderstanding, arrangements will be made to permit individual parents to seek clarification of the policy. The policy will, in specific terms, contain a clause denying access to any pupil by any unauthorised adult. In the case of separated parents the school will establish who has the legal rights of access. Parents are issued with consent forms annually. Access to teachers are included in the school procedures and in any event limited to an “appointment only” basis where the circumstances of a meeting are likely to provoke a confrontation.

#### (iii) General Prevention

The school has an open door approach, although clear guidance on access to the Principal and teachers have been made available to parents annually. Arrangements within the school building for summoning the assistance of another teacher or the Principal will be agreed and clearly understood by all staff.

The telephone number of the emergency services:- 999.

### In the Event of an Assault

- Try to remove yourself from immediate risk and if necessary seek appropriate assistance. If this is not possible, try to place a barrier between you and your assailant.
- Do not threaten or use physical force other than to defend yourself and those in your charge.
- If, in the last resort, it is necessary to use force to defend yourself against imminent injury, restrain your action to the minimum to protect your person or the persons in your charge.
- Note details of the assailant and any witnesses.
- As soon as it is practicable, report the incident to your principal, who shall inform the Employing Authority, Police and if necessary, your family/friends.
- Do not admit any liability. Do not make any formal statement until you have received advice from you Union representative.
- Consider whether it is appropriate to have photographic evidence of the injuries sustained in an assault.

### Supporting

The timing and application of a range of options available to the Principal as the agent of the Employing Authority will depend upon individual circumstances. These will include for example:

- Issuing warnings on the possibility of prosecution
- Delivering a written notice excluding an assailant from the school premises
- Requiring that a prior appointment or other pre-conditions be met before access to the school is restored.

In addition the Employing Authority will:

- Consider and, where appropriate, investigate all reported incidents of violence (form A is attached to facilitate reporting). A formal letter of warning may also be sent to anyone issuing threats etc. to a teacher
- Notify the police of all cases involving assault
- Issue detailed advice in relation to the handling of specific allegations against staff
- Provide training in matters such as the handling of aggression
- Monitor the effectiveness of any measure taken
- Update advice where appropriate by issuing general guidelines to schools

### Purpose

1. To enable the rapid identification of potential critical incidents
2. To enable a quick and effective response to circumstances which are of crisis proportions, or may develop into a crisis situation
3. To clarify roles in the handling of a critical incident
4. To ensure that appropriate personnel and support agencies are identified, so that provision is in place to minimise resultant distress and suffering.

### Guidelines

- In the event of clear evidence being available that immediate physical safety may be compromised, (e.g fire) the person receiving the information will, as appropriate, set in motion the evacuation procedure and contact the Emergency Services prior to informing the Principal or teacher in charge.
- Upon receiving an indication of a potentially critical incident, the person concerned will request accurate, factual information and relay it immediately to Principal or teacher in charge.
- The Principal or the teacher in charge, will assume control and coordination of the response to the incident, delegating tasks as appropriate and identifying an intervention team.
- Initial briefing of all staff will take place as soon as possible, in order to limit the spread of damaging rumour.
- The Principal will inform pupils of the outcome of the incident, after which, as normal as possible routine will be maintained.
- A list of possible support agencies will be available and parents will be advised of support/counselling services.
- The need for support for staff is recognised.
- In the event of an incident arousing media attention, all communication with the media will be through the Principal.

All staff will be reminded of this fact at the initial briefing.

CHECKLIST Task:

Time Scale:

1. Obtain factual information at start of crisis within hours
2. Principal and senior teacher meet with within hours support personnel.
3. Establish an Intervention Team within hours
4. Contact families within hours: Continue until all informed
5. Call a staff meeting to give information same day (if practical)
6. Inform pupils in small groups same day (if practical)
7. Arrange a debriefing meeting for staff involved in disaster same day (if practical)
8. Debriefing for pupils involved in the disaster as soon as possible (allowing for health and safety)
9. Identify high-risk pupils and staff next few days
10. Promote discussion in classes next few days and weeks
11. Identify the need for group or over days or weeks individual treatment incrementally after disaster
12. Organise treatment, etc. as required

## Responding to a Critical Incident

### Developing Support Systems

#### Internal Support Systems

In responding to a critical incident schools and their staff have a key role to play. They are a source of continuity, support and security. With appropriate preparation, planning and information they can be “important agents of recovery, dispelling rumour and encouraging coping throughout the community” (When Tragedy Strikes 2000 pg.20)

A critical incident team formed within the context of a school may include a range of personnel including the following:

- Teaching staff
- Board of Governors
- Education Welfare Officer
- Educational Psychologist
- Non-teaching staff
- Clergy

Large primary or secondary schools may be in a position to use only school personnel and then seek advice from other services, while smaller schools may need to involve other services/professionals with whom they have good working relationships. It is important to develop these relationships and discuss roles in advance of a critical incident.

#### Considerations for Forming a Critical Incident Team

- } Have individuals volunteered to be a part of the team?
- } What training do they feel they need?
- } How can you meet their training needs?
- } Can you match natural abilities to roles within the team?
- } Can time be made available for meeting training needs?
- } Can you offer your team additional support re: timetabling and other duties during a critical incident?
- } Can you monitor inclusion in team when a member of staff is overloaded or emotionally vulnerable due to other circumstances?

## External Supports

There are a range of external supports that can offer a variety of advice and guidance, which a school can access at the time of a critical incident. They can be divided into four categories:

- EA Support Services
- Health & Social Services
- Voluntary Sector Organisation
- Other Services