



Critical Incident Policy

October 2025

Approved by	Date	Review Schedule	Date of next review
Trust Board	23/10/25	Every year	Oct 2026

Saint Paul teaches, 'the body is not made up of one part but of many.'

Chester Diocesan Learning Trust recognises and nurtures the unique gifts, skills and talents within our whole community.

We will empower adults and children to grow in character and mind, shaping a better future.

Shaping better futures; one body, many parts.

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1. Introduction

The handling of a crisis is a normal part of school life, but some incidents are of a critical, more overwhelming nature. A critical incident is defined as a serious disruption arising with little or no warning on a scale beyond the coping capacity of the school operating under normal conditions and requiring the assistance of the emergency services, Chester Diocesan Learning Trust (CDLT), the local authority, or other agencies.

This policy provides a summary of the process that should be implemented in such a situation, describing the roles, responsibilities, and procedures to follow in a number of crisis situations.

Each critical incident is unique, and it is not possible to plan for every eventuality, but similarly each critical incident can be shocking and disorientating, so a prepared procedure is essential to ensure that the school's reaction is effective and efficient.

Potential critical incidents which could affect schools in CDLT may include:

- Fire
- Flood
- Building collapse
- Health risk – outbreak of contagious illness/disease such as Covid-19
- Fatal road, rail or aircraft accident
- Serious injury on an out-of-school visit
- Death of a pupil or member of staff
- Natural disaster within the community
- Consequences of terrorist or criminal activity
- Riot/Civil Unrest
- Missing person
- Asbestos exposure-See Asbestos Management Plan

Please also refer to the school Cyber Response Plan for matters relating to Cyber Incidents.

2. Senior Emergency Management Team

Where an incident is significant in scale or impact, a Senior Emergency Management Team (SEMT) should be established, with specific roles and responsibilities established at the outset, to assist the Headteacher or senior school leader in managing the response.

Roles will include (but not be limited to): safeguarding; parent communication; media communication; health and safety; pupil and staff welfare; business continuity; record keeping; site security; liaison with statutory agencies.

People who will have a role may include (but will not be limited to): Headteacher/Head of School; Deputy Headteacher; Assistant Headteacher; School Business Manager; Site Manager; Governor.

School Senior Emergency Management Team (SEMT)		
Name	Position	Role in an incident
	[Headteacher]	
	[DHT/AHT]	
	[Business Manager]	
	[Site Manager/Caretaker]	

In addition, you should contact CDLT using one or more of the contact details below:

Trust Emergency Management Team (TEMT)		
Name	Position	Contact Details

Sue Noakes	Interim Chief Executive Officer (CEO)	Sue.noakes@cdlt.org.uk 07540 722668
Nicola Winstanley	Chief Finance and Operations Officer (CFOO)	TBC
Jeanne Fairbrother Associates	Health and Safety Adviser	neil@jeannefairbrotherassociates.com ; 07592 413 532

If the incident involves the Police, Fire Service, Health and Safety Executive, Environmental Agency or other enforcing authority, they will take control of certain management issues. Where any statutory agency request control of a particular part of the response, this should be given. During this period, neither representatives from the CDLT central team nor school staff should take any action that interferes with any investigation and should seek written permission for any actions connected directly or indirectly to the incident.

3. Actions following a critical incident

The school's reaction to a critical incident can be divided into the following categories:

- a) Immediate actions
- b) Short term actions
- c) Medium - long term actions

Immediate Actions – i.e. within hours of the incident occurring

Consider your emergency plan. Use the Jeanne Fairbrother Associates template at www.jeannefairbrotherassociates.com/guidance to formulate an emergency plan.

Ensure that your emergency plan has all the up-to-date contact details for the bullet points below and that the plan is revised annually or after any incident.

Your general plan may be amended to address the specific nature of a particular incident. You should also:

- Obtain, collate, and record information relating to the incident.
- Gather and brief the SEMT (Senior Emergency Management Team) – brief the team, allocate roles and responsibilities.
- Trigger support from the LA and other contacts on emergency list – establish clearly who is going to contact whom.
- Assign someone to specifically deal with calls (office) – from anxious parents etc. SEMT should agree a factual statement and avoid speculation.
- Contact families affected – must be done quickly and with sensitivity. Consistency of information is vital. It may be appropriate for families to come to school and immediate emotional support could be a possibility.
- Make arrangements to inform other parents via the usual method of communication with parents. Please liaise with the CDLT central team on any matters relating to communication.
- Inform teaching and other school staff – staff should not talk to the media or respond to questions from reporters. It is vital that all staff in contact with pupils are kept well informed and feel secure in handling comments or questions from pupils. The Senior Emergency Management Team will lead on this.
- Inform pupils – can be done in small or large groups depending on which are most appropriate. Care needs to be exercised to protect both children and adults closely involved in the incident. It is important that children receive a consistent account of the incident allowing for differences in their ability to understand.
- Encourage people involved to talk – the incident may need to be discussed before children go home for the day, for both pupils and adults.
- Deal with the media – seek advice from the CDLT central team before agreeing to speak to or be interviewed by the media. Where appropriate, an agreed text for release must be prepared by the SEMT in advance, agreed

with the CDLT central team, and a designated spokesperson briefed and prepared to respond on the school's behalf. This form of words must be considered and to the point.

- Devise a plan for handling the reactions and feelings of people affected – the most common reactions will include denial, distress, guilt, anger and helplessness. SEMT need to consider outside professionals to support and debrief staff and pupils affected by the incident. Those providing support also need support.

In addition, the SEMT should consider the following:

- Reunion of children with their families – especially where the incident occurs outside the school. Mostly children will need to be brought home, but sometimes parents and families need to visit the scene of the incident to understand how to deal with repercussions in terms of children's fears etc.
- Managing staff – support needs organising for all staff, preferably from within the school, but using outside agencies if appropriate. Staff monitoring should be a priority, even members of the SEMT. If a crisis persists over many hours staff may become tired, weary and upset and this affects their powers to make sensible decisions.
- Encourage pupils to talk – activate strategies for enabling young people to talk about the incident, and their feelings, using outside agencies if appropriate. Staff will need briefing about ways to help the children affected by the incident, and how to identify patterns of behaviour etc. This may have implications for the wider curriculum i.e. training in bereavement counselling for staff, provision of a range of books, PSHE discussions, etc.
- Debriefing meeting – it may be appropriate to hold a debriefing meeting for staff, children and parents to: clarify what has happened; allow for sharing reactions; reassure people that reactions are normal, and; mobilise resources e.g. parental support groups. This meeting should be recorded in minutes to ensure accuracy of content. This debriefing should be welfare based rather than a discussing detail that may become sub judice. Please inform any investigating authority in advance to avoid conflict or misunderstanding.
- Formal and informal recognition of rituals – it is important to remember to express sympathy to families of the hurt or bereaved. Visits to children/staff in hospital. Pupils may wish to send cards and letters. The school may also need to consider attendance at funerals, and/or the desirability of holding special assemblies or memorial services.
- Re-establishing routines – every attempt should be made to provide continuity for the children. The return to school of staff or pupils directly affected by the crisis will need to be managed carefully and with sensitivity but the re-establishment of routine is an important stage in emotional recovery.

Short Term Actions

- Consider the return to school for staff or children after long absence – reintegration will need to be planned carefully, and may involve home visits prior to return, part time attendance initially, reducing workloads, putting in place mentoring process, etc.
- Consulting professionals – consideration should be given to consulting the Educational Psychology Service for support and guidance, especially to help those showing unusual or prolonged reaction to the incident.
- Keeping parents informed – it may be appropriate to produce a leaflet for parents giving guidance on the possible delayed reactions of children to an incident and making suggestions to help them deal with these.
- Support for staff – ongoing monitoring and support for staff is a major consideration. SEMT especially will not be immune to reaction from their ordeal.

Medium - Long Term Actions

- Monitoring the vulnerable – the effects of a crisis can reverberate for years, and it is especially important that new staff and children are briefed in the school's history to help them understand and deal with potential repercussions especially at anniversary times.
- Marking anniversaries – these difficult times need to be treated with sensitivity. Some suggestions for schools to mark anniversaries are by annual concerts, memorial services, memorial prize giving ceremonies, memorial gardens, etc.

- Legal processes – the length of time taken over some legal processes can prolong the recovery process following a critical incident. SEMT may need to plan for this especially where staff may be involved attending legal processes and facing extended emotional trauma.
- Curriculum implications – it may be appropriate to schedule INSET training for staff in loss counselling, bereavement etc.