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RETNS POLICY ON THE MANAGEMENT OF CRITICAL INCIDENTS

Policy No. 2/17

Introduction:

The Board of Management, BOM, recognises a critical incident as “any incident or sequence of events which overwhelms the normal coping mechanisms of the school” [NEPS, 2016]. The BOM has a duty of care to the school’s students and staff and is responsible for ensuring that a critical incident policy is in place and up to date. The BOM reviewed and updated the policy in May 2017.

Purpose:

The outcome of a critical incident is impacted by how well the people involved have planned and prepared for such occurrences [CIP Toolkit, 2012].

The purpose of this policy is to ensure RETNS is proactive in preparing for and responding to critical incidents. Its aim is as follows:

- to provide guidance on the prevention of and effective response to a critical incident
- to minimise the risks of a critical incident occurring and to identify and support vulnerable pupils
- to ensure an effective approach in responding to critical incidents as they occur
- to identify appropriate support structures in the event of an incident, and
- to identify and implement appropriate training and information resources for staff

This policy provides guidance on the development of such resources and the establishment of a critical incident management team. The BOM, Principal and staff have a role in drawing up plans to ensure the school is in a position to respond quickly and effectively in the event of a critical incident, maintain a sense of control and ensure appropriate support is offered to those who need it. These will be organised and implemented with a view to coping with the critical incident, enabling the school to return to normality as soon as possible relative to the particular circumstances and limiting the effects of the incident on the school community. This is in keeping with the RETNS and Educate Together ethos of supportive community action and ensuring a secure, caring and safe environment for students and staff.

Scope:

This policy applies to the BOM, the Principal, Deputy Principal, staff, pupils in the school and parents and guardians. The procedures developed under this policy are designed to provide clear structures for dealing with incidents and also to support the school community in the event of a critical incident.

Policy statement:

1. Critical incident management

The Board of Management, BOM, recognises a critical incident as “any incident or sequence of events which overwhelms the normal coping mechanisms of the school” [NEPS, 2016].

Such incidents may involve students, staff or other members of the school community and could involve accidents, deaths, serious damage to school property, for example, through flooding or fire leading to school closure, or other traumatic or tragic events. Critical incidents may not necessarily happen within the school but can, by their nature, impact on the school community.

The procedures developed under this policy will aim to ensure the school has the capacity to respond appropriately to incidents and to limit their effect on the school community.

2. Prevention

2.1 Psychological

The Social, Personal and Health Education, SPHE, programme is an important element of the school’s prevention work. SPHE has a key role to play in the creation of a healthy, nurturing and safe environment and it supports children’s physical, mental, emotional and social development and well-being. The school strives to integrate SPHE into the school curriculum in a broad based and age appropriate manner, addressing such issues as grief and loss, communication skills, stress and anger management, resilience, bullying, conflict, problem-solving, seeking help, decision making, and mental health. Systems are in place for the identification of pupils at risk.

2.2 Physical

The creation and maintenance of a physically safe environment is a key requirement. To this end, routine inspections of the school are carried out with risks identified and addressed. Evacuation plans are in place and drills occur regularly.

2.3 Other policies and resources

The development and implementation of other school policies are of particular relevance in the context of creating a physically and psychologically safe environment for the entire school community. These policies include those relating to anti-bullying; behaviour; child protection; and health and safety.

Links with external agencies are maintained and there are clear procedures for the appropriate onward referral of children with serious difficulties or identified as being at risk. Staff are familiar with the school's child protection policy and procedures and they are aware of how to proceed regarding concerns or disclosures.

3. Preparation

3.1 Preparation

Emergency preparedness is the preparation and planning necessary to handle effectively a critical incident. It involves individuals assessing the likelihood of specific critical incidents occurring and developing an emergency plan that identifies the services they require, and the resources they need to have on hand in case such an incident occurs [CIP Toolkit, 2012]. The goal of these preparedness activities is to make sure that RETNS is ready and able to respond quickly and effectively in the event of a critical incident.

The school will use this policy and its associated procedures document as its primary resource. These will be supplemented by the 2016 Department of Education and Skills/NEPS publication "Responding to Critical Incidents – NEPS Guidelines and Resource Materials for Schools", which contains templates and other useful resources.

3.2 The Principal

The Principal is responsible in the first instance for the preparation of material and resources for the management of critical incidents in the school.

The Principal is responsible for ensuring that the procedures for dealing with a critical incident are enacted. She will ensure that members of the critical incident management team, CIMT, are selected in advance on a voluntary basis, are fully aware of their responsibilities and have all the required materials in order for them to undertake their respective roles. In general, the ISM will

comprise members of the in-school management team, the health and safety officer, a senior SNA and the school secretary.

The Principal will oversee the school's critical incident management plan, including the development of all relevant documentation for critical incidents and the keeping of accurate and detailed records.

3.3 Staff

The staff are in a strong position to offer strategic and specific support to children in their care. They are in a central position to observe behavioural changes resulting from trauma and they are important role models for healthy coping mechanisms. The BOM will ensure, resources permitting, that staff receive training in dealing with critical incidents and traumatised children. The BOM will also ensure, resources permitting, that staff will be offered all necessary support and clear information will be given on how to access the Employee Assistance Scheme (Freefone 1800 411 057).

3.4 Parents and guardians

Where necessary, parents and guardians will be made aware of procedures for picking up children in the event of an incident from school or the location of an alternative venue should one be required. Parents/guardians are also responsible for ensuring their contact details are current and correct.

3.5 School closures

The BOM strives to ensure school closures are kept to a minimum. It accepts that at times, however, it may be necessary to close the school for a limited time due to health and safety concerns, for example, an emergency situation involving a fire, flood, a severe weather event, serious infection, an explosion, or a chemical spill. Parents/guardians will be informed of closures as soon as possible using as many communications methods as feasible.

4. Critical Incident Management Team

4.1 Team composition

A critical incident management team, CIMT, will comprise the Principal and other designated staff who may volunteer to assist on the basis of specific skills and experience. The CIMT will, in general, be composed of members of the ISM, the health and safety officer, a senior SNA and the school secretary.

The team will include

- a designated team leader, who may be the Principal or Deputy Principal
- a staff liaison officer – usually the Deputy Principal or other senior staff member
- a parent liaison officer – usually a parents' representative on the BOM
- a media liaison officer – usually the Chairperson of the BOM - and
- an administrative officer – usually the school secretary

- the school's health and safety officer
- a senior SNA

Given the potentially large number of tasks that may need to be dealt with at a time of crisis, the CIMT will be established in the context of ensuring that all aspects of the crisis are dealt with expeditiously and empathetically without overburdening individual members of the staff, BOM or school community. Regular training drills for staff involved in the CIMT will take place annually or more often if required.

Details of the operation and role of the CIMT are set out in the "RETNS critical incident procedures arising from review of the RETNS Policy on the Management of Critical Incidents April 2017" document.

4.2 Team meetings

The CIMT will meet annually or more regularly if required, to review the procedures and plans that have been developed to deal with critical incidents.

4.3 Other resources

Where necessary and in the context of the management of an incident, the CIMT may draw on the resources of outside staff agencies, for example, NEPS, the HSE, An Garda Síochána, CAMHS, etc. NEPS, in particular, may have a key role in providing help with all elements of the management process [NEPS guidelines, 2016: 12]

5. External

5.1 Confidentiality

The BOM, CIMT and staff have a responsibility to protect the privacy and good name(s) of those involved in critical incidents and will be sensitive to the consequences of any public statements that are made. Careful consideration will be given to the terms used to describe incidents in any such public statements.

5.2 Media

The BOM understands that high profile incidents will inevitably attract media attention. While this will add a further layer of complexity to a crisis, the BOM also recognises that dealing with the media in a controlled and co-operative manner will ultimately be in the best interests of the school community.

6. Business continuity planning

6.1 Business continuity planning involves working out how to continue operations under adverse conditions such as fires in buildings and utility breakdowns, natural incidents like severe ice and

floods, and national incidents like pandemic illnesses [CIP Toolkit, 2012].

In addition to these potential issues, any event that could impact on the operation of the school, such as a critical incident involving a member of the school community, should be considered in the context of continuity planning. Business continuity planning should be included in all emergency management risk assessment activities and critical incident management planning.

Roles/responsibilities:

The BOM is responsible for ensuring the policy and procedures have been developed and are in place.

The Principal is responsible for co-ordinating the management of critical incidents; drawing up the relevant plans; assigning roles on the CIMT; ensuring records are up to date; instigating periodic checks; and ensuring training is provided where necessary.

All staff should be familiar with this policy and the procedures developed for the management of critical incidents. They should encourage and foster children's confidence and ability to deal with situations as they arise with particular reference to the SPHE programme.

Staff who volunteer and are assigned roles as part of a CIMT will be involved in the preparation of plans and arrangements for dealing with critical incidents. They will undertake training, participate in drills, and provide leadership in crisis situations to the children in their care.

Parents/guardians will be familiar with management plans where applicable, and are responsible for ensuring their contact details are correct and up to date.

Related documentation:

RETNS critical incident procedures arising from review of the RETNS Policy on the Management of Critical Incidents April 2017

Responding to Critical Incidents – NEPS Guidelines and Resource Materials for Schools 2016

CIP – Critical Incident Plan – toolkit for childcare providers: Galway City and County Childcare Committee (2012)

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Review date:

This policy was reviewed by the BOM in May 2017 and will be reviewed again in 2018 or earlier if required.