

Article for Core Brief

## **Critical Incidents in Schools**

There have been developments in how the Local Authority responds to critical incidents in schools, early years settings, academies and colleges.

New guidance 'Developing a School Critical Incident Plan' and extensive resource sheets and templates (including a proforma Critical Incident Plan) have been produced. These provide invaluable advice about the key tasks and actions a school should take in the event of an incident. They include guidance about forming a critical incident management team, assigning roles and responsibilities and supporting pupils, parents and staff.

A series of workshops for Head teachers and senior managers are currently taking place delivered by the police, emergency planning team and the educational psychology service. The workshop takes the participants through a critical incident and asks 'What would you do?' One Head teacher commented that the training was; "Thought-provoking and with its real-life basis, it challenged us to consider our practice within the confines of a supportive and well-informed group of colleagues".

Guidelines for NCC staff and services have been clarified. The overall critical incident process is managed by the emergency planning team. The work often involves support and co-ordination from a range of other central teams, for example student services, the educational psychology service and the school effectiveness service.

While critical incidents are thankfully rare, they can be long lasting and require extensive management and practical support. In the light of continuing economic challenge to local government we have streamlined our response, ensuring we provide robust support but bringing to bear a charging scheme for anything beyond first day support. For both critical and non-critical incidents (such as death of a pupil or member of staff), timely support is essential and we will continue to provide a core response via the educational psychology service (EPS). The EPS will commit up to 3 psychologists on the first day of the critical incident. Anything beyond this level of support will be chargeable – through either a service level agreement or a pay as you use service. All schools have received information about this.

The 'core offer' is made to all state-funded schools and settings in Northamptonshire and includes -

- a new series of guidance booklets and other leaflets, published through the Emergency Planning Team and those brought to school by educational psychologists, as part of the First Day Response (as needed).
- telephone advice and consultation from staff within the Emergency Planning Team, the EPS and members of the senior team of the Learning Skills and Education (LSE) Division.

Schools can then choose a SLA through subscription which provides options for further support.

The educational psychology service continues to maintain The Critical Incident Response Team which is dedicated to supporting schools and other education settings when there is a serious incident that results in emotional or psychological distress.

This team was set up following disasters such as Dunblane and The Herald of Free Enterprise in 1998 when the Council first developed guidelines for schools. They work closely with emergency planning and student services when an incident occurs. The team has specialist training in how to manage incidents and the best way to help children, young people and staff. They meet to practice, maintain and learn new skills so that they are always prepared for an incident.

The team also supports schools with non-critical incidents such as the sudden death of a student or teacher. This is led by the senior educational psychologist for the area. On-site support is developed from close liaison with the head teacher and senior managers and can include staff briefing and guidance and group work with pupils and with parents.

Head teachers and parents are very appreciative of such support and have provided very positive feedback. They comment on the “positive professionalism” of the team and notice that they are “well trained and experienced”:

*“Knowing the support has been there if needed has really helped”*

*“We feel empowered to do a good job in difficult and uncertain circumstances”*

*“Staff were amazed by your swift and supportive response at a very difficult time”.*

The way a school or setting responds at the time of a critical incident or tragic event can really make a difference to the long term impact of such an event on student and staff well being. The Critical Incident Response Team / Educational Psychology Service aims to support the school or setting to manage such events with care and sensitivity so that the most positive outcomes are achieved for the whole community.

Developing a School Critical Incident Plan can be found at [www.northamptonshire.gov.uk](http://www.northamptonshire.gov.uk) under information for schools; schools health and safety. For more information about publication of the guidance and subscription arrangements contact [JPartridge@northamptonshire.gov.uk](mailto:JPartridge@northamptonshire.gov.uk)

For further information about critical incidents, developing a Critical Incident Plan or about the training available contact Siobhan Currie [scurrie@northamptonshire.gov.uk](mailto:scurrie@northamptonshire.gov.uk)