



TRUST IN LEARNING (ACADEMIES)

Critical Incident Policy

Approval Date: January 2026	Version: 01	Review: 3 years (or sooner if required by statutory guidance)
Approval By: Director of Education	Lead: Director of SEND, Safeguarding and Inclusion	Review date: Autumn 2026
As part of the review process, this policy/procedure has been subject to an Equality Impact Assessment.		



History of Policy Changes:

Date	Page	Change	Reason for Change
January 2026		New policy	New over-arching policy for the Trust replacing previous Business Continuity Policy



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1. Statement of Intent

This document sets out the policy for the preparation of and response to, critical incidents within Trust in Learning Academies (the Trust). The policy has been developed and implemented in consultation with Headteachers, school staff and members of the Central Team.

This policy has been written for those who are involved in reestablishing the delivery of services following a major incident for the Trust or any of its schools. It is intended to cover the response to both a critical incident and an incident that affects the ability of a school to operate under normal conditions.

The purpose of this policy is to help senior leaders, school staff, Trustees and members of the Central Team respond to critical incidents in a way that will best support the psychological recovery of the pupils and staff and enable the school/Trust to function effectively.

2. Objectives and Scope

2.1 The specific aims of this policy are to:

- provide guidance and resources for how to prepare and respond to a critical incident. This includes considering plans to support the most vulnerable within the school community and others who might be more at risk of potential impact from a critical incident.
- safeguard the school community in the event of a critical incident, minimising negative impact, including disruption to learning. This includes facilitating psychological recovery and reducing potential traumatic impact.
- ensure all staff are aware of procedures in the event of a critical incident

2.2 This policy has due regard to legislation and statutory guidance, including but not limited to, the following:

- Education Act 1996;
- Equality Act 2010;
- DfE (2025) Keeping children safe in education (KCSIE)
- Health & Safety at Work Act (1974)
- DfE (2023) Emergency planning and response for education, childcare, and children's social care settings

2.3 This policy will be implemented in conjunction with the following Trust policies:

- Safeguarding and Child Protection
- Pupil Wellbeing Policy
- Health and Safety Policy
- Special Educational Needs and Disability Policy

3. Definitions: What is a critical incident?

A Critical incident: an event that is potentially traumatic, and affects a large part, or the whole of a school or the Trust, rather than just one or two individuals. Such events are likely to cause many people in our community distress and may threaten to overwhelm our capacity to cope.

An emergency: any event which causes, or has the potential to cause injury, loss of life, damage to property or significant business disruption.

A disaster: the escalation of an emergency to the point where normal conditions are not expected to be recovered for at least 24 hours.

4. Responsibilities and Accountabilities

4.1 Responsibilities of the Trust central team

- To ensure that the policy, as written, does not discriminate on any grounds, including, but not limited to, age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation.
- To ensure the policy is well communicated to all Headteachers.
- To ensure that the policy is regularly reviewed.

4.2 Responsibilities of the Headteacher

- To ensure the implementation of and compliance with current policy and procedures at school level
- To monitor systems, resources, impact and actions related to the policy
- To ensure the policy is well communicated and staff understand their role in its implementation
- To handle any complaints at school level which arise through this policy.

4.3 Responsibilities of school leadership

- To ensure staff are inducted into the procedures surrounding this policy and any updates
- To provide training to ensure policy compliance
- To hold sessions for parents and pupils as required, to ensure the policy is understood.

4.4 Responsibilities of all staff

- To uphold the whole school approach to the policy through modelling expected standards and utilising appropriate procedures
- To keep up to date with policy changes over time
- To promote a collaborative and inclusive ethos where all pupils can thrive
- To feed back to school leaders where concerns may arise in the implementation of the policy.

4.5 Responsibilities of parents

- To support the implementation of the policy with their child, as appropriate
- Where a parent has feedback on the implementation of the policy, to raise this directly with the school while continuing to work in partnership with the school

4.6 Responsibilities of pupils

- To uphold school rules and expectations and thereby comply with the implementation of the policy
- To feed back on the implementation of the policy through appropriate means, such as school council, to school staff

5. Preparation for a Critical Incident

To be able to respond effectively to a critical incident, schools must ensure that they are prepared. It is the responsibility of the Headteacher to ensure that the following actions are completed, although they may delegate responsibility to other senior leaders. Further guidance on each of the actions is explained in Section 5.1.

Preparation for a Critical Incident

- Incident Management Team (IMT) agreed
- IMT critical incident communication procedures agreed
- Business Continuity Plan completed
- Escalation contact numbers reviewed and updated
- Critical incident folders created and kept in agreed locations
- Stage 1 procedures printed on card and kept in policy folders
- Lockdown and evacuation procedures reviewed, including individual risk assessments or Personal Emergency Evacuation Plans (PEEPs)
- Staff are trained in the school's lockdown and emergency evacuation procedures
- Appropriate leaders have up to date critical incident training

5.1 Guidance for Critical Incident preparation and planning

5.1.1 Incident Management Team (IMT)

The IMT should be agreed at the beginning of each academic year, or in the event of a change of leadership. The IMT should include the Headteacher, Deputy/Assistant Headteacher, Designated Safeguarding Lead and School Business Manager. It may also include other senior leaders or members of staff, including the Site Manager.

5.1.2 IMT communications procedures

Procedures for how the IMT will communicate in the event of a critical incident must be agreed at the start of each academic year. Where a new member of staff joins the IMT, they will need to be updated.

This may involve identifying likely responsibilities that each team member will hold in the event of a critical incident. However there will always need to be flexibility within roles and responsibilities, which may vary depending on how the IMT are directly involved in the critical incident and availability of the team.

5.1.3 Business Continuity Plan

This should be completed by the School Business Manager, in consultation with the Headteacher and other members of IMT. A template can be found in the Critical Incident Policy Annex.

5.1.4 Escalation contact numbers

Response to a critical incident will involve members of the Central Team as well as external support services. Contact details for such services must be kept up to date.

Central Team contacts in the event of a critical incident should be added to the printed Stage 1 flow chart and should include CEO, Chief Finance and Operations Officer, Director of SEND, Safeguarding and Inclusion. These contact details are found in the Critical Incident Policy Annex. They should also be kept in the school office and be held by all members of the IMT.

The Business Continuity Plan provides a template for external support service contact details. These numbers should be kept within the critical incident folder as well as in the school office and Headteacher's office.

5.1.5 Critical incident folder

At least four Critical incident folders should be created. They should be clearly marked, in distinctive ring binders. The ring binders should be kept in the school office, Headteacher's office, Deputy/Assistant Headteacher's office and School Business Manager's office. At each school holiday, a member of IMT must take one of the folders home so that it is easily accessible, in the event of a critical incident.

Each Critical incident folder should contain the following information:

- Critical Incident Policy
- Stage 1 procedures printed on card
- Central Team escalation contacts
- Support service contact details
- Lockdown and emergency evacuation procedures
- Business Continuity Plan

5.1.6 Lockdown and evacuation procedures

School lockdown and evacuation procedures should be reviewed on an annual basis. All staff should be reminded of them, and any new members of staff trained in them. These should be practised regularly so that pupils are familiar with procedures.

Some vulnerable pupils may require a Personal Emergency Evacuation Plan (Critical Incident Policy Annex) or individual risk assessment, which identifies additional provision that they require in the event of a lockdown or emergency evacuation. These should be reviewed regularly, in collaboration with the pupil and family. Staff working with the pupil should be familiar with the plans and know where to access them in the event of an emergency.

5.1.7 Critical incident training

The Headteacher should complete critical incident training at least every three years. It is advisable that the School Business Manager and at least one other senior leader also completes this training at least every three years.

6. Procedures for each stage of a critical incident

Response to a critical incident can be divided into 4 stages:

Stage 1: INITIAL RESPONSE

Normally within the first hour of the incident

Stage 2: CONSOLIDATION

Normally the hours following initial response

Stage 3: RECOVERY

Normally the hours and days following the event

Stage 4: RESTORATION OF NORMALITY

Can be the hours, days or weeks following the event

Actions required at each stage are summarised in the flow charts on pp11-15.

6.1 Communications guidance

The TILA Central Team will advise on wider communications in relation to a critical incident. Where possible, schools should not send wider communication to parents, staff or media without liaising with the CEO/ Senior HR Manager.

Any information shared with the school community will need to be factual, knowing that critical incidents can cause media attention. The school community, including parents and pupils, should be advised not to share details on social media.

Communications with the media should all be handled through the CEO/ Senior HR Manager. In answering any communication from the media, the school should signpost to the Central Team. Contact numbers can be found in Critical Incident Policy Annex 5.

Links to communication templates, including guidance on how to use them, are also found in Critical Incident Policy Annex 4.

STAGE 1: Initial response – Normally within the first hour

Part 1

Take immediate actions to preserve life, safeguard students and staff, together with their welfare, which may include enacting your local emergencies procedures

Notify the emergency services (if necessary)

Declare a critical incident as appropriate and notify key members of staff and the Incident Management Team (IMT)

Assist the emergency services in taking actions to preserve equipment, facilities and the built environment (if appropriate) but not at the detriment of human safety

Gather key information and keep records

Contact the families/next of kin of those involved (see guidance)

On a continuous cycle, reassess risk and take further mitigating actions. Engage support of the IMT as appropriate, together with key staff

Escalation Contact Numbers At the time of declaring the incident a critical incident and notifying the IMT, the Central Team must be contacted. Contact one member of central team who can cascade to other team members.

Chief Executive	Sue Elliott	
Chief Finance and Operations Officer	Drw Cannon	
Director of Education	Julia Hinchliffe	
Director of SEND, Safeguarding and Inclusion	Rachel Peregrine	

Key Guidance for Communications at Stage 1

- In the event of serious incident, injury or death, the police are highly likely to be involved and are likely to take responsibility for informing relatives in person. However, it may be helpful for them to be accompanied by a member of staff.
- In other circumstances, contacting the families of those involved should be done quickly and sensitively by the school. If the contact person cannot be reached by telephone, leave a brief message asking them to telephone a particular number. Try to avoid leaving complex messages as these can become distorted when conveyed. When making contact be mindful that this information may be passed onto the media.
- Information to a wider audience, e.g. parents, should not be released without liaising with the CEO. Information should be prepared with care. Give the appropriate facts and express sympathy or concern. Blame and liability should not be attributed. Remember that the media may get access to this statement.

*This sheet should be printed on card and stored in an accessible location ready to be access and used on the ground during in the event of an incident. Central Team contact numbers should be added to this printed guidance, using the contact details found in Annex 5.

STAGE 1: Key Guidance

Part 2

Assessing Key Incident Information

- Survey – what is the actual situation?
- Assess – what can immediately be done to reduce the impact/severity and preserve life?
- Disseminate – who do I need to contact now to assist and support (in the school and outside) e.g. IMT, designated first aider(s) and emergency services?
- Casualties – How can any casualties be helped and supported?
- Hazards – What can be done to reduce the hazard/risk?
- Access – Does the site need to be placed into lock-down? Can emergency services gain entry?
- Location – If the incident occurs outside of the site, how does this impact?
- Emergency – What range of emergency or other services are needed e.g. power company; gas supplier; coastguard etc?
- Type – What type of incident is it and how may it escalate?

Assessing Continuous Risk

- Is the incident over or continuing?
- Is the risk increasing, decreasing or the same as already assessed?
- Given further information does a different response need to be acted upon?
- Does further communication need to be conveyed?
- Do the local emergency procedures need to be invoked (if not already)?
- Consider actions to ensure they do not increase risks
- Can you estimate the duration of continuing risk?
- What further support or advice is needed?

Collecting Key Incident Information

- What happened
- Where and when the incident took place
- Whether there still ongoing danger?
- If the incident happened off-site, what help is required from the school?
- The numbers and names of those injured and the extent of their injuries
- The current location of those injured, and the name and contact number of an adult present
- The location of students/pupils were involved but not injured, plus the name and contact number of an adult present
- The name and contact number of an adult at the incident site (if off-site)
- The name and contact number of local police

STAGE 2: Consolidation – Normally the hours immediately following the first hour

Continue to take actions to preserve life, safeguard students and staff, together with their welfare, which may include enacting your local emergencies procedures

Coordinate with the emergency services (if necessary) and/or notify the HSE through a RIDDOR notice (if appropriate)

Update the IMT, key members of staff, students, parents/carers (where appropriate to do so)

Take actions to preserve equipment, facilities and the built environment (if appropriate) but not at the detriment of human safety

Continue to gather key information and keep records

Further communicate with families/next of kin of those involved (see guidance) and consider wider communications in conjunction with CEO / Senior HR Manager

Commence the plan for emotional support engaging with the wider resources of TiLA, together with local external support services

Consider the working/learning patterns, expectation from all those involved, and any changes needed or appropriate including changes to the coming days/weeks curriculum/planned activities

Consider business continuity for once the immediate incident has concluded

Key Guidance for Stage 2

- Arrange debriefings for those involved (directly or indirectly). The nature of any debriefing sessions will depend on the incident. Any debriefing sessions may be more appropriate in distinct groups.
- Students/pupils who have recently been traumatised are especially sensitive to reminders. Children's literature, assembly stories and episodes in history all provide sources of likely triggers. Consider these in planning the coming days/weeks, anticipate likely reactions and ensure that teachers feel able to manage them and support is provided.
- Be alert and aware to possible student/staff reactions, even among those who are not directly involved but for whom the incident triggers difficult emotions. Both within the TiLA family and through outside agencies, considerable support is available.

On a continuous cycle, reassess risk and take further mitigating actions. Engage support of the IMT and update as appropriate, together with key staff

STAGE 3: Recovery – Normally the hours/days after the event

Conclude immediate actions to manage and mitigate risk

Reassess risk and take further medium and longer-term mitigating actions

Continue to meet as an IMT managing the execution of the agree actions, processes or mitigation

Take actions to preserve equipment, facilities and the built environment (if appropriate)

Continue to gather key information and keep records

Further communicate with families/next of kin of those involved (see guidance) and consider wider communications in conjunction with CEO / Senior HR Manager

Outwork the plan for emotional support engaging with the wider resources of TiLA, together with local external support services

Consider if further resources will be required to complete normal activities

Further consider the working/learning patterns, expectation from all those involved, and any changes needed or appropriate including changes to the coming days/weeks curriculum/planned activities

Key Guidance for Stage 3

- In the aftermath of a critical incident, TiLA will galvanise the resources of our community – teachers, local governance, wider TiLA resources, parents and other agencies – to support us through the difficulties. In some circumstances extra help to provide emotional support will be needed, debriefing and counselling from external agencies (e.g. health trusts or religious or voluntary organisations).
- The Headteacher with support from the Senior HR Manager /Director of SEND, Safeguarding and Inclusion will lead, plan and coordinate the emotional support plan. Staff will feel responsible for supporting the students during a period of crisis and the aftermath. However, they also have to deal with their own emotions. A new loss may evoke memories of a previous one. Grief or other reactions may return for a while.

On a continuous cycle, reassess risk and take further mitigating actions. Engage support of the IMT and update as appropriate, together with key staff

STAGE 4: Restoration of Normality – same day, following days or weeks

Make medium and long-term change to mitigate future risks

Continue to coordinate with the emergency services (if necessary) in relation to investigations and or evidence gathering

Complete a review to identify lessons learnt and actions required

Further consider changes to the coming days/weeks and curriculum/planned activities

Outwork the plan for emotional support engaging with the wider resources of TiLA, together with local accessible charity groups and support or counselling groups

Further consider the working/learning patterns, expectation from all those involved, and any changes needed or appropriate

Conclude communications with a support from the IMT

On a continuous cycle, reassess risk and take further mitigating actions. Engage support of the IMT and update as appropriate, together with key staff

7. After the critical incident: long term response

7.1 Support for the school community

In the aftermath of a critical incident, the school, with support of the Trust, will galvanise the resources of the community with the aim of providing the necessary psychological and emotional support required and restoring the function of the school. This might include teachers, local governance, parents/carers and other external support services e.g. health trusts, religious or voluntary organisations, Educational Psychology teams or counselling services.

It is common to be inundated with offers of support from various sources in the aftermath of a critical incident, especially one that has attracted media attention, but it is important to take the time to select and manage those carefully to ensure that the best interests of staff and pupils are met.

7.1.1 Support for Staff

The Headteacher should lead, plan and co-ordinate support for staff in managing emotions associated with the critical incident. Whilst staff will be focused on supporting pupils, it is important that their wellbeing is also prioritised, especially for those directly involved in the incident or close to it. This may take the form of:

- frequent debriefings/updates on next steps
- reminders of line management support
- open door drop-ins to discuss concerns
- signposting to HR support or mental health services such as Employee Assistance
- use of existing partnerships, e.g. Educational Psychologists or other trained counsellors
- harnessing community partnerships, e.g. with local religious leaders as appropriate, for advice and guidance on how to support specific communities
- use of in-school mental health practitioners, but only with their consent; they too may be affected by the incident
- engaging staff in reviewing the management of the incident to inform any longer-term changes to mitigate future risk.

Some staff, particularly those with protected characteristics, may need more bespoke support and may be affected more than others, depending on the circumstances of the incident itself.

Maintaining the routine/'normal' atmosphere of the school is also important in supporting staff; a stable environment can be helpful in managing the stress that can arise from a critical incident.

7.1.2 Support for Pupils

Maintaining routine as far as possible is important in supporting pupils.

Evidence suggests that when pupils are directly involved as witnesses to a traumatic incident, they benefit from structured debriefing sessions. Debriefing can also benefit pupils on the periphery of an incident. This

enables them to express what they saw or heard, how it affected them and how they feel about it in retrospect.

School will need to ensure absent pupils catch up any curriculum time missed, in an appropriate timescale.

Depending on the incident, it might be appropriate to set up a memorial space or send cards/messages of support.

Some pupils, particularly those with additional vulnerabilities including protected characteristics, may benefit from additional longer-term support. Parents/carers should be involved in conversations about appropriate additional support for their child. It is important that staff and parents/carers are able to quickly spot changes in behaviour which may indicate emotional distress, enabling support to be implemented at an early stage.

Additional support for pupils may include:

- Adjustments to the PSHE programme, reflecting on the incident and considering how pupils can process events experienced
- Reflection assemblies to support pupils' recovery
- Signposting to mental health support, e.g. in-house mental health practitioners or independent providers such as Kooth
- Bespoke counselling referrals or therapeutic support
- Multi-agency working for specific pupils' needs e.g. grief, trauma
- Home/hospital visits to children unable to attend school
- Drawing on the leadership of the pupils' communities, e.g. from their places of worship

Often pupils will not be able to process or access therapeutic support until several months after the incident. School should remain vigilant, maintaining positive and trusting relationships with the pupil and their family so that they are able to offer support when the pupil is ready to engage with it.

7.1.3 Support for the wider community

A critical incident will often have a significant impact on the school's wider community, such as families and friends of those involved. The wider community may require support through the school. Where appropriate, it is helpful for the school to work in partnership with other local schools that have also been affected.

Examples of support the school might offer the wider community includes:

- reaching out to affected families, e.g. in discussion with them, funerals could be attended, or memorials held. Always ask families if they wish for support, and what form the support may take, rather than making assumptions
- signposting to key services both within and external to the school
- overcommunicating support that is available to pupils at the school
- marking anniversaries, as appropriate. This should be done in discussion with the families involved.

It is important for the school to understand the demographics within their local community, taking into consideration the diversity of backgrounds and cultures and tailoring support as required. In particular, support will need to be adapted for families where English is not spoken at home. In this instance it is useful to engage the support of translation services.

7.2 Lessons Learned

After a critical incident, it is important to review the incident and lessons learned. This should be done with the IMT and may involve other key people who were involved.

The template (in the Critical Incident Policy Annex) should be used to support the process, and school procedures updated accordingly.