Highcroft School

Critical Incidents Policy

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Critical Incidents Policy

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Contributors	Rob Arrowsmith		
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Note	This policy must not be amended without prior approval of the Education Director.		

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1. Supporting Documents

- Safeguarding Children in Education Policy (EDE.POL.002)
- Health and Safety Policy (EDU.POL.038)
- Fire Safety Policy, Procedures & Guidance
- Risk Assessment Policy
- Premises and Site Security Policy (EDU.POL.042)
- Educational Visits Policy (EDU.POL.028)
- Supervision of Pupils Policy (EDU.POL.043)
- Positive Handling and Physical Intervention Policy (EDU.POL.020)
- Behaviour Policy (EDU.POL.027)
- Mental Health and Wellbeing Policy (EDU.POL.037)

Related policies are held within RADAR in the School's policy folder.

2. Introduction

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At Highcroft School, we plan for the rare but serious events that threaten the safety or wellbeing of our pupils, staff and visitors and that we cannot manage through our normal day to day procedures. We call these critical incidents. This policy sets out how we prepare for them, how we respond when one happens, and how we help our school community recover afterwards.

Many of our pupils have social, emotional and mental health needs, and some find disruption, noise and sudden change very hard to manage. A critical incident, and the evacuation or lockdown it may require, can frighten and dysregulate them. For that reason, our planning pays close attention to how we keep distressed and vulnerable pupils safe and supported throughout, and how we adapt the standard emergency procedures to their needs.

3. Aim & Scope

This policy applies to all staff, governors, pupils, parents and carers, visitors and contractors at Highcroft School. It covers any critical incident affecting the school site or affecting our pupils or staff on an off-site activity. It aims to:

- Set out what counts as a critical incident and who does what when one happens.
- Make sure we can act quickly, calmly and safely to protect life and reduce harm.
- Keep the school running, or recover it, with the least possible disruption to pupils.
- Support the emotional recovery of pupils and staff after a serious or traumatic event.

It sits alongside our emergency plan, which holds the operational detail, contact lists and site plans, and which we review and rehearse regularly.

4. Abbreviations and Definitions

Critical incident. A serious or traumatic event that disrupts the normal running of the school and that cannot be managed through routine procedures. Examples include the death or serious injury of a pupil or member of staff, a fire, an intruder or violent incident, a terrorist threat or attack, a serious accident on or off site, a public health emergency, severe weather, or the loss of the building or its utilities.

Evacuation. Moving everyone out of the building to a safe assembly point, for example in a fire.

Lockdown. Securing the building and keeping everyone inside and away from a threat, for example where there is an intruder or an external danger. Invacuation means bringing pupils in from outside as part of a lockdown.

Business continuity. Keeping the school running, or getting it running again, after an incident.

Critical incident team. The small group of named staff who lead the school's response to a critical incident.

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5. Policy Content

5.1 Principles and Approach

Our approach rests on the following principles.

Life and safety come first. Our first priority in any incident is to protect life and prevent harm. Property and routine come second.

We plan and we practise. We prepare for foreseeable emergencies in advance and rehearse our procedures so staff can act without hesitation.

We act calmly and follow the plan. A clear, practised response keeps pupil's safe and keeps the situation under control.

We are relational and trauma informed. We expect a critical incident to distress our pupils, and we plan to keep them regulated, informed and supported throughout.

We work with the experts. In a major emergency the emergency services lead and we follow their instructions, while we continue to care for our pupils.

We communicate carefully. We control information, speak with one voice, and protect the dignity and privacy of anyone affected.

We recover and we learn. We support our community after an incident, and we review what happened to improve our planning.

5.2 Critical Incidents in Practice

Our emergency plan

At Highcroft School, we hold a written emergency plan that sits with this policy. It names the critical incident team and their roles, holds key internal and emergency contacts, sets out our evacuation, lockdown and invacuation procedures, identifies the assembly points and an off-site place of safety, and covers how we keep the school running afterwards. We keep the plan where staff can reach it quickly, including away from the building, and the arrangements specific to our site are recorded in the annex.

The critical incident team

We name a small critical incident team in advance, with a clear leader and a deputy who takes over if the leader is unavailable. Each member has a defined role, for example leading the response, managing communications, accounting for pupils and staff, and liaising with the emergency services. The team and their roles are set out in the annex.

Evacuation

Where we need to leave the building, staff move pupils calmly to the assembly point by the nearest safe route, take the registers, and account for every pupil, member of staff and visitor. Pupils who need help to evacuate have a personal emergency

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evacuation plan, which the staff working with them know and follow. If we cannot return to the building, we move to our agreed off-site place of safety.

Lockdown and invacuation

Where the threat is outside or inside the building, for example an intruder or a dangerous person nearby, we lock down. Staff bring pupils inside, secure doors and windows, move pupils away from sight lines, keep them calm and quiet, and wait for the all-clear from the person leading the response or from the police. We use a clear lockdown signal that is different from the fire alarm, and we make sure every pupil and member of staff knows it. We plan the signal and the drill with our pupils in mind, so that it prompts a safe response rather than panic.

Adapting emergency procedures for our pupils

Given the needs of our pupils, a sudden alarm, evacuation or lockdown can frighten and dysregulate them, and some may try to leave or may refuse to move. We plan for this. Staff who know each pupil stay with them, use familiar de-escalation and reassurance, and follow the pupil's individual plan. Where a pupil has a known risk in an emergency, for example a tendency to abscond when distressed or a need for physical support to move, we record this and the response in their plan and in the annex. We balance the need to act quickly with the need to keep each pupil safe and regulated.

Specific types of incident

Our emergency plan covers the foreseeable types of critical incident, including fire, an intruder or violent incident, a bomb threat or suspect package, a terrorist threat or attack, a serious accident or a death, a public health emergency such as a serious outbreak, severe weather, and the loss of the building, power, water or heating. Each has agreed first actions in the plan. Counter-terrorism risk and our protective procedures are dealt with more fully in our Premises and Site Security Policy (EDU.POL.042), in line with the Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Act 2025.

Incidents on off-site activities

Where a critical incident happens on an educational visit or other off-site activity, the staff leading the activity take charge at the scene, make it safe, call the emergency services, and contact the school without delay so that the critical incident team can support them and manage communication with families. Visit leaders carry emergency contacts and the steps to follow. This section is read with our Educational Visits Policy (EDU.POL.028).

Communication during and after an incident

We speak with one voice. At Highcroft School, we agree a single spokesperson, usually the headteacher or the Keys central communications team, and all enquiries are directed to them. We give parents accurate and timely information through agreed channels, and we do not release names or details that could

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identify anyone affected before families have been told. We ask staff and pupils not to post about the incident on social media, and we agree holding lines in advance for use in the first hour.

Business continuity

After an incident we work to keep the school running, or to reopen it safely as soon as we can, so that pupils return to routine, which matters in particular for our pupils. The emergency plan sets out how we would continue teaching, including from another site or remotely if the building cannot be used, how we would keep records and systems available, and who we would contact at the Keys central team and the local authority.

Critical ICT systems, pupil records and safeguarding records must remain accessible during a business continuity event.

Recovery and support after an incident

A critical incident, especially one involving death, serious injury or violence, has a lasting effect on pupils and staff. After the immediate emergency we move to recovery. We give pupils and staff honest information at a level they can understand; we keep routines as steady as we can, and we watch for signs of distress in the days and weeks that follow. We draw on our pastoral and therapeutic staff, the designated safeguarding lead, and outside support such as the educational psychology service and, where needed, the local authority. We pay particular attention to pupils who are already vulnerable, and we support the staff who managed the incident, recognising the toll it can take on them.

It is essential that all serious incidents (SIs) are reported immediately to line management and recorded on RADAR under the relevant workflow.
Keys Group has defined SI's into three levels along with the corresponding response category.

- **Level 1 SI's will require a GOLD response**
- **Level 2 SI's will require a SILVER response**
- **Level 3 SI's will require a BRONZE response**

Reference to the Keys Group Serious Incident Policy should be made.

5.3 Recording, Monitoring and Reporting

Every critical incident, drill and near miss is recorded, with the timeline, actions and outcome. Where an incident has a safeguarding dimension it is recorded on CPOMS, and injuries and dangerous occurrences are reported as required, including under RIDDOR where it applies. Leadership reviews each incident and the drills, reports to the proprietor and governors and the keys central team, and updates the emergency plan and individual pupil plans so that Highcroft School learns from every incident and rehearsal. Following any significant incident, a formal debrief will be undertaken and lessons learned recorded, implemented and reviewed.

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5.4 Equality and Inclusion

At Highcroft School, this policy is applied fairly and in line with the Equality Act 2010. We make sure our emergency procedures are accessible to pupils and staff with special educational needs and disabilities, including through personal emergency evacuation plans, so that no one is put at greater risk or disadvantage in an emergency. Any concern that this policy disadvantages a pupil should be raised with the headteacher.

6. Responsibilities

6.1 Pupils

Follow staff instructions quickly during a drill or a real incident, and take part in practices so they know what to do.

6.2 Staff

Know their role in the emergency plan, follow the agreed procedures, and account for the pupils in their care raise the alarm immediately and keep pupils calm, safe and supervised throughout.

6.3 Leadership

Leadership at Highcroft School, leads the response to a critical incident, makes the key decisions, liaises with the emergency services and the keys central team, and leads the recovery afterwards. Leadership makes sure the emergency plan is in place, current and rehearsed.

6.4 Governance

The proprietor and governors at Highcroft School make sure the school has effective critical incident and business continuity arrangements and that this policy is followed, and they review the school's response after any serious incident.

6.5 Parents and carers

Keep their contact details up to date, follow the school's instructions during an incident, and avoid coming to the site or telephoning unless asked, so that access and phone lines stay clear.

6.6 Named leads

The person who leads the response to a critical incident at Highcroft School is Stephanie Goddard. The deputy who leads if they are unavailable is Christine Wade – DDSL/Pastoral Manager. The Designated Safeguarding Lead is Stephanie Goddard.

7. Training Requirements

All staff are trained on the emergency plan, the evacuation, lockdown and invacuation procedures, and their own role, as part of induction and regular

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updates. We practise evacuation and lockdown regularly, and we plan these practices so that pupils are prepared for them and not traumatised by them at Highcroft School. The critical incident team rehearses its response, and staff who support pupils with individual emergency plans are trained on those plans.

8. Equality Impact Statement

All policies will be developed and implemented in a manner that promotes equality, diversity, and inclusion, ensuring fair and equitable treatment for all individuals. Policies must align with relevant equality legislation and reflect the expectations and standards set by our regulatory bodies. They will demonstrate a commitment to eliminating discrimination, advancing equality of opportunity, and fostering an inclusive environment that respects and values the diverse needs, backgrounds, and experiences of those we support, as well as our workforce.

9. Sources of Information / References

This policy reflects current statutory guidance and legislation, including:

- The Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, in particular Part 3 on the welfare, health and safety of pupils and the duty to draw up and implement a risk assessment policy, read with the Independent School Standards guidance (April 2026).
- Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974.
- Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999.
- The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005.
- Keeping Children Safe in Education (DfE, 2025, and the 2026 version from 1 September 2026).
- Working Together to Safeguard Children (2026).
- Emergency planning and response for education, childcare and children's social care settings (DfE, updated 2023).
- Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Act 2025, known as Martyn's Law, whose duties are expected to commence in 2027.
- Prevent duty guidance (Home Office).
- Civil Contingencies Act 2004, under which the emergency services and local authority lead the response to a major emergency.

10. Version Control

This document can also be found in Radar. This policy is reviewed annually, or sooner if legislation or statutory guidance changes. The named owner for review at Highcroft School is the headteacher.

11. Appendices

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11.1 Appendix A: School-Specific Annex

At Highcroft School, the following local arrangements apply:

- Critical incident team members and their roles: Stephanie Goddard – Head and Christine Wade – DDSL/Pastoral Manager
- Person leading the response and the deputy: Stephanie Goddard and Christine Wade.
- Evacuation assembly point and off-site place of safety: in the car park on site. Outside Lipscomb Hall off-site.
- Pupils who need support in an emergency: N/A at present.
- Key emergency and local authority contacts: 999
- Where the emergency plan is held: Within the BCP.

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11.2 Appendix B: Critical Incident Quick-Reference

Use these steps in the first minutes of a critical incident. Protect life first. Record the timeline as soon as it is safe to do so.

1. Make yourself and those near you safe. Raise the alarm and, if there is a threat to life, call 999.

2. Start the agreed response. Begin evacuation, lockdown or the relevant procedure from the emergency plan, and signal it clearly to the school.

3. Account for everyone. Take registers, account for all pupils, staff and visitors, and report anyone missing or hurt to the person leading the response.

4. Tell the person leading the response. They take charge, decide the next steps, and call the critical incident team together.

5. Get help. Follow the instructions of the emergency services when they arrive and contact the Keys central team.

6. Care for pupils. Keep pupils supervised, calm and informed at a level they can manage, and follow individual plans for those who need support.

7. Control communication. Direct all enquiries to the agreed spokesperson. Do not release names and do not post on social media.

8. Once it is safe, record the timeline and actions, inform the designated safeguarding lead, and begin recovery and review.

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