

WALTHAMSTOW MONTESSORI SCHOOL

Critical Incident Policy

Including Lock Down Procedures

1. INTRODUCTION

At WMS we recognise the need for a clear and effective Critical Incident Policy to ensure the health, safety and well-being of our pupils, staff, parents and the wider local community. In the event of such an incident we need to be able to react in a clear, united and considered manner, following the guidelines laid down in this document.

2. WHAT IS A CRITICAL INCIDENT

A critical incident may be defined as any unexpected occurrence which has a major impact upon the school, which is likely to cause serious disruption to the running of the school and/or likely to result in significant public or media attention.

2.1 The risks for WMS are to:

- The pupils and the staff
- The buildings, premises and grounds
- The systems and services without which the school cannot function effectively

2.2 The sort of incidents that can affect WMS may include:

- The death/suicide of a pupil or member of staff
- A serious accident to a pupil or member of staff on the premises or in the immediate vicinity, or on a school visit or journey
- An outbreak of a serious communicable disease e.g. meningitis or E-coli
- Major fire, flood or explosion
- A bomb threat
- Release of hazardous substances near or on the premises
- A significant physical threat to pupils or staff by a parent or member of the public
- Hostage taking or abduction
- Hazardous weather

3. DEALING WITH A CRITICAL INCIDENT

It is impossible to predict the exact form or effect of an emergency; however the following are guidelines which will form the basis of the school's reaction. It should be noted that they are flexible depending on the nature and size of the incident.

3.1 ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

A Serious Incident Team will immediately be formed along the following lines:
INCIDENT MANAGER - Principal (supported by the Head of School). The Incident Manager is the main point of contact.

(NB: Should they be absent from the school premises, uncontactable or should the nature of the incident prevent this, their role will be taken by the Head of School or in their absence the senior Assistant to the Head of school at the time of the incident).

Other members of staff will be drafted in to help where appropriate or where their own particular skills are required e.g. First aid.

It should be noted that at the outset both the London Borough of Waltham Forest and REAch2 must be informed of the critical incident by the INCIDENT MANAGER. They will offer the following:

- Support, guidance and advice to the incident manager (it is essential that one person deals with the LA and REAch2 to ensure continuity and clarity of message)
- Supply the relevant technical expertise and advice
- Manage the press and media
- Provide information
- Subsequently, support the school to recover after the incident

3.2 PROCEDURES FOR RESPONDING TO CRITICAL INCIDENTS

At the outset the following actions will be taken (if judged appropriate by the incident manager) and in the order stated below:

1. Call the emergency services and/or other agencies as appropriate
2. Phone London Borough of Waltham Forest (LBWF) to seek support
3. Inform the School's Advisory Panel
4. Gather information on the incident - what it was, where and when it happened, which persons were involved and why it possibly happened

5. Set up a central liaison point in the school office to access telephone, fax and email facilities

3.3 POSSIBLE SCENARIOS

The following is guidance to be followed in specific incidents:

1. Death of a pupil or member of staff at school

- Phone 112
- If appropriate make safe (if possible) the hazard so others are not harmed or in danger
- Preserve any evidence of the cause of the incident
- Contact parents/carers/next of kin
- Arrange counselling
- Inform the Health and Safety Manager
- Later, inform the Health and Safety Executive (by phone) and complete and return Form 2508 (RIDDOR) to the Health and Safety Executive within 10 days and copy it to the Health and Safety Manager

2. Serious accidents or illness

- If a parent is unavailable to meet the pupil at hospital, the accompanying member of staff should act 'in loco parentis'. Including giving permission for treatment - subject of course to any known parental wishes e.g. Jehovah's Witnesses
- If a staff member or visitor to school is involved and next of kin unavailable, the above also applies
- Complete an entry in the Accident Book (this is found in the medical room, along with details of any pre-existing medical conditions of pupils)
- Inform the Health and Safety Manager
- Later, inform the Health and Safety Executive (by phone) and complete and return Form 2508 (RIDDOR) to the Health and Safety Executive within 10 days and copy it to the Health and Safety Manager

3. Assaults on staff by parents or members of the public

- Phone 999 if appropriate
- Try to identify the assailant but do not detain by force
- Collect and retain names of any witnesses and prepare witness statements
- Complete and return the LBWF Major Incident Report Form.

4. Bomb Threats

- Evacuate the building and assemble at fire assembly points or leave the school grounds and reassemble at Lloyd Park (this will be clearly communicated).
- Confirm with staff and the police that the building is empty
- Do not re-enter the building without clearance from the emergency services

5. Emergency school closure

- Ensure adults are available at home or they can collect the child. If not, then the child should remain at school or in a supervised place (pupil contact numbers are kept in the school office, a hard copy is also available. If the school is evacuated the numbers can be accessed remotely off site.)
- If the school has to be evacuated the children should be taken to Lloyd Park as a place of safe keeping (a list of key holders are to be found in the appendices) from where they will be collected or cared for
- Liaise with the Standards and Inclusion Officer responsible for transport of SEN pupils and make any necessary arrangements
- Give written reasons for closure to parents/carers as soon as possible
- Plan for re-opening school and communicating with parents/carers

3.4 MANAGING INFORMATION

In the immediate aftermath of an incident or crisis it is possible that the school will be inundated with incoming calls from anxious parents and others, including the media. The Incident Manager should prepare for this eventuality. Staff dealing with these calls should liaise with REAch2 and provide an agreed factual statement along with a reassurance that appropriate actions are being undertaken. Staff should keep a note of all conversations. A separate dedicated line(s) may be needed for outgoing calls - where staff are asked to use their own mobiles, they will be reimbursed.

Should the incident result in anxious parents coming to school a dedicated room must be set aside depending on numbers. This will be staffed by members of the welfare team and will be where the Incident Manager or her/his appointed representative can speak to the parental body as a whole.

3.4.1 WORKING WITH THE MEDIA

In the case of a major incident the media will become involved very quickly. In many situations where the emergency services are involved the police will take the lead in dealing with the media. Nevertheless, reporters will still ring or even visit the school for information, views and comment.

The media will not go away if you totally ignore them, they will be a bigger problem as they will seek out information themselves, distract staff and disrupt the work of the school. Accordingly, all enquiries should be referred to REAch2's Communications officer and they will deal with any enquires from the media.

The dedicated press officer to the school who, amongst other things, will:

- Advise the Incident Manager and her/his media team on news and information management
- Field and respond to media enquiries
- Draft press statements and releases
- Supervise and manage journalists on site where the situation arises

In a major incident where a news conference would be required, a dedicated area should be set aside for journalists on site. This should be separate to the parents/carers area (e.g. the school hall or a group room). The school has two exits which could also be used to keep journalists apart from the school community. The media should be kept updated with news of when a news conference is likely to take place and general factual information such as the name of the head teacher, number of pupils in the school etc can be given, but not details of the incident itself. The media should be reminded that they are not allowed to speak to the pupils without parental permission.

Where the school is "door stepped" by journalists, radio or television reporters seeking to get information from staff, parents or pupils, you should politely ask them to leave the school premises. Be advised they are within their rights to film/ photograph outside the school gates. They are not allowed to interview pupils unless parental permission has been sought and given.

The Communications Unit should be contacted at the earliest opportunity for advice and support and the journalist should be politely and firmly referred to the Communications Officer.

When agreeing to an interview on camera or a photograph think where you are being asked to stand or what you are being asked to do. If the story places the school in "a bad light", don't for example, allow yourself to be positioned in front of a sign displaying the school motto as that will obviously form part of the report.

3.5 RECOVERY PLANNING

Once an immediate crisis has been addressed the school will need to act a recovery programme to start the process of returning to some sort of equilibrium as soon as possible. A recovery team will be set up by the Incident Manager, which will be assisted by REAch2 and where required by LBWF.

The range of issues that may need to be addressed in a recovery programmed is varied but may include:

- Ways of communicating to staff, parents and children
- Formal and informal recognition and rituals
- Support for staff and pupils, which may include therapeutic help
- Support for the Incident Manager and the recovery team
- The curriculum implications - timetabling, staffing etc
- Buildings issues
- Policies and procedures implications

The strains of leading a school through a critical incident can be very disturbing but may not be apparent until after the crisis has subsided. The support of family, colleagues, advisory panel, LBWF and REAch2 staff may need to be engaged.

3.6 RECORD KEEPING AND VIEW

A summary of the incident must be recorded as soon as practicable and placed in the Critical incident file.

Within 5 working days of the incident a review of the incident should be undertaken noting strengths and areas for development. The outcome of the review must be retained in the critical incident folder.

LOCK DOWN PROCEDURES

Rationale

As part of our Health and Safety policies and procedures the school has a Lockdown Policy.

On very rare occasions it may be necessary to seal off the school so that it is not able to be entered from the outside. This will ensure that pupils, staff and visitors are safe in situations where there is a hazard in the school grounds or outside the school in the near vicinity.

A lockdown is implemented when there are serious security risks to the premises due to, for example, near-by chemical spillage, proximity of dangerous dogs, serious weather conditions or attempted access by unauthorised persons intent in causing harm/damage.

NaCTSO (National Counter Terrorism Security Office)

****Guidance****

In January 2016, NaCTSO provided the following advice to leaders of schools and other Educational Establishments for Reviewing Protective Security.

Contact NaCTSO

Action Counters Terrorism: Report Suspicious Behaviour

Contact form <https://act.campaign.gov.uk..>

Anti-Terrorist Hotline 0800 789 321

It's probably nothing but... if you see or hear anything that could be terrorist-related trust your instincts and call the Anti-Terrorist Hotline. If you think you have seen someone acting suspiciously, or if you see a vehicle, unattended package or bag which might be an immediate threat, move away and call 999.

Bomb threats: Procedures for handling bomb threats

Most bomb threats are made over the phone and the overwhelming majority are hoaxes, made with the intent of causing alarm and disruption. Any hoax is a crime and, no matter how ridiculous or unconvincing, must be reported to the police.

Be alert, but not alarmed!

On receipt of a "bomb threat" - Dial 999 and police will respond. You should always consider their advice before a decision is taken to close or evacuate.

Notification of Lockdown

Staff will be notified lock down procedures are to immediately take place on hearing a message given via the school's megaphone from halls and playground.

Procedures:

1. These signals will activate a process of children being ushered into the school building if in the garden as quickly as possible and the locking of the school's offices, fob connecting doors and all outside doors where it is possible to remain safe.
2. At the given signal the children will remain in the room they are in and the staff will ensure the windows and doors are closed/locked and screened where possible and children are positioned away from possible sightlines from external windows/doors. Lights, computer monitors will be turned off.
3. Children or staff not in class for any reason will proceed to the nearest occupied classroom and remain with that class and class teacher, e.g. children using toilets when siren goes. If a class is in the opposite hall from where their classroom is they are to go to one of the nearest rooms.
4. If practicable staff should notify the front office by phone that they have entered lock down and those children not accounted for.

NO ONE SHOULD MOVE ABOUT THE SCHOOL

5. Staff to support children in keeping calm and quiet.
6. Staff to remain in lockdown positions until informed by key staff e.g. Senior Management Team. As soon as possible after the lockdown, teachers return to their base classrooms and conduct a roll call and notify the office immediately of any pupils not accounted for.

Staff Roles:

1. Front office staff ensure that the offices are locked and police are called if necessary.
2. Head or office staff member locks the school's front doors and entrances.
3. Principal/Head of School locks Office/ Back gate to Nursery.
4. All staff to lock/close classroom door(s) and windows. Nearest adult to check exit doors are locked.
5. Domestic Staff to turn off lights.

INDIVIDUAL STAFF CANNOT SIGN OUT OR LEAVE THE PREMISES DURING LOCKDOWN

WITHOUT PRIOR AGREEMENT OF THE HEADTEACHER

Communication with parents

- If necessary parents will be notified as soon as it is practical to do so via the school's established communication network - website/ parent-text /telephone
- Depending on the type and severity of the incident, parents may be asked NOT to collect their children from school as it may put them and their child at risk.
- Pupils will not be released to parents during a lock down.
- Parents will be asked not to call school as this may tie up emergency lines.
- If the end of the day is extended due to the lock down, parents will be notified and will receive information about the time and place pupils can be picked up from office staff or emergency services.
- A letter to parents/carers will be sent home on the nearest possible day following any serious incident to inform them of the reason for the lockdown and to encourage parents/carers to reinforce with their children the importance of following procedures in these very rare circumstances.

Lockdown drills

Lock down practices will take place a minimum of once a year to ensure everyone knows exactly what to do in such a situation. Monitoring of practices will take place and debriefed to staff so improvements can be made.

Review

This policy and procedures will be reviewed annually as a part of our Emergency Fire and Evacuation Plan and our Health and Safety Policy

Date Last Reviewed: 10th September 2025

Date to be Reviewed: 10th September 2026