



Ashfield Girls' High School



“Each different. Each talented. All valued.”

Critical Incident Management Policy

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Critical Incident Management Policy



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Executive Summary

In Ashfield Girls' High School the following definition of a Critical Incident will apply:

A critical incident may be defined as any sudden and unexpected incident or sequence of events which causes trauma within our school community and which overwhelms our normal coping mechanisms.

A critical incident, especially one which results in the tragic death of a young person, exerts enormous pressures on individuals and the whole school community. The resulting wave of emotion is intense, difficult to deal with and can be over-whelming. The prior establishing, maintenance and on-going promotion of a school ethos as one of a caring and supportive community is an important pre-requisite for helping everyone- staff and pupils, to cope and feel valued at a time of great stress.

Response strategies, everyone's role in them and sources of help and support need to be in place in every school as part of a pre-planned proactive process of staff development as opposed to being hastily thought out at a time of a critical incident.

Being aware of essential tasks to be undertaken, specific roles in a collaborative, multi-agency and well-coordinated response will greatly assist the school population and broader community to cope with and recover from, the emotional fall-out.

The monitoring and support arrangements necessary for all young people, especially those individuals with delayed or complicated grief reactions and who may be 'at risk' require particular attention and coordination. A period of high-level vigilance for pupils' emotional well-being may need to be maintained for some time.

Teaching and support staff have an important role to play in maintaining a purposeful and supportive environment while sensitively helping restore harmony and routine back to the lives of pupils and the whole school community.

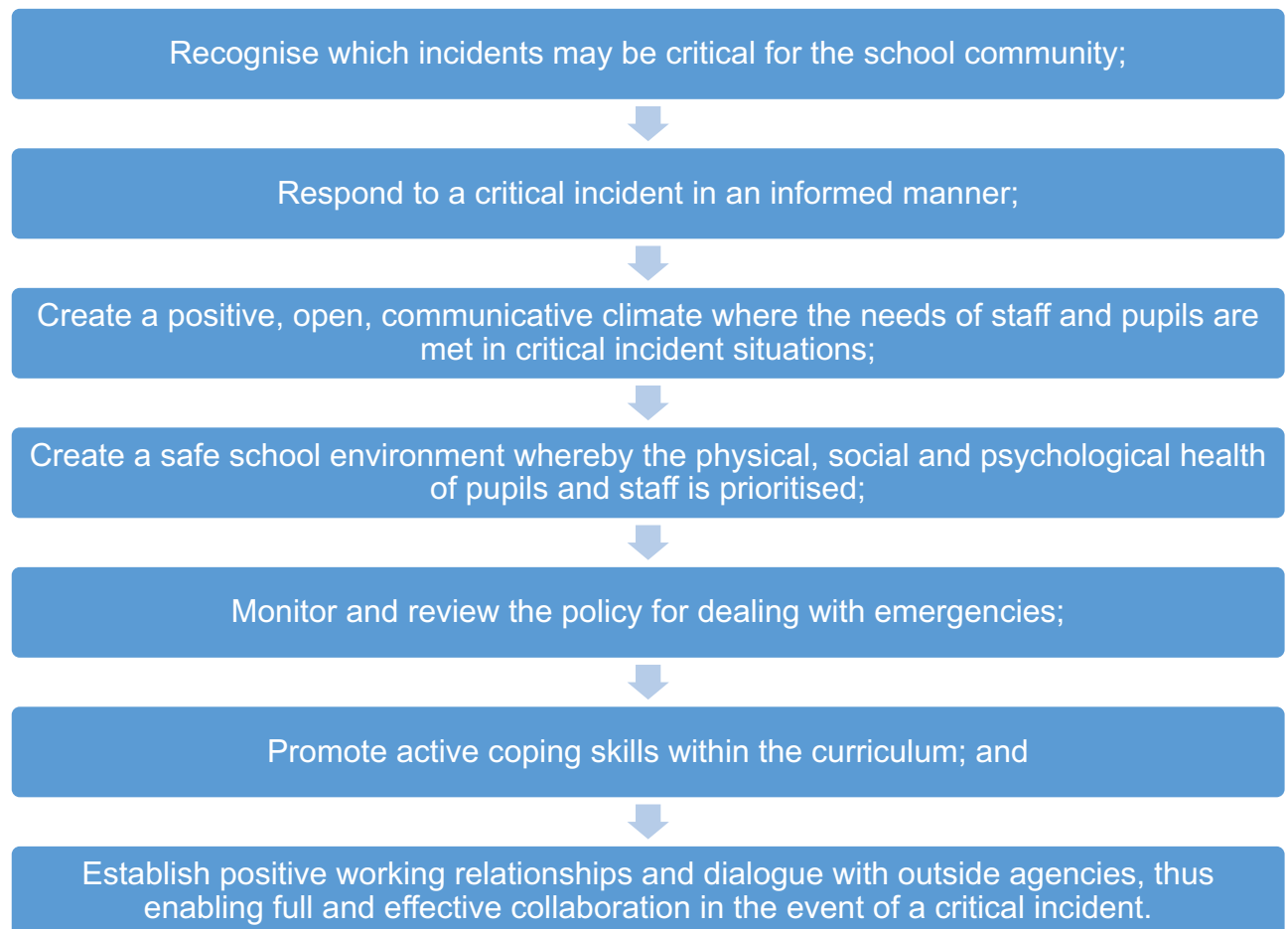
Some examples of critical incidents may include:

- Sudden death of a pupil or staff member;
- Disappearance of a pupil or staff member;
- Death or injury of a pupil or staff member on a school trip/outing;
- Severe injury or death of a pupil or staff member as a result of a road traffic collision;
- Violent intruder on a school premises;
- Serious damage to school premises through fire, flood or vandalism;
- Civil disturbance in local community;
- Pupil with contagious illness
- Immediate evacuation of the school with no likelihood of return.



Section A (Aims of the Policy)

The aims of the Critical Incident Management Policy are to:



Our school's response to any critical incident will differ according to the nature of the incident and the specific circumstances pertaining to it. Guidance for our response is described under the following three headings: 'Before the Incident', 'During the Incident', 'After the Incident'.



Section B (Legislative Context and Linked Policies)

Ashfield Girls' High School does not consider that the Critical Incident Policy is a stand-alone policy document.

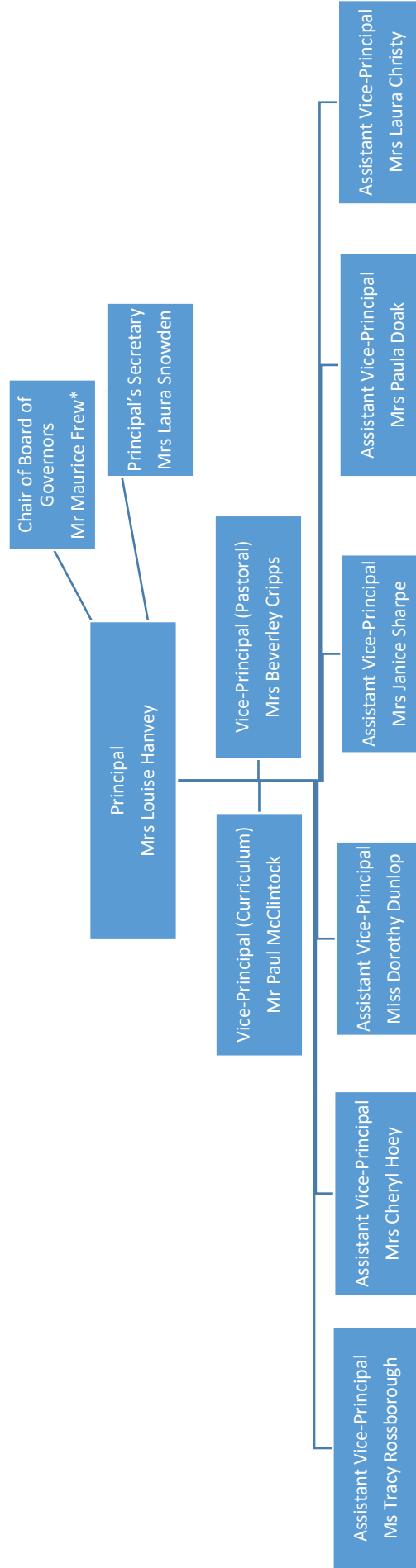
This policy links with the other school policies such as:

- Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy
- Special Educational Needs Policy
- Relationships and Sexuality Education Policy
- Health and Safety Policy
- Positive Behaviour Policy
- Pupil Wellbeing Policy



Section C (Policy and Procedures)

Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT)



Other members of staff may be co-opted members of the CIMT, as and when required. One/two members of staff may be asked to take responsibility for the normal running of the school whilst the CIMT is engaged in dealing with an incident.

Education Authority Critical Incident Response Team at 028 3751 2515

BEFORE THE INCIDENT

Critical Incident Management Plan

In Ashfield Girls' High School, the guidelines and procedures identified in this document will form the basis of our response to a critical incident. The Critical Incident Management (DE Guidance Appendix 3) will guide that response and serve as a record of events and action taken.

All information recorded as part of a critical incident should be treated as confidential and shared and stored in accordance with Data Protection and Child Protection procedures.

Critical Incident Management Team

In Ashfield Girls' High School the Principal and Vice Principals will lead the school response and accept joint responsibility for the recording of that response. The Senior Leadership Team will quality assure our response and ensure that essential tasks are completed.

All members of this team will have been assigned tasks and roles which may include:

- Overall management of incident and central information point;
- Establishment of a temporary recovery room/quiet space;
- Management of phone calls and enquiries;
- Staff briefing;
- Support for pupils (including vulnerable pupils and those who are off-site);
- Support for staff;
- Communication with parents ;
- Liaison with external agencies;
- Media liaison.

The Critical Incident Management Team will seek the assistance of the Education Authority Critical Incident Response Team to assist with the critical incident management, provide advice and support as required.



DURING THE INCIDENT

Implementing the Critical Incident Management Plan

It is important to remember that no two incidents are alike. We will always assess needs first using the information available.

When a critical incident occurs it is necessary for us to inform key people of the event that has taken place and to ensure that they remain updated. These may include the emergency services, members of the school's Board of Governors and the EA's Critical Incident Response Team. A list of relevant names with current phone numbers is included in the school's Critical Incident Management Booklet and is updated on a regular basis. The Principal and Vice Principals retain copies of this booklet at home, as well as in school, under secure storage arrangements.

Ashfield Girls' High School Critical Incident Response Team will:

1. Assess the risk, gather factual information and take appropriate action. Begin use of Critical Incident Management Booklet and follow tasks suggested. These will include:
 - Initiate agreed school evacuation procedures if necessary, arrange emergency agencies if required;
 - Mobilise the Critical Incident Management Team;
 - Establish a central information point, set regular briefing and debriefing times and, if possible, have a dedicated telephone line;
 - Notify the emergency services/other relevant authorities, Chairperson Board of Governors, the EA's Critical Incident Response Team and other relevant agencies such as counselling agencies;
 - Maintain structures and routines where possible;
 - Create a calm and purposeful environment.

2. Co-ordinate the school's response by following Critical Incident Management Booklet for guidance.
 - The School's Critical Incident Management Team will meet before staff briefings;
 - The Principal or member of the school's CIMT will meet with staff in the morning to brief and in the afternoon to debrief;
 - The morning meeting with staff is to share information, liaise and delegate, discuss the intervention plan, agree how and what pupils will be told being mindful that in certain circumstances there may be a police investigation into an incident. There is a potential that shared information could form part of the evidence. The school's Critical Incident Management Team will liaise with the police for further guidance, if necessary;

- Collect, record, verify and update details (time, place, those involved etc);
- Prepare a media statement – be careful about naming any pupil without parental/PSNI permission;
- Set up a recovery room in the school if needed (provide fluids, tissues, comfortable chairs and support personnel).

3. Organise contact with pupils and parents

- Give the facts of the critical incident, keeping in mind legal implications, the potential for police investigations and issues of confidentiality;
- Inform parents by telephone or in person if their child is involved, as soon as the initial information is confirmed. Remember, the media and/or children with mobile phones may have reached them first with news of the event, which may contain inaccuracies;
- Ensure only accurate information is shared ;
- Maintain appropriate communication between school and parents;
- Provide appropriate information for parents on possible reactions of pupils and how to support them.

4. Restore the school to regular routine as soon as practicable

- If planning visits to injured and bereaved, ensure that a senior member of staff remains on the school premises;
- Continue to liaise with the Chairperson of Board of Governors, Critical Incident Response Team and others as appropriate.

5. Continue to monitor the well-being of pupils and staff, especially the most vulnerable

- Identify at-risk pupils and staff, arrange for follow-up support, involvement with other professionals and referrals as necessary;
- Assess the need for specialist intervention of staff and pupils.



Staff Briefing and Debriefing

In the event of a critical incident affecting the school, it is essential that staff receive information from the school's Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT). The Principal/CIMT Team member is responsible for relaying factual information on what has occurred, how the incident will be handled and how staff can contribute to the school's response.

In order to do this effectively it is our intention to have a formal staff briefing as soon as possible after a critical incident and then a debriefing at the end of the school day. Every effort will be made to keep staff updated on developments in the course of the day and this will be done informally during morning breaks and/or lunchtime using the school's staff room.

1. At the initial briefing session, staff will be given clear and factual information, as currently available, about the critical incident. If full details are not known at this point, we will still hold the briefing and share what has been confirmed. Staff will be assured that as further details become available they will be updated as appropriate;
2. Advice on how to inform and support pupils will also be provided;
3. Practical arrangements will be discussed;
4. Information will be given on how staff can be supported and the afternoon debriefing meeting should be announced;
5. The end of day debriefing will take place and that any staff concerns will be listened to. Staff will be asked what they have had to deal with, how they handled it, what was difficult and any other issues;
6. Staff will be informed of the tasks which need to be addressed in relation to the next day and will be made aware that there will be a meeting again in the morning;
7. Staff will be advised about self-care and support available to them;
8. While all members of staff should attend briefing meetings, we will ensure that any staff that are vulnerable and unable to cope, are not expected to take an active role;
9. Those members of staff who appear to be vulnerable will be offered additional support;
10. Substitute and absent teachers will also need to be informed of the situation and supported as above.

Breaking the News to Pupils

It is important to inform pupils of a critical incident as soon as possible. Delaying a formal announcement may make the situation worse, as rumour can add another dimension to the existing problem and pupils may feel that a delay communicates lack of concern or sensitivity by the school staff.

In Ashfield Girls' High School the best person to communicate this difficult news will usually be the class teacher/ form tutor (supported by the Senior Leadership Team) who is familiar to the pupils and trusted by them.

We are aware that there will likely be a range of different groups among the pupils with whom we will need to communicate. We will be mindful of pupils with Special Education Needs, Medical Needs, Newcomers, Children Looked After and those recently bereaved.

We are mindful that the manner in which a critical incident is announced to the pupils can have a major impact on the emotional responses of the whole school community. Before making the announcement of a traumatic event, Ashfield Girls' High School will give careful attention as to the content of what pupils are to be told by:

1. Carefully wording the content of the announcement and providing written copies to teachers for use;
2. Ensuring that the family's right to privacy is respected.
3. Making a straightforward sympathetic announcement of a loss with a simple statement of condolence. As pupils may have heard rumours via text messages or word of mouth it is important therefore that the broad facts of the event, once verified, are communicated to the pupils in an appropriate manner. This will help minimise rumour, provide an opportunity for the pupils to talk, express their reactions and help to prevent hysteria developing;
4. Reducing the potential for creating a highly charged emotional climate and providing a 'safe container' by informing pupils in small groups for example siblings, close friends, class group, year group and in their regular classroom setting;
5. Allowing sufficient time for pupils to begin to discuss their feelings and assuring them that they will be kept updated as information is available.
6. Staff will be encouraged to remain calm and to listen to the pupils. They should not feel that they need to have all the answers to pupils' questions (as they will not) and indeed it may not be appropriate to give out detailed information. Theirs is a listening, supportive and containing role.
7. Be as truthful as possible when responding to the questions of pupils, but keep in mind that early information available about a traumatic event may not be accurate.
8. Monitor the reactions of the pupils.
9. Monitor corridors and school grounds to ensure pupils are appropriately observed and supported.
10. Provide designated area/areas for pupils should they wish to come out of their class. They may wish to go to a quiet place (where they can be supervised) or to talk to someone.
11. Staff members need to be able to respond to pupil's needs and reactions in a calm, caring, compassionate and containing manner.



Normal School Routine

Our school aims to restore normal school routine as soon as practicable following the news of a critical incident. Sustaining the normal routine with timetabling flexibility will allow pupils and staff to access support and will also maintain a sense of continuity and stability for the whole school community.

Pupils Off-Site

In Ashfield Girls' High School it is our intention to be mindful of pupils who are off site because of link courses or curricular demands, work experience, educational trips etc. As with all other pupils, thought will need to be given as to how they are contacted, informed and supported.

Pupils who are absent from school due to illness will be informed.

Pupils with Special Needs

Pupils with special needs including pupils with learning and communication difficulties will require special consideration from staff as they may be at a different developmental level from their peers, which may affect their understanding of trauma and death. These pupils will be told the news separately, if possible, by using short simple sentences in language appropriate to their level of understanding.

Contact with Parents/Carers

When a critical incident occurs parents will need to be informed. Parents of pupils directly involved will receive a telephone call. The Principal will make contact as soon as possible.

Other parents, as appropriate, will also need to be informed by letter. The letter might contain information about what has occurred and the school's response/intended response.

We will provide parents/carers as required with information on how young people react to a traumatic event will be helpful and reassuring e.g. pupils may be anxious, lack concentration, and be restless or unable to sleep. Giving parents some practical and constructive suggestions on how to support their child. Where there are vulnerable pupils, some parents may need to be contacted personally.



Funeral Arrangements

In Ashfield Girls' High School the attendance at a funeral following a critical incident will be considered in line with our Wellbeing Policies and Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy.

The welfare of all our pupils is paramount and we will therefore we will consider the following areas, if appropriate:

- *Attendance at funerals – staff and pupils*
- *Memorials / flowers*

Managing the Media

In Ashfield Girls' High School, all media enquiries will be channelled through the Principal. Staff will be reminded about this school policy and will be advised not to speak with the media directly. It may be necessary to explain to the media that it is not possible to answer their questions at a particular time because of the sensitive nature of the incident or because the information is not available for various reasons.

For safeguarding reasons and to ensure that 'normal' school life is disrupted as little as possible, the news media will not be permitted on school property without the approval of the Principal.

Dealing with a death by suspected suicide

Legally and ethically the term suicide should not be used until this is determined by a Coroner's Court. This can be one to two years after the actual death. The term 'suicide,' however, will not be used by the school.

Staff Welfare

The Principal will endeavour to ensure that staff are well supported at all times during the school year and even more so during a crisis. In order to support pupils effectively, staff will be kept informed, given clarification regarding their role and given support. The needs of all staff will be monitored so that vulnerable individuals can be identified and supported. There are a number of ways in which this will be done, through school and external support, both formally and informally.

Informal support in school may operate through colleagues who are also friends of a member of staff and who can look out for them and support them.

Formal support can be arranged by a staff member by contacting Inspire Workplaces.



School Closures

Depending on the nature of the critical incident and its impact on the school and wider community, it may be necessary to suspend the normal timetable for a short while to permit an appropriate response. In very exceptional circumstances, it may be necessary to close the school. Advice with regard to exceptional closures and the procedures to be followed are contained in the Department of Education circular, Circular Number: 2018/20.

Critical Incidents during School Holidays

In Ashfield Girls' High School if a critical incident occurs during the school holidays we will inform staff and parents (who will in turn inform their child). When the school opens we will support the pupils as appropriate.

Unsolicited Support/Advice

In Ashfield Girls' High School we are aware that, during a critical incident, offers of help and support will come from many sources, some welcome and part of our planned response, and others which, though well-intentioned, may only serve to complicate that response. Careful consideration will be given to the benefits to be gained for our school community of accepting help from any source, other than those which had been planned for. All contact with pupils from any agency or individuals will be governed by our current Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy.

Police Investigation

In Ashfield Girls' High School we are also aware that the sudden death of a pupil may trigger an investigation and involve a number of agencies. This will depend on individual circumstances pertaining to the pupil. School staff may be asked to co-operate with enquiries by the PSNI or other investigating authorities.

AFTER THE INCIDENT

Ongoing Support for Pupils

Following a critical incident, it is likely that there will be distress evident among many pupils, especially close friends and relations. In Ashfield Girls' High School, pupils who continue to show signs of significant distress after a number of months and who are finding the return to normal functioning difficult, will be considered for referral to appropriate personnel for specialist intervention.

The Pastoral Team will also consider the need for action plans of support for individuals and groups, and continue close liaison with external agencies for guidance and reassurance. It is important to realise that safeguarding children is a multi-agency concern and can become a child protection issue. The welfare of the child or young person must always be paramount.

Within our school environment, subject teachers may have to cope with relevant issues as they arise during teaching and learning. The curriculum will also provide opportunities to deal with these issues in a more extensive way. It would be unwise to focus on the critical incident, yet issues arising from the event should not be avoided by staff.

With regards to those most affected by a critical incident, when a bereaved pupil (i.e. sister) is due to return to school, the Pastoral Team will give due consideration as to how best to facilitate this and plan support for the pupil and her peers.

Support for Families

The families affected by the incident may require support for a long time after the tragic event. Family members may also attend our school and have difficulty in adjusting to their loss. In the event of the death of a child, parents may wish to have mementos of their son/daughter's involvement in the life of the school and to hear about his/her achievements. The return of personal belongings and/or school work to the family will be handled sensitively.

Anniversaries and other significant times

Consideration will also be given to marking the anniversary of the incident in an appropriate manner, and in accordance with the wishes of the family affected. Additional support for pupils and staff may be required at this time.



Section D (Roles and Responsibilities)

Board of Governors

- Will ratify the policy and ensure that it is reviewed every two years, or when guidance changes
- Will monitor the effectiveness of the policy

Principal

- Seeks clarification
- Calls emergency services, if appropriate
- Convenes the CIMT to inform of incident
- Prepares relevant statements/letters for the media, parents, pupils and office staff
- Convenes and informs staff

Vice-Principal (Curriculum)

- Liaise with Facilities Manager to ensure access for essential personnel
- Ensure health and safety measures are in place
- Contacts any partner schools
- Contacts Translink, if any change to bus schedule

Vice Principal (Pastoral)

- Contacts external agencies – Education Authority / Social Services / Counselling
- Contacts relevant parents
- Supports the physical and emotional wellbeing of pupils
- Arranges contact with Inspire
- Liaise with school first aiders and Pupil Welfare Auxiliaries, as appropriate

Assistant Vice-Principal (Miss D Dunlop)

- Arranges staff cover, if necessary and appropriate



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Assistant Vice-Principal (Mrs C Hoey)

- Social media communication on operational matters, if necessary and appropriate

Principals' Secretary (Mrs L Snowden)

- Ensures phone lines are operative and office staff are available
- Ensures office staff do not vary from the agreed response language

Other Assistant Vice-Principals

Mrs L Christy

Mrs P Doak

Mrs J Sharpe

Ms T Rossborough

Manage other areas, as allocated, within the Critical Incident Management Plan.



Section E (Consultation, Communication, Monitoring and Evaluation of the Policy)

In light of experience, the Critical Incident Management Team will review and evaluate our provision for coping with critical incidents after a critical incident, upon updated circulars and bi-annually.

What went well?

What was most/least helpful?

Were there any gaps?

Have all necessary referrals to support services been made?

This review will be undertaken in collaboration with those support agencies involved and will include consultation with all parties concerned.

Staff Continuous Professional Development

The Principal will seek to identify and arrange training for relevant staff.

Challenging girls today; creating women of value in the future



Principal: Mrs Louise Hanvey BSc (Hons) PGCE, PQHNI, PGDH

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