Responding to a Critical Incident Policy

Related documents include:
Health and safety policy Safeguarding policy Fire evacuation policy Fire policy Attendance policy Missing Student policy
Legal Status:
It is not a statutory requirement to have a School Critical Incident Plan, but to be prepared for the unexpected Worcestershire County Council strongly advises schools and colleges to draw up a plan, regularly review its contents and maintain training for staff. This plan supports the College's wider legal and regulatory responsibilities, including duties under the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974, the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999, the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005, applicable data protection legislation and the safeguarding requirements of the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 (as amended). The plan should be read alongside the College's current policies and statutory guidance. The Department for Education's guidance, Emergency planning and response for education, childcare and children's social care settings (updated 10th May 2023), and Protective security and preparedness for education settings (updated 28th April 2025), inform this plan. The DfE guidance is guidance rather than legislation. The Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Act 2025 (Martyn's Law) received Royal Assent on the 3rd of April 2025. As of the 4th of November 2026, the substantive requirements have not yet come into force. The College will monitor commencement regulations and assess whether any College premises or activities fall within scope. Preparatory consideration of protective security is appropriate in advance of commencement.
Monitoring and Review
• This policy will be subject to continuous monitoring, refinement and audit by the Principal. • The Principal and Welfare Manager will undertake a formal annual review of this policy for the purpose of monitoring and of the efficiency with which the related duties have been discharged, by no later than one year from the date shown below, or earlier if significant changes to the systems and arrangements take place, or if legislation, regulatory requirements or best practice guidelines so require.
• The next official date for review is **November 2027** • The review will also consider lessons from drills, incidents, near misses, changes to the College site or boarding provision, updated emergency-service advice and relevant DfE guidance.

Produced by:	SAC	Date:	18/05/22	Checked by:	JKS	Date:	09/11/2026	Approved by:	MN	Date:	10/11/2026

Introduction

Abbey College takes the safety of students, staff, and employees very seriously.

In the event of a critical incident the following actions will be taken:

A Critical Incident is defined as "*an emergency affecting student, personnel or property, requiring immediate responsive action beyond that which could be reasonably expected from the college's own management team during the day to day running of the school.* "

It may involve:

- the death of a child, staff member or guest
- a serious accident involving children and/or college personnel on or off the premises
- a violent intrusion onto college premises (e.g. an armed intruder or a bomb alert)
- extensive damage to college premises
- college fire, flood or explosion
- the effects of disasters in the wider community
- incidents on educational visits
- epidemics
- the release of hazardous substances near or on the college site
- IT Systems being compromised because of a cyber-attack or significant information security breach

Everyone in our community is likely to be affected in large or small measure by any one or combination of the above incidents. Thinking through might need to be done in such circumstances and having helpful information in an accessible place could make all the difference in successfully managing a situation.

A critical incident may also include a prolonged loss of essential utilities, heating, water, communications, access to buildings, transport or staffing, or an incident which prevents the safe operation of the College or its boarding provision.

Planning Process

It is important to involve staff in the planning process, to ensure that they support the plan and can implement it in the event of an emergency. Staff have been identified that are prepared to take on key roles in an emergency and have nominated one member of staff to take responsibility for updating and reviewing the plan once it is in place.

Key persons and roles are identified as:

- The College Principal to head the management of an incident
- Welfare Manager & House Parents to support students
- Bursar to guide the admin staff & maintenance team

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- Senior teacher to support academic staff
- Catering manager to guide catering staff

The following principles apply to managing a wide range of incidents:

- design the plan to suit your establishment (particular care should be taken if your establishment has residential accommodation)
- it should be simple and straightforward to implement
- it should be known by all those having identified responsibilities within it
- it should be regularly reviewed and critical information updated
- it should be held in a duplicate copy off-site or otherwise accessible in the event of fire/flood etc

Managing people in the aftermath of a critical incident relies heavily on good information and having thought through the practical consequences of the range of interested parties and how they can be helped.

The College will maintain proportionate arrangements for foreseeable emergencies, including fire, serious injury or illness, severe weather, flooding, public health incidents, hazardous materials, security threats, terrorism, loss of utilities and cyber incidents. Plans will take account of the College's day and boarding population, visitors, contractors, events and activities taking place outside normal teaching hours.

The Principal, or the most senior available member of staff if the Principal is unavailable, will activate the plan and determine the initial level of response. The safety of people takes priority over protection of property or business continuity. Staff must call 999 where there is an immediate threat to life, serious injury, fire or an urgent threat requiring police or ambulance attendance; they must not delay emergency-service contact while seeking internal authorisation.

The College will maintain an accessible emergency contact list, site plans, building access information, utility isolation information and role/action cards. These will be checked at least annually and after material changes. Copies must be available securely off site and in a form that can be accessed if the College's IT systems are unavailable.

Roles of Individuals

It is important that individuals understand their role within the Critical Incident Management Plan. There are several specific responsibilities, which need to be identified and assigned to individuals. Individual responsibilities include:

- The person to take charge of the Critical Incident Management Team (Principal)
- Welfare (Welfare Manager)
- Communications (Administration)
- Media (Marketing and Bursar)

- Resources (Site Manager/Resource Manager)

Where a designated role-holder is absent or directly affected by the incident, a named deputy will assume the role. The College will maintain a current list of role-holders and deputies, including out-of-hours contact arrangements for boarding and residential activities.

The Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) or deputy DSL must be included in the response whenever an incident involves, or may involve, a safeguarding concern affecting a child. Safeguarding referrals and decisions must continue to be managed in accordance with the College Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy and the current Keeping Children Safe in Education statutory guidance.

Information Gathering

Up-to-date records on personnel and students and the premises will be essential in hard copy and electronic form. A Fire list of students on campus is created weekly and stored in the Fire Plan Folder. E Reception will also be used to see who is onsite at any given time. A second copy of these and the *Critical Incident Management Plan* is kept securely and stored appropriately off the premises by the Bursar in order that vital information is not lost in the event of fire/flood/explosion.

All actions will be recorded using the incident log and retained for future reference. Immediate witness accounts will be kept securely for police evidence, if required.

The College will ensure that information used for roll calls and accountability is sufficiently current for the particular activity and time of day. This includes students, staff, visitors, contractors and any other persons known to be on site. Boarding registers and out-of-hours occupancy information must be available to the person leading the response.

Personal information must be accessed and shared only by those who need it for the emergency response, safeguarding, welfare or lawful reporting. Records, including CCTV, emails, call logs and witness accounts, must be preserved securely and handled in accordance with the College's data protection, retention and information-security arrangements. Where a personal data breach has occurred, the designated data protection lead must assess it promptly and determine whether notification to the Information Commissioner's Office and/or affected individuals is required within the applicable statutory timescales.

Base For Critical Incident Management Team

For Abbey College, the Critical Incident will be managed from the meeting room of the college, located in the main building. If the premises need to be vacated the reserve off-site base is Malvern Wells Village Hall (the key holder is known to the College).

The Principal or Incident Lead will confirm whether the primary or reserve base is safe and usable. If neither is available, the Incident Lead will nominate an alternative safe location and inform the emergency services and relevant staff. Staff must not return to a building or area until it has been declared safe by the appropriate authority.

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Communications

The plan includes all emergency contacts for students, employees and directors. The duty phone will be the dedicated mobile phone to use in the emergency. Malvern Wells primary school will provide a landline if the building needs to be evacuated.

The College will identify a secondary means of communication if mobile networks, internet access or the duty phone are unavailable. Communications must be clear, timely, consistent and approved by the Incident Lead. Messages should state what recipients need to do, where they should go, how further updates will be provided and how urgent enquiries should be directed.

Where students or parents are overseas, the College will take account of time differences, language needs, the reliability of contact details and the possibility that family members may receive information through social media before receiving an official communication. Information about casualties or deaths must be shared sensitively and, wherever practicable, in coordination with police and other relevant authorities.

Internal Communications

It is important to establish mechanisms for informing staff of developments. This will be through morning briefings. Staff will be debriefed at the end of each working day. All staff will be kept up to date with developments. All relevant information will be recorded and shared via SharePoint or emails, whichever is deemed more appropriate.

If normal digital systems are unavailable, the Incident Lead will use the agreed fall-back arrangements, such as telephone cascade, SMS or an alternative secure communication channel. Staff must not circulate unverified information, photographs, names or details of those affected.

Media Relations

The Marketing Manager and Bursar will be the media liaison and will undertake all communications. All guidance will be taken from the Directors of the College.

No member of staff or student should make unauthorised statements to the media or post incident information, images or speculation on social media. Staff should refer enquiries to the designated media liaison. The College will not identify casualties or disclose personal information until the information has been verified and the appropriate next of kin have been informed, in liaison with the police where relevant.

Evacuation and Shelter Procedures

All staff are inducted to deal with an emergency evacuation due to a critical incident. This forms part of our regular CPD training days. A rehearsal for an evacuation is carried out at least termly by all staff members to familiarise them with the procedure. Evacuation procedure cards are displayed in all classrooms, buildings and boarding houses.

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Students are also inducted in how to respond to an emergency incident as well as having regular fire drills.

To evacuate the premises our fire evacuation procedures will be followed and will be supported by welfare staff.

In the event of a lockdown, all students and personnel will be directed to the assembly hall or sports hall dependent of what emergency has taken place.

The Incident Lead will determine whether evacuation, invacuation (moving people inside to a place of safety), lockdown or partial evacuation is the safest response. The assembly hall or sports hall must not be used automatically: the safest location depends on the nature and location of the threat. Staff must follow the relevant incident-specific instruction and emergency-service advice. A lockdown must never be initiated where moving people would expose them to greater danger; the Incident Lead should communicate the safest available action.

The College will maintain separate, clearly understood procedures and signals for fire evacuation, lockdown and shelter/invacuation. Any alarm or message used for lockdown must be distinguishable from the fire alarm and understood by staff and students. Staff must know how to raise the alarm if the normal system fails. Procedures must include reasonable assistance for persons with disabilities, medical needs or other vulnerabilities.

The Principal or delegated Incident Lead will ensure that emergency arrangements are practised and reviewed. Drills should be planned so that staff and students understand the procedure without creating unnecessary distress; any learning points must be recorded and acted upon.

Emergencies During Educational Visits

Advice for dealing with emergencies on educational visits is available from DfE (Nov 2018) via the following link: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/health-and-safety-on-educational-visits/health-and-safety-on-educational-visits

The Council for Learning Outside the Classroom (LOtC) awards the The Council for Learning Outside the Classroom (LOtC) awards the Learning Outside the Classroom Quality Badge. This is a useful organisation to contact for advice before booking with outside organisations before embarking on trips.

http://lotcqualitybadge.org.uk/
The following documentation is required for all visits to be approved by the Principal.

All excursions should have in place:

- A visit itinerary/programme
- Appropriate Risk Assessments
- Supervising Adults
- Emergency contact details

On the visit, the visit leader should carry a visit leader emergency action card. (Worcestershire county council emergency procedures action plan for off-site visits)

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The visit leader should take charge of an incident until relieved by the emergency services or by a senior member of employer/establishment staff. If the visit leader is incapacitated, all members of the visit leadership team should have the competence to take charge and to initiate the establishment emergency plan.

The designated emergency contact should carry an emergency contact action card.
The designated emergency contact (a member of the senior leadership team) should provide an emergency contact for the group (this needs to be available after hours for evening activities and 24 hours for residential visits).

The school contact must have, readily available, written or online accessible details of the visit, including a list of all involved, contact arrangements with the group, and day and night contact details for parents and staff next-of-kin. On residential or after-hours visits, the emergency contact should have access to this information at home.

Make sure that arrangements will work after hours, at weekends and during the school holidays if visits are taking place at these times.

The visit leader must contact the College's designated emergency contact as soon as practicable after immediate danger has been addressed and emergency services contacted where necessary. The College contact will coordinate communications with parents, next of kin, insurers and relevant authorities, and will keep a written record of decisions and information received. The visit leader should not make speculative statements about the cause of an incident or disclose names of casualties before appropriate verification and notification.

For overseas visits, the visit plan should include relevant local emergency numbers, the location and contact details of appropriate medical facilities, travel insurer and assistance-provider details, arrangements for passports and travel documents, and a means of contacting the College at all times. The College should consider the needs of international students and families when planning communications.

The DfE guidance Health and safety on educational visits (26 November 2018) remains the relevant published DfE guidance identified for this policy. Visit planning should also have regard to current Outdoor Education Advisers' Panel (OEAP) National Guidance where relevant.

Lockdown Procedures

On rare occasions, it may be necessary to close and lock the doors of the College so that it is not possible to enter its interior. This will ensure that students, staff and visitors are safe in situations where there is a hazard in the College grounds.

A lock down is executed when there is a serious safety risk for the premises, for example a chemical spillage, proximity of dangerous animals or attempted access by unauthorized persons intent in causing harm/damage.

The aims of this policy are to:

- Remove students and teachers from the threat
- Isolate the dangerous situation from much of the school
- Allow an accurate accounting of students within each room
- Depending on the situation, facilitating an organized evacuation away from the dangerous area

Notification of Lockdown

Staff will be notified that lock down procedures are to be taken immediately by the Fire Alarm sounding 3 times in succession. This will be done repeatedly. (This is not a Fire Drill Alarm, which is a continuous sound, but three short sounds times in succession once.) Once the notification has been given, staff and students should:

- Close all windows and doors
- Lock the doors
- Out of sight & minimize movement
- Get under the tables where possible
- Stay silent and avoid drawing attention
- Be aware you may be in lock down for some time

The process will be activated and the students will be ushered into the College buildings as quickly as possible and the outer doors locked.

Depending on the nature of the lock down, the students will remain in the room they are in and the staff will ensure the windows and doors are locked. The students need to be positioned away from possible sightlines from external windows/doors. They must get under tables where possible. Lights, smart boards and computer monitors must be turned off. Mobile phones are put on silent mode.

Staff members and students not in class for any reason will proceed back to the class as soon as possible if safe to do so. If this is not possible, staff and students should go to the nearest available securable space. The Director of Academic Studies and Principal should be alerted to any students who are not accounted for. **No one should move around the College.**

Staff members need to support the students to keep them calm and quiet.
Staff members will remain in lock down until informed by a key Executive Staff Member in person that there is an all clear. The alarm will stop at that point.

The lockdown signal and the method for issuing an all-clear must be tested and understood by staff. An all-clear must only be issued by the Incident Lead or emergency services, following confirmation

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that it is safe to do so. Where an in-person message is unsafe or impracticable, a secure alternative method may be used and communicated during staff training.

Staff must not open doors or leave a secure location merely because someone claims that the incident has ended. If a person cannot safely follow the standard procedure, staff should use their judgement, prioritise immediate safety and follow instructions from the Incident Lead or emergency services.

The College will periodically review the suitability of its lockdown arrangements against the DfE guidance Protective security and preparedness for education settings and the Home Office guidance issued under the Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Act 2025. The College will assess the Act's eventual application to its premises and activities when commencement and scope requirements are confirmed.

Cyber and Information Notification of Lockdown

Where a cyber-attack or significant information-security incident affects College operations, the Bursar or designated IT lead will notify the Principal and activate the relevant incident-response arrangements. The College will prioritise the safety and safeguarding of students and staff, preserve evidence, isolate affected systems where advised by competent technical support, and avoid actions that may destroy evidence or worsen the incident.

The Incident Lead will establish which essential services are affected, including attendance and boarding records, safeguarding information, communications, access control, payroll, teaching systems and emergency contact information. The College will use secure alternative arrangements for roll calls, communication and operational decisions. Staff must not connect unauthorised devices or attempt independent remediation unless instructed by the IT lead.

The College will consider whether the incident requires notification to the Information Commissioner's Office, the National Cyber Security Centre, police, insurers, the Department for Education or other relevant bodies. The DfE cyber security core standard (updated 16 September 2026) will inform the College's preventative and response arrangements.

Post Incident Care and Support

The Senior Management Team will assess the needs of employees and staff who may have been affected by the incident that has taken place and offer any support that is required for all employees and students. For example, offering counselling sessions.

Staff & Students

Anxiety and the urgent pressure of events may produce stress amongst staff. The Critical Incident Management Team needs to think about how to support individuals in the aftermath of the events.

Those more likely to be affected are those whose lives were most at risk during the incident; those who witnessed tragic or frightening events or their immediate aftermath; and those who have themselves experienced traumatic events in the past or whose support networks are less robust.

Support should be proportionate to individual need and may include access to counselling, welfare checks, medical support, adjustments to work or study, and referral to appropriate specialist services. The College should consider the impact on boarders who may be away from their families, and maintain appropriate supervision and pastoral support. The DSL should consider any safeguarding implications arising from the incident.

Parents/Carers and Other Visitors

When parents/carers hear an incident has taken place, parents of day students may naturally come to the College for information. A space where parents/carers can be seen in groups or on an individual basis where concerning or tragic news can be shared in a considerate way. A staff member or trusted adult from the College community will be on hand to receive visitors and deal sensitively with their enquiries. This can be more difficult in situations where the police limit the information that can be shared; It can be very difficult to contain events which are often shared quickly through social media. It will also be important for all staff to be aware of the need to resist commenting in such forums. Our Marketing Manager will oversee liaising with all communications with social media and press.

Most Abbey College students are international. As parents live abroad the dissemination of information must be handled sensitively. Therefore, all communication must be through the Principal or Bursar.

The College will consider whether families require translated or otherwise accessible communications and whether time differences or international telephone arrangements affect the speed of contact. The College will coordinate any notification of death or serious injury with the police or other responsible authority and will not release identifying details prematurely.

Log Keeping

Any emergency affecting the College may afterwards become the subject of a detailed inquiry. It is important that accurate written records are kept, and that no piece of information about either the planning or the response to the incident is lost. Records may also be in the form of a recording made via a CCTV camera, a telephone or on an answer machine. The records should be retained after the incident for future reference.

Each member of staff involved in dealing with the emergency should log decisions made, telephone calls made and received and tasks carried out. In an emergency, things happen very quickly and it is unlikely that you will remember all the people you have spoken to and actions you have taken unless you write everything down.

The incident log should, where practicable, record the time, information received, decisions made, person making each decision, actions taken, persons contacted and any outstanding actions. Original records and potential evidence must not be altered or destroyed. The Principal or Bursar will arrange secure retention and access in accordance with legal, regulatory, insurance and data-protection requirements.

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Stand-down

The Critical Incident Management Team may need to continue to function for some time after the incident to consider several issues. These may be:

- When and how to re-open the college
- How to deal with continued interest from the media
- The provision of information to parents/carers and the public
- Support for the families of those hurt or bereaved
- Attendance at funerals
- The organisation of memorial services
- Particular thought needs to be given to the sending of cards and flowers
- Investigations are likely to be undertaken by various bodies such as the police and insurance companies

The Incident Lead will formally record when the emergency response is stood down and which responsibilities remain active. Staff should be informed of any continuing restrictions, welfare arrangements, reporting requirements or instructions not to discuss the incident. A structured debrief should identify what worked well, what needs improvement and who is responsible for completing each action.

Recovery

When the emergency services have left the College, or in the case of an incident on a trip off site, when
students and staff have returned home and media interest has subsided, the College can begin the recovery process.

The Principal will work with the local authority to develop a recovery plan for College. A range of support will continue to be available from the local authority including the Education Psychology Service.

The recovery plan should consider the safe reopening of buildings, alternative teaching and boarding accommodation, staffing, transport, catering, medical and welfare support, access to records and IT systems, examination and assessment arrangements, insurance claims, financial implications and communication with students, parents, staff and relevant agencies. Reopening must take place only when the College is satisfied, taking account of competent advice and any relevant authority, that the premises and arrangements are safe.

Where normal education cannot be provided, the College will consider proportionate arrangements for continuity of learning, including remote education where appropriate, while recognising that the immediate safety and welfare of students and staff takes priority. The College will maintain appropriate attendance and safeguarding oversight during any period of disruption.

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There may be formal inquiries or even police investigations into the incident, which may continue for some time, and require the cooperation and support of the College staff, students and parents/carers.

Additional Guidance and Reference Documents

- Department for Education, Emergency planning and response for education, childcare and children's social care settings (updated 10 May 2023).
- Department for Education, Protective security and preparedness for education settings (updated 28 April 2025).
- Department for Education, Health and safety on educational visits (26 November 2018).
- Department for Education, Keeping Children Safe in Education 2026 (in force from 1 September 2026).
- Department for Education, Meeting digital and technology standards in schools and colleges – Cyber security: core standard (updated 16 September 2026).
- Home Office, Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Act 2025: Statutory Guidance (April 2026; updated 25 August 2026).
- Department for Education, School and college security – associated emergency planning templates and checklists.
- Outdoor Education Advisers' Panel (OEAP), National Guidance, where relevant to educational visits.

ISA: No publicly available ISA-specific critical incident plan or operational standard was identified for this review. The College should continue to use any current member advice, training or support issued directly by ISA where relevant; such material should be checked against the statutory and government guidance listed above.

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