



**TAFF BARGOED
LEARNING PARTNERSHIP**
'Learning and Growing Together'

Disaster Policy

Introduction

Within the Taff Bargoed Learning Partnership, we understand the importance of ensuring all of our pupils are kept safe whilst at school. The school has adopted policies and procedures to minimise risks to pupils and staff, and has Health and Safety policies and procedures that are regularly reviewed. The governing body recognises that not all circumstances are under the control of the school and that emergencies and disasters may happen.

The specific aims of this policy are:

- ★ To outline what is considered a disaster;
- ★ To understand the roles and responsibilities during a disaster;
- ★ To outline actions to be taken in the event of a general disaster (details about specific disasters can be found in relevant policies.)
- ★ To outline the communication process in ensuring all stakeholders are aware and informed of disasters that have taken place;
- ★ To understand how news and information regarding a disaster is shared with the public;

All staff and Governors should be familiar with the contents of this guidance so that all those involved know what to do, or what not to do, if an emergency occurs.

Definitions

By 'disaster' we mean an incident that has caused death or serious injury to a member or members of the school community e.g.;

- ★ The death of a pupil or a member of staff from natural causes;
- ★ A traffic accident involving staff or pupils;
- ★ A deliberate act of violence against staff or pupils;
- ★ A school fire or major incident in the classroom;
- ★ A serious accident of any sort involving death or mutilation;
- ★ A death or injury on school journey;
- ★ A tragedy involving children with many others (e.g. Aberfan Disaster);
- ★ An incident involving terrorism or extremism; and
- ★ A bomb incident

Note: While it is not a disaster situation, some of what follows may be appropriate where refugees join the school having been themselves the victims of violent persecution.

Most aspects of disasters are self-evident but two are important to emphasise for the purpose of planning:

1. Feeling of grief, guilt and insecurity caused by the disaster. These are felt by survivors, parents and staff alike (not only by those directly involved) and may strike at any time over a long period after the disaster.
2. Inevitable media interest. This will focus on the 'human interest' and on discovering 'who is to blame'. To the media there is no such thing as an accident. Whether intended or not, the result can be to persuade people to say things in haste that they will bitterly regret at leisure. The media can sow discord and prevent healing. In the immediate aftermath the media may interfere with communications and distract people from coping with the emergency.

The following procedures are designed to deal with the problems in the early stages.

It is assumed in what follows that our first duty is to support and help pupils, parents and staff involved. We are also concerned to ensure that the handling of the disaster does not result in damage to the school, or school reputation, which will then cause all pupils and staff to lose in the long term.

It is essential that everybody knows:

- ★ The roles to be performed by each person;
- ★ The communications strategy; and
- ★ The basic principles we will follow with the pupils and parents.

Roles and Responsibilities

In term time, other things being equal, the crisis will be managed by a team that will include:

- ★ The Chair of Governors
- ★ The Head
- ★ The Deputy
- ★ Relevant Staff, depending on the situation.

The Head, if not disabled in the disaster, will be first contact for the media. It is probable that as things develop the Chair of Governors will need to make a statement and others may issue written statements.

The exact roles of others will have to be decided at the time as any crisis will undoubtedly have its own particular issues and need a different reaction, however among the actions needed will be:

- ★ Contact with the parents
- ★ Support for staff directly involved
- ★ Liaison with remainder of staff and pupils
- ★ Finding assistance for the school e.g. legal etc.; and
- ★ Liaison with relevant authorities e.g. Police/Health and Safety

Out of school term, the first thing for the person in charge on site to do will be to contact as many members of the Emergency Team as possible.

SMT Chain of Command

In the event of incapacity of any members of SMT the Chain of Command is as follows:

- Head
- Deputy Head

Precautionary Rules for Trips off Site

When a disaster occurs off site it is critical to know quickly who has been involved, therefore:

- ★ all trip leaders will make sure that there is a list in the School Office with the names of all pupils and a contact number/s for parent/s (also available on EVOLVE); and
- ★ every member of staff on the trip (not only the leader) will keep with them at all times a list of pupils on the trip. This may be the only starting point for identifying pupils and the leader may be incapacitated or dead.

It is also vital that information is passed to the school as soon as possible so that support can be given to the staff on the ground and parents and that accurate information can be given to the media etc.

All the staff on a trip will:

- ★ know how an alarm is to be raised; and
- ★ will have to hand a number to contact in order to report any disaster.

As soon as the injured etc are properly looked after and in the hands of competent assistance then communicating the news is the priority. Once that has been done the priority of those on the ground becomes to look after pupils and each other. Dealing with the media, with parents and all other issues then becomes the job of the Head Teacher

Immediate Action in the Case of Disaster

The Chair of Governors will be contacted immediately or in their absence, the Vice Chair. Failing either, another nominated governor will be contacted. The relevant governor will be asked to join the team at the school where;

- ★ The police will be contacted immediately to ask for help in controlling access to the School;
- ★ The LA will be contacted and asked what resources they can make available;
- ★ Roles will be allotted amongst senior staff;
- ★ Parents will be contacted ;
- ★ If children are off-site parents should be re-united with them as fast as possible. (It is the duty of the Head to determine in the circumstances whether it may be helpful for parents to view the accident site so they can share the situation with their children.

Communicating with Parents

Only nominated members of staff/governors have the authority to contact parents. Such persons, when answering or contacting parents will have a written list of known facts issued by the Head. It is important when reporting to Parents that the member of staff will only;

- ★ Say what is known for a fact;
- ★ Say how parents will be updated as information becomes more complete;
- ★ Say how parents should contact hospitals etc; and
- ★ Check whether any help is needed with transport.

While the school's main responsibility is to parents whose children are involved, there will be other parents who, for one reason or another, will want to know what has happened. Depending on the circumstances it may be appropriate to:

- ★ Send an account that is written;
- ★ Post information on the School website; or
- ★ Use the media to communicate with parents.

The Head will make the final decision regarding all communication.

Communicating with Pupils

If the disaster occurs during term a lot again will depend on whether information is available while pupils are in school. The priorities necessary when communicating with pupils are:

- ★ The first priority will be to make sure that pupils know what is true.
- ★ The second priority will be, as appropriate, for the School community to share its shock and/or grief.

The procedure will be:

- ★ Pupils will be given information by class groups by selected staff members or through an assembly;
- ★ the plain facts - no speculation; and
- ★ absolutely honest responses to questions that cannot be answered.

Normally the school will use the following strategy to address disaster issues:

- ★ Hold an assembly to give out information;
- ★ Return pupils to class; and
- ★ Selected staff monitor groups and answer questions.

If a disaster occurs during the holiday there may have to be special arrangements to allow families, friends and others to come into school, and for an appropriate member of staff to be available to inform and support.

This will be determined by the Head.

Communicating with the Media

Media interest will seem intrusive and unhelpful. It is important to realise, however, that their interest is legitimate. Used properly the media can help to communicate important messages to parents and the community. It is important to do everything to be helpful short of compromising the essential interests of the school. The Head will explain to the press what is happening but will stress that pupils' and parents' interests must come first for us. We will ask for the press' cooperation in achieving this aim.

When communicating disasters with the press we will ensure that;

- ★ All statements to the media will be made after discussion with the Head and Chair of Governors. In ideal circumstances they will be the press officer. If the head is not present they should be contacted if possible. A Deputy will cover the Head's absence;
- ★ The Chair of Governors will make a statement at the earliest but appropriate moment;
- ★ Governors and staff will refer all questions to the Head and must refuse to make any comment or react to any statement put to them by the media.

The following will be the principles to guide dealings with the press. It should be remembered that the media will be looking for a story and headlines. A 'story' only lasts for a short time in media terms so they will be looking for a quick result: grief to dramatise or blame to allot. They only polarise. However, there are possible statements which we can use to help get sympathetic treatment:

- ★ close-knit school devastated by disaster;
- ★ staff trying to hold things together under impossible circumstances;
- ★ caring school trying to do what it can; and
- ★ bolt from the blue overwhelms all sensible precautions.

It should be remembered that we have to be careful that nothing we say should increase grief or wrong-foot ourselves in possible legal action.

The media will normally not be invited onto the school site and if they do make their way into the site uninvited, they should be referred to the Head, who will normally ask them to leave, and will explain why. The assistance of the police could be sought if necessary.

It is the responsibility of the Head in consultation with the Governing Body to determine whether a Press Conference should be arranged in a place away from the children. If there are signs of devastation on the school site, it may be inevitable that they will have to be allowed to take pictures but the Leadership team will attempt to ensure that these do not add to the grief of parents and others.

Pupils will always be kept away from the media and the importance of this will be explained to the pupils. No addresses will be given to the media.

Further Information

Details about specific disasters can be found in specific disaster policies;

- ★ Policy for Arson
- ★ Policy for Educational Visits
- ★ Policy for Terrorism & Bomb Scares