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Managing Emergencies in Schools

Updated September 2015

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'Coping With a School Emergency'

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This guidance replaces the Central Bedfordshire policy 'Managing Critical Incidents in Schools' (2008). It is also available in electronic format, together with all supporting resources on the [Schools' Portal](#).

Parents and carers trust schools to keep their children safe. Thanks to the efforts of staff and governors, schools normally remain a safe haven for children; but they can become involved in an emergency at any time.

The Department for Education (DfE) **recommends** that schools create and maintain an Emergency Plan.

This document and its associated resources have been designed to help schools:

- Develop and review an Emergency Plan
- Provide training to staff who could become involved in an incident
- Organise emergency planning exercises
- Apply for the CBC Resilient Schools Award

Planning for emergencies can save lives. It can prevent an incident getting worse, provide confidence to staff, governors, parents, carers and pupils and enhance your school's reputation as a safe place to learn and work. Plans which deal with the consequences of large-scale emergencies also help staff to deal with smaller incidents that schools can experience on a regular basis.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The aim of a School Emergency Plan is to help staff respond effectively to an emergency at school or on an educational visit.

An Emergency Plan should be generic enough to cover a range of potential incidents that could occur. Examples include:

- Serious injury to a pupil or member of staff (e.g. transport accident)
- Significant damage to school property (e.g. fire)
- Criminal activity (e.g. bomb threat)
- Severe weather (e.g. flooding)
- Public health incidents (e.g. flu pandemic)
- The effects of a disaster in the local community
- An intruder on school site
- Loss of utility (water, electricity etc.)

It is vital for your plan to cover procedures for incidents occurring during and outside school hours, including weekends and holidays. Emergency procedures for extended services should also be included.

Plan distribution

All staff and governors should have a copy of the plan which can be referred to during and outside school hours (including holidays and when on educational visits). Depending on the content it may also be appropriate to distribute it to other parties, such as extended services.

As most Emergency Plans contain sensitive information (e.g. contact details) it is important to keep them secure. All versions of the plan, including hard copies and electronic versions, must be protected. Hard copies will need to be locked away when unattended and electronic versions should be password-protected.

Your plan will need to be reviewed regularly. It may be useful to keep hard copies of the plan in a ring-bound folder so that frequently updated sections of the plan (e.g. contact details) can be easily replaced.

School emergency plan template and supporting resources

A template School Emergency Plan is available for download from the Central Bedfordshire Council (CBC) [Schools' Portal](#).

The information in **SECTION 4** within this document relates directly to the completion of this template. Whether you adopt the template or choose to use your own, this guidance should be used to adapt your plan to your school and circumstances.

Other resources designed to help train staff and run exercises are available. Please note it is not necessary to use all of these resources in order to have an effective Emergency Plan; nor are these documents intended to supersede any existing arrangements your school has in place.

Preparation

Preparing for emergencies is an ongoing process which involves:

- Risk assessment
- Business impact analysis
- Planning
- Training (ie. key staff)
- Exercising
- Reviewing

Throughout each stage of this process, it is important to consult members of staff and governors to gain their involvement and support.

Support from Central Bedfordshire Council

In the event of an emergency, schools are asked to report this to the council via the School Emergencies phone number (**0300 300 8193**). Full details can be found in [Emergency Contact Information](#) on the Schools' Portal

Links with other areas of work

Many aspects of work carried out by schools have some bearing on emergency planning. Examples include:

- First aid arrangements
- Evacuation procedures
- Personal Emergency Evacuation Plans (PEEPs)
- Fire safety management procedures
- Policies for supporting those with medical needs and/or special educational needs or disabilities (SEND)
- Procedures for educational visits
- School security procedures (i.e. site perimeter security)
- Health and safety documentation (e.g. risk assessments, asbestos management)
- Safe practice in physical education (PE)
- Flu pandemic planning

- Remote learning arrangements
- Grief and bereavement guidance

It can be useful to include such related information within your Emergency Plan. In other cases, it may be more suitable to keep this documentation separate and provide a linking reference where appropriate.

Emergencies on educational visits

Central Bedfordshire Council has published guidance to support schools in their planning for emergencies occurring on a school visit. **Emergency Planning for School Visits** can be found on the [Schools' Portal](#).

2. RISK ASSESSMENT

Schools are potentially susceptible to a variety of risks which vary in severity and likelihood. Examples of risks which can affect schools are available at the end of this section. The list of risks provided is not prescriptive but intended to act as an aide memoire for the initial consideration of risks that may affect your school.

Before developing an Emergency Plan it is useful to consider those risks to which your school could be particularly vulnerable. When identifying risks to your school it may be useful to refer to the [Bedfordshire Local Resilience Forum \(BLRF\)](#) website. Here you will find a list of risks that could potentially affect schools in Central Bedfordshire together with detailed advice and guidance around minimising the impact of an incident.

Note that an Emergency Plan should be designed to help the school respond to a variety of incidents; it is not necessary to develop a separate plan for each risk.

Risk prevention and mitigation

Risk can be assessed based on a combination of the likelihood of an incident occurring, and the potential impact of that incident should it occur. The combination of these two factors determines the level of risk (e.g. 'high', 'medium' and 'low').

Wherever possible, measures should be taken to prevent or mitigate risks, especially for those deemed 'high'. Examples include buying flood protection equipment, or ensuring sufficient stocks of grit / salt have been procured for use during periods of severe cold weather.

Schools might like to consider registering for alerts.

- If vulnerable to flooding, consult the Environment Agency for advice www.environment-agency.gov.uk
- The Met Office provides an email alert service for severe weather warnings. Schools can register online at www.metoffice.gov.uk

RISK ASSESSMENTS – HEALTH

Risk	Risk level (high, medium, low)	Notes
Death or serious injury: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Natural causes • Playground accident • Sporting accident • Transportation incident • Laboratory incident • Suicide • Other 		
Accident on an educational visit		
Asbestos		
Legionella		
Flu pandemic		
Contagious disease (e.g. meningitis)		
Contaminated food / water		
Release of toxic materials (e.g. smoke plume)		
Animal health incident (e.g. foot and mouth disease)		

RISKS - PROPERTY

Risk	Risk level (high, medium, low)	Notes
Fire: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accident • Arson 		
Loss of electricity supply		
Loss of gas supply		
Loss of water supply		
Loss of heating		
Loss of telecommunications (including broadband)		
Burst water pipe		
Drainage / sewerage defect		
Building collapse / structural instability		
Discovery of an unexploded device		
Denial of access to school		

RISKS - NATURAL EVENTS

Risk	Risk level (high, medium, low)	Notes
Flooding,(for example): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fluvial flooding • Flash flooding • Surface water flooding • Groundwater flooding • Reservoir inundation • Sewer flooding 		
Heavy snow / widespread icy roads		
Storms / severe gales		
Heatwave		
Exceptional events (e.g. tornadoes)		

RISKS – CRIMINAL ACTIVITY

Risk	Risk level (high, medium, low)	Notes
Violence / assault		
Threats / threatening behaviour		
Bomb threat		
Suspicious package		
Significant vandalism		
Intruder on school premises		
Disappearance: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Abduction ● Kidnapping ● Hostage taking ● Other 		
Sexual assault		
Terrorism		
Radicalisation		

RISKS – MISCELLANEOUS

Risk	Risk level (high, medium, low)	Notes
Disruption to fuel supply		
Industrial action		
Aviation incident		

3.BUSINESS IMPACT ANALYSIS

In the previous section, the likelihood of occurrences of critical disruptions to daily functioning were assessed. As a follow-up to risk assessment, you might like to consider the short, medium and long-term effects of the loss of critical resources, facilities or supplies in the aftermath of an emergency. This will help you plan for any emergency and reduce the impact on the day-to-day functioning of the school, so that business can continue as usual.

LOSS OF UTILITY SUPPLY

Utility supply	Effect of loss:		Back-up measures / restorative arrangements (to be included in Business Continuity Plan)
	short-term – ½ -1 day	medium-term – 2-5 days	
	long-term – 5 days+		
GAS	Short		
	Medium		
	Long		
WATER	Short		
	Medium		
	Long		
ELECTRICITY	Short		
	Medium		
	Long		
HEATING	Short		
	Medium		
	Long		

LOSS OF SUPPLIER

Supplier	Effect of loss:		Back-up measures / restorative arrangements
		short-term – ½ -1 day medium-term – 2-5 days long-term – 5 days+	
TRANSPORT	Short		
	Medium		
	Long		
CATERING	Short		
	Medium		
	Long		
ELECTRICITY	Short		
	Medium		
	Long		
CLEANING	Short		
	Medium		

	Long		
HEATING FUEL	Short		
	Medium		
	Long		
GRIT / SALT	Short		
	Medium		
	Long		

LOSS OF PREMISES

Premises	Effect of loss:		Back-up measures / restorative arrangements
	short-term – ½ -1 day	medium-term – 2-5 days	
	long-term – 5 days+		
OFFICE	Short		
	Medium		
	Long		
CLASSROOMS	Short		
	Medium		
	Long		
KITCHEN	Short		
	Medium		
	Long		
LIBRARY	Short		
	Medium		

	Long		
LABS	Short		
	Medium		
	Long		
SPORT FACILITES	Short		
	Medium		
	Long		
STAFF ROOM	Short		
	Medium		
	Long		
TOILETS	Short		
	Medium		
	Long		

LOSS OF PERSONNEL

Personnel	Effect of loss:		Back-up measures / restorative arrangements
	short-term – ½ -1 day	medium-term – 2-5 days	
HEAD / PRINCIPAL	Short		
	Medium		
	Long		
TEACHING STAFF	Short		
	Medium		
	Long		
SITE AGENT / CARETAKER	Short		
	Medium		
	Long		
BUSINESS	Short		

MANAGER	Medium		
	Long		
OFFICE STAFF	Short		
	Medium		
	Long		
CATERING STAFF	Short		
	Medium		
	Long		
CLEANING STAFF	Short		
	Medium		
	Long		

LOSS OF TELECOMMUNICATIONS

Telecoms	Effect of loss:		Back-up measures / restorative arrangements
	short-term – ½ -1 day	medium-term – 2-5 days	
	long-term – 5 days+		
COMPUTER NETWORK	Short		
	Medium		
	Long		
WEBSITE / EXTRANET	Short		
	Medium		
	Long		
ATTENDANCE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM	Short		
	Medium		
	Long		
TEXT MESSAGING SERVICE	Short		
	Medium		

	Long		
TELEPHONE	Short		
	Medium		
	Long		
MOBILE PHONE	Short		
	Medium		
	Long		
FAX	Short		
	Medium		
	Long		
EMAIL	Short		
	Medium		
	Long		

4. COMPLETING THE CBC EMERGENCY PLAN TEMPLATE

A. QUICK REFERENCE INFORMATION

Site Plan for Emergency Services

It is good practice to keep a site plan to share with the Fire and Rescue Service should they be called on site. The plan should show the location of:

- Utility supplies
 - Isolation points
 - Is water supply direct / indirect?
- Location of hazardous chemicals (e.g. cleaner's cupboards, science prep room)
- Notable premises in the vicinity (e.g. places of safety, buddy schools, rest centres)
- Pre-designated areas to be used during an emergency (e.g. School Emergency Leadership Team briefing area, media briefing area, suitable rooms for lockdown procedures)
- Evacuation routes
- Fire alarm control box (with instructions on how to reset)

Grab bags

Having the necessary resources available during the onset of an emergency can prove very beneficial to the response. It may be helpful to prepare a number of grab bags which contain potentially useful items:

Emergency contact information (staff/pupils/utilities)	A loud hailer
Laminated role cards	Torches
Location map for isolation valves/switches	A whistle
High visibility jackets	Petty Cash
Mobile phone(s) + charger	Stationery
Laptop with dongle / i-pad	Blankets
A first aid kit	Log book
Two-way radios	A disposable camera
Batteries	

Important documents, such as your Emergency Plan or insurance policies, could also be included.

Grab bags should be stored securely but made easily accessible to staff should an incident occur. Consider storing one in the school building (e.g. office, staff room) and one outside the main building in case the site becomes inaccessible.

It is recommended that the contents of the grab bag are checked annually and after any equipment has been used.

Contact Information

The Department for Education emphasises that schools should maintain up-to-date contact details (staff, pupils, LA etc.) for use during an emergency. Knowing who to contact, and being able to contact them, is fundamental in responding successfully to an incident.

Your plan should contain up-to-date contact details for all those who may need to be contacted during an emergency. Examples include:

- School staff
- Governors
- Pupils
- Parents / carers
- Other providers on same campus
- The Emergency Services
- Central Beds Council: SOS system, school emergencies, utilities hotline
- Providers of portable toilets
- Providers of portable water bowsers (e.g. local tool hire company)
- Local radio stations

Arrangements for contacting people during and outside school hours often vary, so it is important to make such distinctions within the plan. Alternative methods of contact for staff (e.g. mobile phone number, home telephone number) and back-up contact details for organisations should be included wherever possible.

It is important the Emergency Services and Central Bedfordshire Council are able to contact a key holder if an incident occurs outside school hours. Ensure that the council is provided with up-to-date emergency contact details whenever changes to key personnel are made. It is also good practice to inform Central Bedfordshire Council where changes are made to the school switchboard number or to its email address.

‘Contact Information’ is the most important section of your emergency plan and must be updated on a regular basis.

B. ACTIVATION

Potentially any member of staff could be notified of an emergency, so it is important that all employees are aware of the plan and a copy is made readily available (e.g. near the telephone in the school office). Throughout the response to an emergency, staff should maintain an incident log.

When an incident occurs, the priority is to safeguard those onsite (i.e. pupils, staff, parents/carers and visitors) and alert the Emergency Services, if necessary. Other organisations, such as the local authority, should then be informed, where appropriate.

Some emergencies may affect the local community but not the school directly. In such instances, it might be suitable to activate certain aspects of the plan (e.g. post incident support) to help those affected.

C. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

This section of the plan describes the specific responsibilities for members of the School Emergency Leadership Team (SELT) as well as generic roles and responsibilities for staff during an emergency and in the recovery phase. It is recommended that a copy of the SELT role cards are laminated and stored in the grab bag for easy access in an emergency. The actions required in response to an emergency will depend on the nature of the emergency; it is unlikely that staff would need to implement all of the actions outlined in this section during one incident.

Actions identified on the role cards are divided into three distinct phases:

- initial response
- ongoing response
- recovery

Actions taken during the response to an emergency can have a direct impact on the recovery phase. When responding to an incident, staff should consider the long-term implications of any decisions made.

Once the response phase of the initial emergency has ended, all those who were originally notified of the incident should be informed and a recovery strategy should be established. Support may be available from the local authority in organising remedial work to property, and providing post-incident support to pupils and staff.

The recovery phase may last for a significant period of time. Reconstruction work, formal inquiries or police investigations into an incident will require the co-operation and support of school staff, pupils and parents / carers.

School Emergency Leadership Team (SELT)

The headteacher will usually take overall responsibility for co-ordinating the response to an emergency. If this is not appropriate, a pre-agreed nominee should be identified (and appropriately trained) to undertake this role.

Unless the incident is minor, it will be impossible for the headteacher to implement all the actions required on behalf of the school. A SELT should be established at the onset of an incident, which can assist the headteacher in managing the response.

The following roles could be covered by the SELT:

- Co-ordination (i.e. headteacher or pre-agreed nominee)
- Incident controller
- Business continuity
- Communications (internal and external)
- Log-keeping
- Media management
- Resources
- Welfare

Assigning staff to the SELT

Nominees for the SELT should be identified prior to an emergency and are likely to comprise a variety of school employees:

- Site managers / caretakers
- Business managers / bursars
- Teachers
- Office staff

The size of a SELT will vary depending on the size of your school and the nature of the emergency. In some cases more than one member of staff will need to be assigned to a role (such as 'welfare' which can prove especially labour intensive).

Depending on the school size, it may not always be possible to establish a full SELT; in such a situation employees will have to undertake more than one role. Indeed, in smaller schools the majority of responsibilities may be assigned to the headteacher with the support of office staff and the site manager / caretaker. In these circumstances, it is particularly useful to call for additional support (e.g. from Central Bedfordshire Council) as soon as possible.

When assigning staff to SELT roles, the immediately obvious choice may not always be most appropriate - consider the strengths of your staff and what they would be most suited to doing. For example, if an employee updates the school website and contacts parents / carers on a regular basis, then this person may be appropriate to undertake the 'communications' role. The site

manager / caretaker is often well placed to undertake the 'resources' role due to their detailed knowledge of the school premises.

Employees who have other roles in an emergency (such as those trained in first aid) may not be appropriate to nominate as part of the SELT as this could prevent them delivering their prime responsibilities.

Those staff not included in the SELT still have a crucial role in the response to an emergency; their presence will be needed to reassure pupils and minimise disruption to the school routine. They may also be required to provide assistance in other ways, such as accompanying people to hospital.

SELT briefings

It is useful to agree in advance a venue for the SELT to meet during an incident. Ideally this location will have access to telecommunications and enough space to incorporate the SELT and other responders (e.g. personnel from the Emergency Services or local authority). In many instances, the school office or staff room will be particularly suitable for this role. However, offsite alternatives need to be considered in the event of a whole school evacuation where return to the building is not possible.

How often the SELT meets will depend on the exact nature of the incident. However, it is important that frequent briefings are held and that staff maintain regular contact with each other. At the end of each SELT briefing, the time and location of the subsequent one should be agreed.

Shifts

Responding to an emergency can be exhausting and potentially upsetting. Staff cannot work indefinitely, and during a protracted incident it will be necessary to consider shift patterns. The timing of shift changes should be staggered to ensure replacements have an opportunity to be briefed properly and become accustomed to their role.

D. EVACUATION

Evacuation and lockdown procedures are particularly important sections of your plan, as they outline the initial actions that should be taken to safeguard pupils and staff, both from internal and external hazards.

All staff must be aware of these procedures, as warning signals may need to be triggered immediately before advising others of the threat. In other situations, the Emergency Services might alert the school to a potential hazard, such as a plume of smoke or a potential intruder.

In some circumstances it can be difficult to know whether to evacuate the premises or to follow lockdown procedures. The Emergency Services will be able to advise on the best course of action.

It is important to distinguish between the different signals used for:

- Evacuation procedures
- Partial lockdown procedures
- Full lockdown procedures

The difference between these signals should be easily identifiable (e.g. using a different ring tone or pattern). Procedures for sounding the 'all-clear' should also be established.

The purpose of an evacuation is to move people away from danger to a safe place. This is likely to involve withdrawal from a hazard in a specific section of the school building, but in some circumstances could require evacuation of the whole site.

Your school should already have conducted a Fire Risk Assessment and have evacuation procedures in place. These arrangements, together with any Personal Emergency Evacuation Plans (PEEPs), should be detailed in **Section D** of the template with particular reference to the roles and responsibilities of key personnel.

If the entire site has to be evacuated, pupils and staff may need to move from an initial assembly point to alternative premises.

Buddy schools

It may be useful to have a mutual aid (or 'buddy school') agreement with a nearby school. In the event of an emergency, a buddy school can be asked to provide assistance; this could include acting as a place of safety.

If such an arrangement is reciprocal, you will need to consider the implications of receiving a request for support from your buddy school. The assistance your school would be able to provide could be documented in this section.

Places of safety

Other places of safety (e.g. village halls, church halls) could be used to provide temporary accommodation should the school have to be evacuated.

If there is a potentially suitable venue nearby it would be useful to assess the property to establish what facilities it has available and how many people it could realistically support:

- Catering facilities
- Toilets
- Heating
- First aid
- Chairs and tables
- Beds / sleeping bags
- Disabled access / facilities
- Back-up generator
- Office

Information about how to travel to a place of safety, including at least one alternative route in case the main one becomes unsuitable, could be documented in this section. Arrangements for contacting key holders could also be included.

Rest centres

If a school is evacuated for a significant period of time, and pupils cannot be easily collected by parents / carers, the local authority may establish a rest centre. School staff will need to liaise with the local authority in order to establish transport to the rest centre and to ensure the welfare needs of pupils are met.

In rare cases, the local authority may request schools to act as a rest centre. This could entail accommodating evacuees in a school hall (possibly overnight) and providing them with refreshments, comfort and hygiene facilities. Schools are likely to be used only upon agreement by the headteacher and if all other potential venues are unsuitable.

E. LOCKDOWN

All schools should consider the need for robust and tested **lockdown procedures**. Lockdown procedures should be seen as a sensible and proportionate response to any external or internal incident which has the potential to pose a threat to the safety of staff and pupils in the school. Procedures should aim to minimise disruption to the learning environment whilst ensuring the safety of all pupils and staff. Lockdown procedures may be activated in response to any number of situations, but some of the more typical might be:

- A reported incident / disturbance in the local community (with the potential to pose a risk to staff and pupils in the school)
- An intruder on the school site (with the potential to pose a risk to staff and pupils)
- A warning being received regarding a risk locally of air pollution (smoke plume, gas cloud etc.)

- A major fire in the vicinity of the school
- A dangerous dog roaming loose in the area

It is not possible to create a generic school lockdown plan as there are a number of variables that will dictate exactly how an individual school responds to those situations identified, for example:

- Access to school bell controls to raise an alarm in an emergency
- Other means of internal communication – messenger, two-way radios, mobile phone, internal email, texts etc.
- School site plan e.g. the layout of buildings and their proximity to one another
- Age of students
- Geographical location – urban/rural, presence of secure perimeter fence

Nonetheless, many schools have found it helpful to incorporate the following basic principles in their plans:

- Staff are alerted to the activation of the plan by a recognised signal, audible throughout the school
- Pupils who are outside of the school buildings are brought inside as quickly as possible
- Those inside the school should remain in their classrooms
- All external doors and, as necessary, windows are locked (depending on the circumstances, internal classroom doors may also need to be locked)
- Once in lockdown mode, staff should notify the office immediately of any pupils not accounted for (and instigate an immediate search for anyone missing)
- Staff should encourage the pupils to keep calm
- As appropriate, the school should establish communication with the Emergency Services as soon as possible
- Central Bedfordshire Council should be notified via the ‘School Emergency’ phone number
- If necessary, parents should be notified as soon as possible via the school’s established communications system
- Pupils will not be released to parents during a lockdown
- If it is necessary to evacuate the building, the fire alarm will be sounded
- Staff should await further instructions

It is of vital importance that the school’s lockdown procedures are familiar to members of the senior management team, school administrators, teaching staff and non-teaching staff. To achieve this, a lockdown drill should be undertaken at least once a year. Depending on their age, pupils should also be aware of the plan as regular practices will increase their familiarity. Parents should also know that the school has a lockdown plan, and a copy should be placed on the school’s website.

It would also be good practice to:

- 1 Conduct a number of table-top exercises with the senior management team to test the procedures against various scenarios
- 2 Rehearse lockdown arrangements with all staff and pupils
- 3 Display lockdown drill information in every classroom alongside information relating to fire drills

Lockdown Arrangements

Lockdown arrangements should be determined by schools on an individual basis, as they will be dependent to a large extent on local circumstances such as the school's design and layout, class arrangements, resources available, etc. An example of a lockdown procedure could be:

Partial Lockdown

Alert to staff: 'Partial lockdown'

This may be as a result of a reported incident / disturbance in the local community with the potential to pose a risk to staff and pupils in the school. It may also be as a result of a warning being received regarding the risk of air pollution etc.

Immediate action:

- All outside activity to cease immediately, pupils and staff return to building. (There need to be a means of communicating the alert to duty staff at break times)
- All staff and pupils remain in building and external doors and windows locked
- Free movement may permitted within the building depending upon the circumstances

All situations are different, once all staff and pupils are safely inside, senior staff will conduct an ongoing and dynamic risk assessment based on advice from the Emergency Services. This can then be communicated to staff and pupils. 'Partial lockdown' is a precautionary measure but puts the school in a state of readiness (whilst retaining a degree of normality) should the situation escalate.

In the event of an air pollution issue, air vents can be closed (where possible) as an additional precaution. Emergency Services will advise as to the best course of action in respect of the prevailing threat.

Full Lockdown

Alert to staff: 'Full lockdown'

This signifies an immediate threat to the school and may be an escalation of a partial lockdown.

Immediate action:

- All pupils return to base (classroom, tutor room or other agreed location e.g. sports/assembly/dining hall)

- External doors locked. Classroom doors locked (where a member of staff with key is present). Windows locked, blinds drawn, pupils sit quietly out of sight (e.g. under desk or around a corner)
- Register taken and the office will contact each class in turn for an attendance report

Staff and pupils remain in lockdown until it has been lifted by a senior member of staff / Emergency Services. At any point during the lockdown, the fire alarm may sound which is a cue to evacuate the building.

During the lockdown, staff will keep agreed lines of communication open but not make unnecessary calls to the central office as this could delay more important communication.

Examples of discreet communication channels might be:

- Where staff have access to an internal email system then they could access their account and await further instruction. In practical terms, staff would need to be familiar with accessing their account through a variety of means e.g. laptop, smartphone or tablet
- Where a school uses 'Parentmail' then staff could be put into a defined user group. This could then be used to communicate instructions via text message in an emergency

Communication between parents and the school

School lockdown procedures, especially arrangements for communicating with parents / carers, should be routinely shared with parents either by newsletter or via the school website.

In the event of an actual lockdown, it is strongly advised that any incident or development is communicated to parents as soon as is practicable. It is obvious that parents will be concerned but regular communication of accurate information will help to alleviate undue anxiety.

Parents should be given enough information about what will happen so that they:

- Are reassured that the school understands their concern for their child's welfare, and that it is doing everything possible to ensure his/her safety
- Do not need to contact the school. Calling the school could tie up telephone lines that are needed for contacting emergency providers
- Do not come to the school. They could interfere with Emergency Services' access to the school and may even put themselves and others in danger
- Wait for the school to contact them about when it is safe for them to collect their children, and where this will be from

*The communication with parents part of the plan needs to reassure parents that the school understands their concern for their children's welfare and that everything that can possibly be done to ensure children's safety will be done. However, **it may also be prudent to reinforce the message that '..the school is in a full lockdown situation. During this period the switchboard and entrances will be unmanned, external doors locked and nobody allowed in or out...**'*

Emergency Services

It is important to keep lines of communication open with Emergency Services as they are best placed to offer advice as a situation unfolds. The school site may or may not be cordoned off by Emergency Services depending on the severity of the incident that has triggered the lockdown. Emergency Services will support the decision of the headteacher with regarding the timing of communication to parents.

In the event of a prolonged lockdown or more severe scenario, Central Bedfordshire Council has the capacity to provide humanitarian assistance by establishing a reception centre for friends and family outside of the cordoned area.

F. BOMB THREATS / SUSPICIOUS PACKAGE

Although bomb threats usually turn out to be hoaxes, they must always be taken seriously. All staff need to be aware of the actions to take if they receive a call from someone claiming to have information about a bomb.

This section outlines the immediate actions staff should take upon receiving a bomb threat. It might be useful to retain a copy of the 'Receipt-of-Bomb-Threat' form in the school office for quick reference.

Bomb threats can come from a variety of sources, including truants, former pupils or strangers. A threat is more likely to be real if:

- A codeword is used that is known to the Police
- The Police are aware of potential terrorist activity in the area
- The threat is specific rather than general
- The threat is credible

Whilst it is not reasonable for staff to assess the accuracy or validity of a threat, employees should record as much detail about the call as possible as this information will prove useful to the Police.

A bomb threat is a crime so even if employees are confident the call is a hoax they must still report the incident to the Police.

Suspicious Package

In most cases a suspicious package turns out to be a hoax or genuine mistake. Nevertheless, all appropriate precautions should be taken if such a package is received.

Any member of staff who handles post in the school should be aware of procedures relating to suspicious packages.

G. COMMUNICATIONS

During an emergency it is likely that concerned parents / carers will contact the school for further information and the main school telephone number may quickly become jammed with incoming calls.

You might like to consider the following emergency communication strategies:

- Set up an answer machine to 'message only' meaning that callers cannot leave messages. Updating the answer machine message regularly with information on the emergency can inform and reassure parents / carers whilst reducing the burden on office staff
- Signpost callers to a source of updated information e.g. the school website
- Updates sent out via Parentmail or sent out via the freetext function of Central Bedfordshire Council's SOS system
- Central Bedfordshire Council may be able to set up a public helpline to help relieve the pressure

Specifically designated lines for incoming and outgoing calls (preferably landlines, as mobile phones can rapidly run out of battery) should be used to maintain communication with other organisations (e.g. the Emergency Services or local authority), but should not be made available to the public.

During an emergency, it may be appropriate to consult the Emergency Services or local authority about what information can be provided to pupils and parents / carers.

Those who have been directly affected by the incident should be notified personally (either by a telephone conversation or face to face). A communications log should also be maintained so as not to disturb people by contacting them more than once if it is not necessary.

H. SCHOOL CLOSURE

Schools are expected to remain open in all but the most extreme circumstances. The decision to close a school is ultimately the responsibility of the headteacher or principal. Occasionally local and/or central government may also recommend this course of action (e.g. in the event of a public health incident).

The timing of a decision to close is important. It must balance the benefits of an early decision (avoiding unnecessary journeys and providing parents / carers with enough time to arrange childcare) against the drawbacks (finding that the situation is not as bad as initially feared). Headteachers are best able to judge the severity of the incident, but should always weigh safety considerations before arriving at a decision.

Central Bedfordshire Council School Closure Arrangements

It is important that key staff are familiar with the agreed procedures to conduct an unplanned school closure and, in particular, familiarisation with the SOS (School Open Status) system, including the checking of passwords and usernames.

It is vitally important that:

- The school's SOS administrator is able to access the [administration page of the SOS system](#). A link to the SOS administration section, together with a guidance document for school administrators can now be found on the CBC Schools' Portal in the [Emergency and Business Continuity Planning](#) section in the 'School Administration' section. If you are unsure of a username and password, please email sos@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk
- Contact details for staff and school (including email and website addresses) are correct and that former staff accounts are disabled.
- Key staff (i.e. those with delegated authority to change the school status to 'closed') are familiar with the routine needed for changing the school's status.
- Instructions regarding registering for alerts have been communicated to parents.

School Closure Procedures

Most schools will have a generic means of communicating information to parents in an emergency (Parentmail, telephone tree, website etc.) In addition, schools will register their decision to close via the SOS System. This will automatically alert local radio stations, parents (who have registered for alerts) and school transport providers of the disruption. However, in the event of an emergency or service disruption where a school's SOS administrators are unable to login to SOS (e.g. a power cut or loss of internet), schools will need to:

- Telephone radio stations (you will be asked for the current password)
- Notify school transport providers directly
- Notify Central Bedfordshire Council's Schools' Transport team

I. BUSINESS CONTINUITY

The aim of Business Continuity Management is to maximise the prospects of critical services being able to continue to be delivered during and after an incident. Section 2 of this guidance includes a number of Business Impact Analysis (BIA) templates; completion of these, together with the risk assessment forms, will greatly assist in the writing of a Business Continuity Plan.

Causes of business interruption commonly include:

- Loss of utility supply (e.g. water disruption; electricity failure)
- Loss of supplier
- Loss of premises (e.g. through fire or flood)
- Loss of personnel
- Loss of telecommunications

It is important to have Business Continuity arrangements in place. Even whilst responding to an emergency, schools should aim to maintain pupils' education and minimise disruption to timetables and examinations.

The loss of important paperwork, records and data can prove particularly damaging.

Paper-based records

Most schools have some essential paper-based records which could be destroyed in a fire or flood.

Staff should be encouraged to think about where they keep important resources (e.g. coursework), as loss of these can significantly harm pupils' morale. Measures could include:

- Storing essential documentation in a fire-proof safe
- Making copies of important documentation and storing these offsite
- Scanning important paper-based records and storing these electronically

It is sometimes possible to restore damaged records if prompt action is taken. Details of document salvage / restoration companies could be incorporated into your plan.

Schools should have a record of important equipment and items (e.g. asset register, equipment inventory) for calculating losses for insurance purposes. This, alongside details of any leased equipment on the premises, could also be included within this section.

Electronic records

Schools should have disaster-recovery arrangements for their technical systems. All data stored on the school network should be backed up remotely and copies of data stored offsite. This section could be used to record information on the technical systems on which your school relies, and on any back-up arrangements which have been established.

Remote learning

If closed for a significant period of time, schools will need to put remote learning measures in place to provide pupils with a reasonable level of teaching. A reliable and consistent method of distributing work to pupils should be established, and pupils will need advice on the arrangements for submitting work and receiving feedback from teachers.

Technical systems play a vital role in maintaining communication between staff and pupils. Nevertheless, it is important to consider how pupils without a computer and internet connection will be able to work from home. In most situations, remote learning arrangements are likely to consist of a combination of technical systems (e.g. virtual learning environments, extranets, websites, email) and sending hard copies of work via post.

Methods of supporting pupils should also be considered. An email address could be designated for pupils to use should they have any general queries, but regular opportunities to speak to an appropriately qualified member of staff (either in person or over the telephone) should also be provided.

J. POST - INCIDENT SUPPORT

The effects upon a school of a traumatic event, such as the serious injury or death of a pupil or staff member, can be profound and have significant long-term effects.

After an incident there will be a continuing need to support pupils, parents / carers and staff. It is important to ensure appropriate monitoring procedures are in place so any individuals who require assistance can be identified and supported. This could include those who:

- Were injured
- Were uninjured, but at great risk
- Witnessed the event
- Are related to those involved
- Are friends of those involved
- Blame themselves
- Are being blamed by others
- Are experiencing instability at home
- Have pre-existing behavioural difficulties
- Have previously suffered bereavement or loss
- Have witnessed a similar incident before

People involved in the incident, whether directly or indirectly, will be affected in different ways. This could include:

- Sleep disturbance
- Recurrent dreams
- Disturbing images and memories of the event

- Impairment of memory
- Feelings of guilt
- Feelings of detachment
- Difficulty in retaining concentration
- Diminished interest in significant activities (e.g. exams)
- Avoiding of activities which recall the event

Affected individuals may also experience renewed grief on the anniversary of the incident or on other significant dates.

Staff will play an important role in supporting pupils as they recover from an incident, but they should not be expected to perform a counselling role. If support is needed, further professional help should be arranged following discussion with, and the consent of, parents / carers. This will be a very sensitive matter and staff should seek advice from trained specialists if they are unsure how to proceed.

Assistance is also available from external counselling services (e.g. by calling CHUMS. On 01525 863924 or at www.chums.uk.com/)

Staff will need support if they are to be effective at caring for pupils, as dealing with crises can be an enormously stressful experience. The effect on staff should not be underestimated – in some cases, it may be more significant than the impact on pupils

5. TRAINING

School employees have many demands on their time, but it is important that staff and governors are aware of the Emergency Plan and their roles when responding to an incident. Training events provide an excellent opportunity for staff to become acquainted with emergency procedures and discuss any queries or concerns they may have.

The amount of training staff and governors require will vary. Members of the School Emergency Leadership Team (SELT) and their deputies will need to undergo more extensive training due to their specific responsibilities.

Although other members of staff may require less comprehensive training, all employees should have a general overview of the school's emergency procedures.

It can be useful to train both staff and governors together. This can foster a closer working relationship and identify co-ordination or communication issues which may have otherwise gone unnoticed.

Records should be kept of staff who have attended training events, both for audit purposes and to ensure their training is kept up to date. Including training within your existing staff training programme is a useful method of embedding emergency procedures within your school.

It is the responsibility of the main school to ensure that other providers such as pre-schools, who share the school campus are aware of the plan and how it affects them. You may wish to involve them in any training events that take place, or even tailor a specific event for them.

Types of training

Staff can be trained in a variety of ways. You may wish to:

- Provide staff with a demonstration of the equipment within the school grab bag(s)
- Deliver a tour of the school premises
- Provide a general overview of the procedures within the Emergency Plan
- Organise specific training for members of the SELT

Resources for delivering these events are available from the Emergency and Business Continuity Planning section of the Schools' Portal:

www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/schools-portal/school-administration/bcp.aspx

The following resources are available:

- MSE1 (Grab bag demonstration)
- MSE2 (Site tour)

- MSE 3 (General awareness training)
- MSE 4 (SELT training)

It is preferable for staff to have read the Emergency Plan and become accustomed to the procedures within it before attending these sessions.

Staff may also benefit from other types of training which would support their role in responding to an incident. Examples include:

- First aid training
- Media training
- Fire safety training
- Health and safety training

During training exercises, worst case scenarios need to be considered whereby key members of the SELT are unavailable. This will highlight any over reliance upon one or two key staff which could potentially lead to a single point of failure. For this reason it is recommended that staff are trained to assume each others roles in an emergency.

Delivery

Staff who developed the Emergency Plan are usually well placed to organise and deliver training. Other employees, particularly the site manager / caretaker and members of the SELT, may also be able to assist.

Although special events can be organised which focus solely on emergency planning issues, it may be more feasible to incorporate training within existing meetings.

It is recommended that training is provided annually as this will keep staff reminded of their responsibilities, offer opportunities to examine updated versions of the plan and ensure new staff are appropriately trained.

Involving pupils

It is important that pupils know what action to take if an emergency happens at school or on an educational visit. Becoming familiar with evacuation, shelter and lockdown drills will improve the likelihood of these procedures being implemented swiftly and effectively (which could prevent injury and even save lives).

There are many different ways to inform pupils about this subject. An assembly could be used to explain an emergency drill and outline the actions pupils would be required to take; this could then be followed up by an exercise of the drill. This theme could be continued over a period of time, with a different drill being discussed each term.

Alternatively, a class session could be used to focus on preparing for emergencies. The lesson plan could include:

- Risk assessment (e.g. asking pupils to consider the risks that could affect them at home, at school or on an educational visit)

- Emergency preparedness at home (e.g. asking pupils to consider what they could do to prepare for an emergency at home, such as preparing a grab bag or knowing how to isolate utility supplies)
- The role of pupils in the school Emergency Plan (e.g. emergency drills, communicating with parents / carers)

Elements of these tasks could be included in one teaching session or spread over several during a term.

Some of the issues outlined during training sessions (such as lockdown drills) are sensitive and may potentially upset pupils, especially in primary schools. Staff are well placed to assess what level of information should be provided to pupils or the reasoning behind implementing a lockdown. Parents / carers should also be informed when teaching is taking place on this subject, so they can prepare for any possible impact this may have on their children.

Raising awareness with parents / carers

Routinely informing parents / carers of your emergency procedures can reassure them that their school is prepared and able to look after their child. A public version of the school's Emergency Plan (which excludes sensitive information such as contact details) could also be uploaded onto the school website. It may be appropriate to include the following information:

- The reasoning behind contacting parents / carers
- The emergencies the school has prepared for
- The actions staff would take during an emergency (e.g. ensure the safety of pupils, co-operating with the Emergency Services)
- The arrangements in place for contacting parents / carers in the event of an emergency or school closure
- The action parents / carers should take if they are informed of an emergency at school or on an educational visit
- A reminder for parents / carers to inform the school of any changes to their contact details

6. EXERCISING

The purpose of an exercise is to validate procedures documented within an Emergency Plan. Although they cannot fully replicate the pressure of a real incident, exercises can help to reinforce training, give confidence to staff that they have the necessary knowledge and skills to respond to an emergency and increase the likelihood of procedures working in practice.

They are also particularly useful at highlighting areas of the response which may initially have been overlooked when developing the plan.

It is recommended that staff and pupils undergo training on relevant parts of the Emergency Plan before participating in an exercise. Staff should be aware of their roles and responsibilities and be reasonably confident in carrying them out.

There are different types of exercise that can be used to validate a plan, but the method you choose is likely to depend on the purpose of the exercise and the amount of time available.

Discussion-based exercises

Discussion-based exercises involve assembling staff together and asking them to consider how the school would respond to a particular scenario. Participants are provided the opportunity to talk about their roles and discuss what actions the school would take if an incident were to occur. Staff are required only to discuss, not implement, these actions.

Discussion-based exercises are often used to develop a greater awareness of the plan and are ideal for use during training events. They are simple to prepare and a variety of scenarios can be used to provide an indication of the different emergencies staff may experience.

Tabletop exercises

A tabletop exercise is based on simulating the response to an incident (although it doesn't literally have to take place around a tabletop). A tabletop exercise can be run in a single room or a series of rooms to simulate real divisions (e.g. different school sites).

Unlike a discussion-based exercise, each participant is expected to undertake a specific role and outline the actions they would take whilst a simulated, realistic scenario unfolds. It is not necessary for staff to physically implement the response but they are required to co-ordinate their actions with other staff.

Tabletop exercises are a particularly useful way to run an exercise for members of the School Emergency Leadership Team (SELT). They are relatively easy to run, but do require careful preparation. Due to the nature of this type of exercise, there are limits to the number of people who can be involved.

The following examples of tabletop exercises are available from the Emergency and Business Continuity Planning' section of the Schools' Portal:

<http://www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/schools-portal/school-administration/bcp.aspx>

- MSE 5 (Tabletop Exercise: Coach crash)
- MSE 6 (Tabletop Exercise: Severe weather)
- MSE 7 (Tabletop Exercise: Smoke plume)
- MSE 8 (Tabletop Exercise: Food poisoning)
- MSE 9 (Exercise Planning Document)

Live exercises

A live exercise involves physically acting out the response to a scenario. Although this may sound complicated, all schools are required to implement fire drills (which are a type of live exercise) on a

regular basis. It is also recommended that schools conduct regular lockdown drills to familiarise pupils and staff with the procedure.

More information in relation to live exercises can be found in the Business Continuity section of the [Schools' Portal](#).

7. REVIEWING

An Emergency Plan needs to be reviewed on a regular basis in order to remain effective. Contact details will need reviewing regularly; it is recommended that these are updated at least annually. Staff, governors, extended services, pupils and parents / carers should also be encouraged to notify the school whenever their contact details have changed.

Grab bags should also be audited annually and after any equipment has been used. This schedule may need to be brought forward in the event of:

- Lessons identified from a training event
- Lessons identified from an exercise
- Lessons identified from an emergency
- Changes to risk assessments
- Changes to key members of staff
- Changes to the school site

Debriefs

It is particularly important to identify lessons from an exercise or incident. The best method of doing this is by asking staff and governors to attend a debrief.

A debrief should aim to identify:

- Aspects of the response which worked particularly well
- Aspects of the response which could have been improved
- Improvements that should be made to the school Emergency Plan
- Additional training needs for staff

A debrief may take place immediately after an exercise (often referred to as a 'hot' debrief) or some time afterwards, when participants have had time to reflect on what happened.

Although it may not be appropriate to invite pupils and parents / carers to a debrief, you may wish to speak to these people beforehand to gain their views on the response and mention any issues in the debrief on their behalf.

It is important that information and suggestions for improvement are captured during a debrief or review. It might be appropriate to devise an action plan which includes any suggested

amendments that need to be made to the plan. Any actions, recommendations or lessons identified can be incorporated into an action plan.

Redistributing the plan

Ideally, staff and governors should be given a chance to consult on the plan before any new versions are distributed. A process of version control should also be instigated to ensure only the most up-to-date version of the plan is available.

One hard copy of the previous version should be archived and all others securely disposed of. Similarly, one electronic version should be archived and all others deleted (including those on encrypted memory sticks). Similar arrangements should also be put in place for public versions of the plan.

Appendices

APPENDIX 1 LOG-KEEPING GUIDELINES

In an emergency, events can occur very rapidly and it is vital to keep an accurate record of events.

All employees involved in the response to an emergency should maintain an incident log. Within this log, staff should record decisions made, actions taken, significant conversations and any other important information pertinent to the incident.

Any emergency affecting a school may afterwards become the subject of a detailed inquiry. It is therefore crucial that accurate written records are kept and that no piece of information related to the response is lost. Information related to the incident should be copied, retained and archived for future reference. Records of expenditure should also be kept.

When distributing the plan it is recommended that staff are provided with a log book. Staff should keep this alongside their copy of the plan to ensure it is readily available.

- Notes should be clear, intelligible and accurate
- Include factual information
- Use plain and concise language
- Keeps records of any expenditure
- Do not remove any pages
- Do not use correction fluid

	<i>Thursday, 19/05/2011</i>
<i>7.40pm</i>	<i>Received call from Jane Sutcliffe at the council. Report of a fire at school (although she's unsure which parts of the building are affected). Police and fire service are on-scene. Jane offered to send someone to the school to assist with the response - I gave her my mobile number and she'll let me know who will attend. I'll contact Philip Healy (caretaker) and we'll aim to arrive at school within half an hour.</i>
<i>7.50pm</i>	<i>Rang Philip. Number engaged.</i>
<i>7.55pm</i>	<i>Rang Philip. Told him about the situation and asked him to meet me at the school entrance as soon as possible. He'll be there for 8.15pm.</i>
<i>8.05pm</i>	<i>Received text message from Jane - someone from her team (Andrew Taylor) will meet us at the entrance in about 10 / 15 minutes. Mobile number for Andrew: 07802 388 07802 338 202.</i>
<i>8.20pm</i>	<i>Arrived at school, Philip and Andrew already there. Spoke to fire officer - one classroom ablaze, adjacent ones likely to be severely affected by smoke damage. Unsure of the cause but arson can't be ruled out at the moment. We'll have to close the school tomorrow. Also need to arrange a site visit in the morning (provisional time 8am).</i>
<i>8.40pm</i>	<i>Informed Anna Hughes (deputy headteacher) about the incident. Asked her to notify parents / carers that the school will be closed tomorrow. She'll arrange for other staff and governors to be told and put a notice on the school website. I'll contact the radio stations.</i>

Notes should be recorded in chronological order.

If you make a mistake don't try to overwrite the original text - cross it out with a single line and start again.

APPENDIX 2: DEALING WITH THE MEDIA

Any significant emergency is likely to attract media attention. The scale of the interest will depend on the incident and could vary from telephone enquiries from the local media to national and international television crews arriving at the school asking for interviews.

If handled successfully, media management can directly assist personnel involved in the response and enhance the reputation of the school. It may therefore be beneficial for a member of the Senior Emergency Leadership Team or a governor to undergo media training.

Other organisations, such as the Emergency Services or local authority, may be able to assist in responding to media requests and thus alleviate some of the pressure on school staff. All media statements should be approved by the school and those organisations involved in the response prior to release.

The following advice has been issued by the Department for Education:

The media, particularly local broadcasters, can often be the best method for getting accurate information or advice out to members of the local community. A brief interview with someone authoritative at the scene of an incident can be a powerful way of defusing rumour and panic, which may otherwise spread quickly.

However, to people not used to being interviewed; this can seem like very unwelcome pressure at a difficult time. Any member of the school community may be approached to give press interviews, including pupils. Journalists may want to get access to school premises or try to contact individuals at home.

Remember to include procedures on handling the media in the school's Emergency Plan and make sure all staff and governors are familiar with the guidance.

Points to note about media interviews:

- If possible, agree an interview format and establish what the interviewer wants to ask. Try to have another person with you to monitor the interview
- Be clear in your own mind what you want to say and talk it through with a colleague first if possible. You will also need to be prepared to think on your feet
- If possible, get statements checked by legal advisors and governors
- Remember, you could be quoted on anything you say to a journalist, even if it is not a formal part of the interview
- If you do not know the answer, say so
- Stick to the facts and do not be drawn into speculation
- Don't over-elaborate your answers
- Do express your sympathies and don't be afraid of showing a little emotion if appropriate; but try not to get angry, especially if it is for television
- Refuse requests for photographs or schoolwork of children or staff involved

- Do not allow journalists to wander around school premises unescorted

This advice should not be taken as an authoritative interpretation of the law. That is a matter for the courts.

For further guidance, please contact a member of the Central Bedfordshire Communications Team on 0300 300 8301

APPENDIX 3: USEFUL CONTACTS

Useful websites	
School website	
Central Beds: SOS	www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/webApps/SOS/Admin/Login.aspx
Department for Education	www.education.gov.uk
Foreign & Commonwealth Office	www.fco.gov.uk
Environment Agency	www.environment-agency.gov.uk
Met Office	www.metoffice.gov.uk
Health and Safety Executive	www.hse.gov.uk
Teacher Support Network	www.teachersupport.info

Contact us...

by telephone: 0300 300 4955

by email: pete.hardy@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk

on the web: www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk

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