

MEDIA INTERVIEWS

INFORMATION FOR STAFF

1. It can be difficult to manage media interviews especially when a school is dealing with a critical incident. A school should think carefully before agreeing to any interview(s). Advice should be sought from Communications Officers. It is important in advance of a media interview to ascertain the main focus of the message, for example, is it about providing public reassurance or is it about clarifying public misunderstanding.
2. Schools should have a 'one spokesperson' practice. The spokesperson should be well briefed on the details and expectations of the interviewer. Briefing should include the most likely questions that may be asked. Negative lines of questioning and difficult questions should be anticipated and appropriate responses prepared. If media deadlines cannot be met it is essential to say so and to keep to new deadlines if agreed.
3. Before making a media statement. The school's spokesperson should:
 - liaise with the Chair of the Board of Governors and/or relevant education and library board/Council for Catholic Maintained Schools Communications Officers in order to identify two or three key messages to be highlighted;
 - write these down before the interview and refine for accuracy, clarity, simplicity and impact;
 - keep spoken comments simple, factual and short so that key points such as what has been done so far, are not edited out;
 - be aware that interviews, if not live, may be edited and comments taken out of context;
 - take time to respond to questions and seek clarification if necessary;
 - be aware of legal issues, particularly the language/terminology used;
 - avoid making comments which imply blame or fault for any part of the incident, as there could be significant legal implications;
 - remember that official enquiries are likely to follow serious incidents. Media comments on the public record may have a bearing on such proceedings;
 - avoid 'off the record' comments at all times;
 - express concern and the school's grief, restricting answers to facts and accentuating the positive developments following the event.