



QUEEN VICTORIA PRIMARY SCHOOL

BEREAVEMENT POLICY

2023 – 2025

Policy Number:	School Policy - 49
Approved by:	LGB Meeting 22 nd November 2023
Next review due date:	November 2025

AIMS & ETHOS

This policy aims to outline the key principles and procedures that underpin our school's approach to supporting members of our school community affected by bereavement.

Sadly, bereavement affects everyone at some point and as a school we aim to support all who are experiencing it as best we can.

There will almost always be someone within the school community who is struggling with bereavement, or possibly there are times when the whole school is impacted by the loss of a member of staff or child.

Whatever the circumstance, we recognise that every bereavement is unique and that any guidelines we have will need to take into account individual circumstances and the wishes of those most involved.

Empathy and understanding may, in many cases, be all that those grieving require, here at Queen Vic, we aim to have staff who understand bereavement and can help individuals and their families during such a difficult time, to ensure that we as a school are doing all we can to support them. However, where the impact of their loss is more complex, more specialist support may be needed to be considered.

It is vital that children are helped to understand bereavement in an unambiguous way, and are allowed to experience the range of emotions that may accompany their loss, within a safe and secure environment. We also acknowledge that long-term support may also be required for those who are grieving and endeavour to offer this.

This policy aims to:

- Set out guidelines for how our school will sensitively respond to a death within our school community
- Set out a plan for communicating deaths in a timely and respectful manner that balances our school community interests and transparency with the wishes of the family of the deceased
- Identify best practices for supporting pupils and/or members of staff experiencing bereavement
- Define the roles and responsibilities of key staff members, the governing board and Academy Trust

ROLES & RESPONSIBILITY

In the event of the death of a pupil or member of staff, the Head Teacher will take ultimate responsibility, however they may delegate actions to key staff as appropriate, as the best person to liaise with the family may depend upon the specific situation or relationship with the family. The Head Teacher will be supported by the Deputy Head Teachers.

A member of the SLT will inform the Chair of Governors.

The remainder of the Leadership Team may take charge of the day-to-day running of the school and Deputy DSLs will assume responsibility for safeguarding.

The Headteacher, in liaison with the appropriate people, such as family, SLT and the Academy Trust will determine the best way to inform staff regarding the death of a pupil or colleague.

The nature of social media may mean that members of the school community hear the news of the death before others.

Where the death is that of the Head Teacher, the Deputy Heads would take overall charge, but would contact the Academy Trust. Where the death is that of a Deputy Head Teacher or a member of the Senior Leadership Team, the Head Teacher may contact the Academy Trust for support, as well as the Chair of Governors.

Sharing news of the death of a child or member of staff with staff, will be undertaken in a sensitive way. Depending on the situation, some members of staff may be notified individually upon arrival at school or together in a staff meeting. Any member of staff not present for the staff meeting will be told the news individually either via telephone or when they arrive to start work.

Staff will be asked not to 'spread' the word, and allow the designated person to inform people individually to ensure that a consistent and factual message is delivered to all.

Should the death of a child or member of staff occur during a holiday the Head Teacher will notify all members of the Leadership Team by telephone without delay and instruct each member of the Leadership Team to contact specific members of staff by telephone, reporting back to the Head Teacher when complete. It will be completed without delay to aim to ensure that the news is not heard via other means.

In the event of a sudden or traumatic death of a pupil, the school may be called upon to take part in a multi-agency review. The Head Teacher will be the school's representative and will attend, however this may be delegated as appropriate.

PROCEDURES

As a school, we realise that some families may want to share information with the school community while others may not. A simple confirmation of the death may be required until more details are available, and/or the family have been consulted. To best support staff and pupils during times of bereavement, it will be necessary to ascertain sensitive and potentially distressing information regarding the nature of an illness or cause of death. We will always ensure that any meetings with families are conducted in a comfortable, private space, in an unhurried manner. If this information must be shared, we will always be clear with parents beforehand about how we will respect confidentiality and share information sensitively, only where it is in the interests of the bereaved and the school community.

In the case of terminal illness, the school will liaise with the family to arrange for a member of staff to be the main point of contact throughout the illness. This member of staff will support the family regarding school procedures to support them during the illness and will help keep the pupil informed about events at school during any prolonged periods of absence. The same member of staff will also support the pupil during their time in school, and be available to the family before, during, and after the death. The Head Teacher will also co-ordinate a school representative to attend the funeral, and any memorials the family may wish the school to facilitate. The Head Teacher will also ensure that the staff member involved will be given support throughout this.

News of the death of a pupil or current member of staff may be given to pupils in different ways, depending on the situation and circumstances surrounding the death:

- In certain circumstances, parents may be notified first, by email or text, with the news being given to pupils the following day in an assembly at the start of the day. If the death is that of a child, the news may be given to that child's class first. Parents may be given the option of informing their child themselves
- It may be more appropriate for the Head Teacher and/or Class Teacher to deliver the news to each individual class

- Where the message is delivered by different members of staff, they will be provided with a script about what has happened so clear, consistent information is given to all of the pupils in an age-appropriate way. It is important to use words such as 'died.' Include where possible some answers to difficult questions that staff may be asked by the children, to prevent them needing to think of appropriate responses on the spot.
- Provide an opportunity for children to ask questions. Identify which class/classes are most likely to be impacted by the news and provide additional staff to support following breaking the news. Identify any pupils who may be particularly upset by the news and take them aside to provide additional support. Identify any pupils who may find it difficult to understand, such as children with Special Educational Needs, to check that they have understood

The following guidelines may help to inform children of the death of a teacher or other member of staff:

- Identify those children who had a long-term and/or close relationship with the deceased to be told together as a separate group. Where possible, inform all the pupils in the smallest group practicable
- Take into account of pupils with specific needs including: pupils with past history of loss; pupils with a learning disability and pupils who have difficulty managing their emotions or behaviour
- It is always a shock when a death occurs in a school even if it may have been anticipated. In the eyes of the pupils, teachers are part of the fittings and fixtures in school and are not expected to die. Children can expect to live forever, and so a fellow pupil dying whilst still young enough to attend school can also feel quite shocking. This can cause them to consider their own mortality.

Provide staff with guidelines on how to inform children. For example:

- "I've got some really sad news to tell you today that might upset you. I know most of you will have heard of cancer, and know that sometimes people with cancer get better, but other times people die from it. Mrs Jones has been ill with cancer for a long time. I have to tell you that Mrs Jones died yesterday in hospital"
- "Sometimes people have accidents at work, at home, at school or on the road. People may be hurt or injured in the accident and they may have to go to hospital for treatment. Sadly, there are some accidents that cause people to die. I have some really sad news to tell you that might upset you. Yesterday Stephen, who is in Year 4, was in an accident and he was so badly injured that he died".
- Refer to the person's name naturally, "Mrs Jones died from cancer."
- Children and young people will appreciate time to verbalise their feelings and fears.
- Allow space for "If only's..." to be acknowledged
- Discussion - allow pupils to share their own experiences of death, e.g. "When my pet/my gran died" etc...
- Be honest about your own feelings and experiences, and talk openly about the relationship that you had with the person

- Answer pupil's questions factually. Avoid using euphemisms like 'passed away', or 'lost' etc. Use the words 'dead', 'died' and 'death' to avoid confusion for children, e.g. to explain dead as 'it means their heart stopped beating, they stopped breathing and the brain doesn't send or receive messages anymore.' When Dinosaurs Die by Krasny Brown is useful to explain the concept of death to young children
- Be prepared for children to say or do the unexpected, experience has shown some responses or apparent lack of response may be upsetting for adults. No apparent response does not mean that a child does not care

In order to provide support to staff and pupils, Dudley Educational Psychology Service will be contacted by the Head Teacher at the earliest opportunity, in order to arrange for Educational Psychologists to support in school.

When delivering the news, a script will be used. This script will be prepared with the support of the Dudley EPS. The script will:

- Start by acknowledging you have sad news to give
- Be honest. Give the news stating simple facts, using the words dead/died
- Tell the story of what happened leading up to the death
- If known, and with the family's permission, explain briefly where and when the death occurred
- If not known, say so, and that you will endeavour to find out. If rumours are rife, say which of these are definitely not correct, if known. Where appropriate, remind pupils of their responsibilities and the impact when posting on social media. Talk briefly and positively about the person who died without eulogising them.
- Mention any arrangements already in place, including for those needing support. Acknowledge that not everyone will be feeling sad and that is okay. Consider that the news is likely to impact on particular classes significantly, whilst other classes may be relatively less impacted. Equally, some staff will be more significantly impacted relative to others (this may depend on their relationship to the deceased and also factors such as if they have had recent experience of bereavement themselves).
- Allow a break in the timetable for pupils to process the news and take a little time-out
- Be prepared for obvious upset and feelings of anger and /or guilt. If needed, explain that in no way to blame for what has happened. People may connect the incident to their own personal experience of bereavement, so feelings about past bereavements may need to be discussed. This is perfectly natural
- Parents will be informed by email or text
- Take account of pupils with specific needs including: pupils with past history of loss; pupils with a learning disability and pupils who have difficulty managing their emotions or behaviour.

If the death of the pupil or staff member attracts media attention, such as if the person died tragically, was murdered or through suicide, then the Head teacher, in liaison with the Academy Trust and possibly the police, would publish a news statement at an agreed time, as a way of dealing with media intrusion. Liaison with the bereaved family at this point is essential.

Further information can be found in the [Samaritans Step by Step Programme for Schools](https://www.samaritans.org/how-we-can-help/schools/step-step/) (<https://www.samaritans.org/how-we-can-help/schools/step-step/>)

THE FIRST FEW DAYS

Although school can provide stability and normality for staff and pupils, some flexibility may be necessary. This at the discretion of the Head Teacher.

Bereaved young people may need time to grieve and manage overwhelming feelings, so being able to leave a classroom and take time out in a safe space can be very welcome.

With the family's agreement, a temporary tribute/book of condolence can be kept in a safe and accessible location, ideally where pupils can be supervised. Individual pieces of paper could be sent home for families to complete their own tribute and return it to school. Arrangements for this will be organised based on specific factors around the death and person who has died. If appropriate, the family will be offered the opportunity to visit, if they wish to, or photographs may be taken to share with them later.

Temporary tributes may not be considered appropriate in a primary school, however, if a specific place is not provided it is likely that an unofficial area for tributes will be created. Temporary tributes will therefore be put in a specific place. The school will declare a timetable for the tapering of mourning. Family members of the bereaved, staff and pupils will be consulted before any temporary tribute is removed, giving notice to prepare them beforehand.

THE FUNERAL

In the event of the death of a person belonging to the wider school community it is usual practice that the Head Teacher will attend the funeral and on occasion, other members of staff who knew the person will also. However, in all circumstances, rather than making assumptions, families will always be consulted to find out whether members of staff and/or pupils are welcome to attend. The family's wishes regarding the funeral, will be taken into consideration, regarding, but not be limited to, the following:

- Are flowers welcome, or is it just family flowers?
- If flowers are welcome, can/will pupils be involved in choosing flowers?
- What is the dress code for the funeral?
- Do the family want the school to play a part in the funeral, for example the giving of a eulogy?

Arrangements will be made, dependent on the situation. This will include, but not be limited to the practicalities of issues such as staff cover to allow all those wishing to attend the funeral to do so. For some circumstances, it may be appropriate to close the school, for others, it may not. The bereaved family's view will always be considered.

SUPPORT FOR PUPILS

Dudley EPS will be contacted and asked to provide support for pupils as necessary. The school's Pastoral Lead Mrs Elwell is ELSA trained and is happy to support parents, staff or children with bereavement counselling.

REMEMBERING

The family of the person who died will be consulted about any plans for a memorial, assembly or other tribute.

Where requested by the family, staff or pupils, a more permanent memorial (a tree, a special garden, a piece of artwork, or a bench) may be appropriate, but the future removal, relocation or replacement will need to be managed sensitively. The memorial should include a plaque so that future members of staff understand the significance of the memorial.

SUPPORTING A BEREAVED PUPIL

RETURNING TO SCHOOL AFTER A BEREAVEMENT

Most grieving pupils do not need a 'bereavement expert', they need the support of familiar and trusted adults. School, with its familiar environment and routines, can be a place of comfort for a bereaved young person.

It can be helpful to meet with the pupil and their family/carers to establish what has happened and to discuss their return to school. This could be a familiar adult, such as the class teacher, Phase Leader, Pastoral Lead, Mental Health Lead SENCO, or SLT member

The purpose of this meeting should be to:

- Acknowledge the death.
- Find out how the pupil would like to share their news.
- Organise a safe space for the bereaved pupil to go if they feel overwhelmed by their grief and need a 'time-out'. How will they inform staff of this?
For example, a 'time-out' card, or a non-verbal signal or message. How will this be communicated to all staff?
- Consider, in liaison with the child's family, whether to provide 'time-out' activities, such as journals, art and craft, books, screen time, memory boxes etc.
- Set guidelines for communication - with the pupil, between members of staff and between home and school.
- Consider providing support for peers when they have a bereaved friend.

A short film is available on the Child Bereavement UK website:

<https://www.childbereavementuk.org/returning-to-school-after-someone-has-died>

LONGER TERM SUPPORT

It should be remembered that a pupil will continue to grieve for the rest of their life and may require ongoing support. Significant dates or anniversaries may be particularly difficult. Regular contact with the family/carers and reviews with the pupil will help to build up an overall picture of how the pupil is coping.

Pupil Progress

The grief may impact the pupil's progress. Some pupils work really hard and may put themselves under extra pressure to succeed, while others may find it difficult to focus in class and on their work. There may be changes in their behaviour. It is important to recognise this and consider how this will be managed. Any concerns should be raised as soon as possible with the SLT and/or Pastoral Lead.

Transition

Bereaved young people can find change difficult, so preparing them in advance (where possible) may help them to voice their worries and ease the process.

Each new class teacher or school, should be made aware of any bereavement issues during transition whether written within school or between schools. If the pupil is already vulnerable (SEND etc.) then transition should be discussed with all relevant parties well in advance, where possible, of any transitions.

Death, Grief and Bereavement in the Curriculum

Teaching the topic of death, grief and bereavement will help pupils to understand feelings of grief and prepare them for the future. Informing parents and carers in advance will help to gather information about previous bereavements so that vulnerable pupils can be prepared for the lesson. This will be part of the PSHE/RE curriculum.

Recently bereaved pupils may find it helpful if they are given the option to work elsewhere or step outside, if they think it would be too painful to attend. The Pastoral Lead, Mental Health Lead, SENCO and the School Nurse can be contacted to help pupils at this time.

See Elephant's Tea Party resources on the Child Bereavement UK's website.

SUPPORT FOR STAFF

Being alongside anyone experiencing a loss can be emotionally draining, and supporting a bereaved pupil particularly so. At certain points in time, some members of staff may be more vulnerable due to circumstances in their own lives.

School will consider how staff members can be supported and utilise other staff members to help share the load. Staff can be supported within school from staff such as SLT, the Mental Health Lead, Pastoral Lead, SENCO, Educational Psychologist and School Nurse. They can also be signposted to outside agency support including Dudley Counselling.

Staff should be:

- Provided with details of support agencies
- Provided with further information about training which can be found at <https://www.childbereavementuk.org> or by contacting Child Bereavement UK's Helpline on 0800 028 8840 or Live Chat on the website, available 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday.

The Head Teacher should, in the event of a bereavement, consider seeking support from another Head Teacher within the Academy Trust.

GDPR - Personal Data

This policy is collecting personal data and accordingly adheres to the principles of data protection law. Further information on the lawful basis of using personal data can be found in the school's privacy notices. The personal data obtained will also be managed in line with the school's data retention policy. For further information, please refer to the school's data protection policy.

APPENDIX: LETTER TEMPLATES

LETTER TO PARENTS OF DECEASED CHILD

Dear

We are so very sorry to hear the sad news of <Name's> death. There are no words to express our sadness and we can only begin to imagine the anguish you must be going through. As a school community, we will miss <Name> very much and we are doing our best to offer comfort and support to <his/her> friends, classmates and teachers. <Name> was a <valued/cherished/highly- regarded/well-liked/popular/friendly> member of our school family. If we can do anything to help as you plan <Name's> funeral, please let us know. We will continue to keep in touch and will support you in any way we can.

With sympathy

LETTER TO PARENTS/CARERS: DEATH OF A MEMBER OF STAFF

Dear Parents/Carers

I am sorry to inform you that a <well-respected/long-standing/well-loved/popular/wellknown> member of our staff, <Name>, died <suddenly/in hospital/after a short illness>.

The pupils were told today by their <class teacher/Phase Leader/in assembly> and many will be reacting to this news. When someone dies, young people may experience many different feelings, such as sadness or anger. Some pupils may feel shocked and upset by the news, while others may be confused or numb. These reactions are all normal.

We have tried to answer their questions in school, using age-appropriate and honest language. For more information about speaking to children and young people about death, visit the Child Bereavement UK website childbereavementuk.org

Our thoughts are with <Name's> family at this time. We will be in touch with details of how our school will celebrate/remember <Name's> life.

Yours sincerely
Head Teacher

TEMPLATE LETTER TO PARENTS AND CARERS - DEATH OF A PUPIL

Dear Parents and Carer

Your child's class teacher/form tutor/head teacher/head of year had the sad task of informing the pupils of the death of <Name>, a pupil in <Year>.

<Name> died suddenly/in hospital/after a short illness yesterday/last week/ over the weekend/during half term.

He/She was a <valued/cherished/highly-regarded/well-liked/popular/friendly> member of the class/school community and will be missed by everyone who knew him/her.

When someone dies, young people may experience many different feelings, such as sadness or anger. Some pupils may feel shocked and upset by the news, while others may be confused or numb. These reactions are all normal.

We have tried to answer their questions in school, using age-appropriate and honest language. For more information about speaking to children and young people about death, visit the Child Bereavement UK website childbereavementuk.org

Our thoughts are with <Name's> family and friends at this time. We will be in touch with details of how our school will celebrate/remember <Name's> life.

Yours sincerely

Head Teacher