

Hawridge & Cholesbury C of E School



Bereavement Policy

Our Vision is for every child within the Hawridge & Cholesbury family to grow, flourish 'have life and ... have it more abundantly' (John 10:10 KLV); to be fascinated, rounded, eager to make a difference, spiritual and have high aspirations through Jesus' teaching and our curriculum.

We live our vision through our natural setting and our school values:

Respect teamwork Responsibility Understanding Peace Honesty

Review Date: July 2029

Adopted by the governing body on 16th July 2026

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Aims and Ethos

Hawridge and Cholesbury C of E is a nurturing school that provides a safe and happy environment for our pupils. We believe in a strong partnership between the Church, local community and the school and our distinct church school status is at the heart of everything we do. Our core values of Respect, Teamwork, Responsibility, Understanding, Peace and Honesty are well established in our day to day practice and reflect the ethos of the school. These shared values make our school community a strong and supportive one where every member of our school is respected and valued as an individual. We pride ourselves on the high quality pastoral care and support we provide for our pupils and strive to provide a nurturing learning environment where all of our pupils can thrive.

Bereavement affects us all at some point and is a time when our support will be crucial to pupils, families and/or staff members. The Bereavement Policy sets out how we as a school will respond to bereavement in our school community and how we will provide support to those affected.

Rationale

In the event of a sudden or unexpected bereavement school staff may feel considerable anxiety about knowing how to best respond. This is understandable in a culture where death is seldom openly discussed. Every year 20,000 children under the age of 16 years will be bereaved of a parent and many more will experience the death of someone else special in their life. In addition to these individual pupils, schools may also experience the death of a child at the school or a staff member. It is almost inevitable therefore, that at some time all schools will have to deal with a death that affects the school community. As children spend a significant amount of their time at school, teachers and staff members will be the primary source of care and support. Bereaved children may see school as a safe haven away from the turmoil of emotions at home and may look to trusted staff members for help. *Consequences of childhood bereavement in the context of the British school system* (2019) stated that "Staff in schools are ideally suited to offer support at a time where bereaved families might not be able to, because family members are themselves in the throes of grief. Not only can such support help the child deal with grief, studies indicate that it can also help limit the social and educational issues that can arise as a consequence of the loss."

Death is something that most people choose not to think about so when faced with it we often find ourselves ill prepared. The purpose of the Bereavement Policy is to help everyone involved at a time when there may be shock, upset and confusion, ensuring that there is as little disruption as possible, effective communication takes place and each member of the school community is supported to help them through a very difficult time.

Objectives

The objectives of the Bereavement Policy are as follows:

- To provide a framework for all staff to give guidance in how to deal sensitively and compassionately with bereavement.
- To create a bereavement aware culture that will help to support pupils and/or members of staff before (where applicable), during and after bereavement.
- To enhance effective communication and clarify the pathway of support between members of staff, pupils, the family/carers and the community.
- To identify key staff within school who will play a vital role in responding to a bereavement in the school community and offering support to those affected.
- To outline clear expectations about the way we as a school will respond to a death and provide a nurturing, safe and supportive environment for all.

Roles and responsibilities

The role of the governing body

- To approve policy and ensure its implementation and regular reviews.
- To ensure there is a whole school approach to supporting emotional wellbeing.

The role of the Headteacher

- To have oversight of support required and provided, liaising with external agencies as appropriate.
- To be the first point of contact for the family/child concerned.
- To respond to media enquiries if required.
- To keep the governing body fully informed.
- To ensure staff are appropriately trained around bereavement and undertake actions set out in this policy (such as how to share sad news with pupils), including a deputy for the role of the Headteacher should the event mean the Head is unable to complete this role.

The role of the Local Authority (LA)

- To advise and support school staff as required
- To signpost to referral pathways and other means of support
- To provide information, guidance and support for all schools.

The role of staff

- To provide a safe and calm environment for all
- To act as a 'trusted adult' to support pupils and proactively enable them to have the time and space to talk
- To monitor the wellbeing of their pupils, identify concerns and escalate where additional support may be required

- To ensure any safeguarding concerns are shared with the Designated Safeguarding Lead.

Procedures following a bereavement in the school community

A death can affect the school community in different ways and depends on:

- The role that the deceased person had in school.
- How well known they were in the local community.
- Circumstances surrounding the death, particularly suicide, or other violent or sudden deaths.

The following procedures will be used after a bereavement:

- Wherever possible (and if deemed appropriate), the Headteacher will attempt contact with the bereaved family before taking **any** other action. This is to ensure any communications to the wider school community (and the media) are factual, avoid rumour or confusion and are aligned with the family's wishes. Where it has not been possible to establish contact with the family, and news of the death is already in the public arena, the Headteacher will need to manage this and will do so, taking advice from the Local Authority.
- A staff meeting will be arranged as soon as it is practicable. Absent staff will be identified.
- To enable absent staff to feel part of a caring team, arrangements should be made to inform them over the telephone if a personal visit is impractical. The relationship between the absent colleague and deceased will be taken into consideration.
- If a death has occurred in a holiday period, or at another time when staff are not at school, all staff will be informed via a virtual meeting, by phone or via email.
- A factual explanation of how the death occurred will be given.
- Good lines of communication with all relevant parties will be established; this will always include family and staff. In other cases it may also involve communication with emergency services, health services, the Educational Psychology service, Social Care, and other support services.
- For a death that may attract media coverage (e.g. if the member of staff was a well-known personality or died tragically), the Headteacher will provide a 'news statement' at an agreed time, following advice from the Local Authority, as a way of dealing with media intrusion. Liaison with the individual's family is essential, prior to reporting information to the media, in order to respect their privacy and wishes.
- The Headteacher and staff will agree how to share information with pupils in a supportive and age-appropriate way.
- The Headteacher will agree with staff members how information will be shared with the wider school community.
- The Headteacher will prepare a communication to all parents / carers to inform them of the death and provide advice about how to support their child, should they be affected. (An example letter can be found in the Appendix.)
- The Headteacher will adapt the school day and timetable if necessary to enable appropriate support to be provided. This support may be from school staff and / or from the Local Authority, Education Psychology Service or other appropriate agencies.
- The Headteacher will make arrangements in school for a book of condolence and / or an area where flowers may be placed.
- In consultation with the bereaved family, arrangements for funeral attendance will be clarified, with the consideration of full or partial school closure in some circumstances.

- Details of someone who can be available to talk things through with members of staff, parents or children will be provided to support them if they are finding the situation particularly hard. This person could advise the family of support services available if required.

Support for pupils

- The Headteacher and staff will monitor the wellbeing of all pupils identifying any concerns.
- Additional support for specific pupils will be put in place when needed. This may include 1:1 or small group sessions with a member of staff who they know well or with a trained therapist.
- The school will record any concerns about a child's wellbeing to ensure any future school is aware that additional support may be required.
- Class teachers will address questions from pupils honestly and sensitively as they arise. (If questions arise following the return to school of a child who has experienced the death of a loved one, then this must be done with careful consideration of the bereaved child at all times.)
- The class teacher and SENCOs may need to arrange small group sessions for the children who have supported a bereaved child to allow them to be able to speak openly about their thoughts, feelings and experiences. They are likely to need some support as supporting a friend who has suffered a bereavement can be difficult and emotionally challenging.

Support for staff

- Encourage everyone to consider how to meet their own support needs and take care of themselves, this may be from friends, family, support services and/or buddying up with other members of staff. Provide contact details for support in your local area.
- Be prepared for obvious upset and feelings of anger/guilt. 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.
- Ensure staff are aware who they can speak to if they are struggling emotionally. This may be the Headteacher or another member of the SLT.
- Arrange for staff to have access to a support/therapy service should they need this. This may be through the school Art Therapist or an employee counselling service.
- Provide staff with a script about what has happened so that consistent information is given to all of the pupils. 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.

Supporting a bereaved pupil on their return to school

The support that school can provide to a pupil who has experienced the death of a loved one is vital. It is essential that we as a school provide the right support to our pupils following the death of a loved one. This will not only apply to their initial return to school but for the remainder of their time at Hawridge and Cholesbury C of E School as well as when transitioning to a new school.

The following guidelines outline how we will provide support to bereaved pupils:

- Before the child returns to school the Headteacher will consult with the family about what they have shared with the child about the death. This will ensure that staff are aware of what the child knows and will not provide new additional facts or conflicting information should the child ask them difficult questions.
- Staff who have received some bereavement training (Mrs Woodward, SENCO and Mrs Davey, SENCO) will ensure supportive resources are prepared for the child, such as books and journals. They will work with the class teacher to discuss considerations and strategies to implement when the child returns. This may include having a signal such as a time out card to signal to the teacher that they need to take a few moments on their own. A designated space may also need to be arranged for the child to go to and may have soft furnishings, sensory toys, soft toys, paper and stationery, a music player with headphones etc as comfort for the child when they are experiencing overwhelming emotions. A memory box may be prepared in case the child wishes to bring things in from home to place in the box that remind them of their loved one.
- The SENCOs will arrange for somebody to provide 1:1 support sessions with the child every week. This may be a teacher or an LSA whom they are comfortable or with our school Art Therapist.
- As well as the class teacher, at least two other members of staff will be identified to provide support for the child as and when needed. This should ensure there is always a member of staff available to speak with them.
- The SENCOs, the class teacher and the other designated support staff will agree to talk about the death in the same way with the child. They will use factual language instead of 'passed away' or 'lost'. This is important to help children deal with their grief and understand the finality of their loved ones death.
- Further support will be accessed via Child Bereavement UK if it is felt that the child requires this to help them through the grief process.
- A Bereavement Fact File (see Appendix) will be produced through consultation with the family. This will include key dates and anniversaries to be remembered throughout the child's education such as birthdays of their loved one. This Fact File will be shared with all staff and be passed to each teacher as the child moves through the school. Key dates will be recorded on the online school calendar to ensure that staff remember and are prepared to offer support to the child. These Fact Files will also be passed to the child's new school should they leave or when they transfer to secondary school. Grief does not go away and it is important that everybody working with the child is aware of their background.
- Staff will be reminded to be aware of other key dates that may trigger memories and emotions for the child (for example Mother's Day, Father's Day, Christmas). This will be especially important when discussing these events in class and/or assemblies, making cards or preparing for class assemblies/church services. It is important that staff working with the child, especially the class teachers, are prepared in order to deal sensitively with these events and provide the appropriate support. Staff may choose to set a reminder about such events on the online calendar if they feel it is necessary.
- The class teacher will speak to the child when they return to school and ask them what they would like to do about discussing the death of their loved one with their class. It is essential that the child's wishes are followed. They may want their class to be spoken to without them in the room or to be in the room when they are welcomed back. They may feel they want to say something or they may not want to talk about it at all and for everything at school to just be 'normal'. It is vital that their wishes are respected.
- The class teacher will arrange for two or three of the child's close friends to be their 'buddy' who can support them day to day as well as in arranged group sessions where they could complete games, crafts or pieces of art together.

Death, grief and bereavement in the curriculum

Death is the 'elephant in the room', a taboo which nobody likes to talk about, particularly to children and young people. Teaching pupils about death and the emotions of grief helps to prepare them for the future. At some point in their life they will experience a bereavement, and it will be helpful if they have some understanding of what to expect.

As well as preparing pupils for a bereavement, this equips them with the tools to understand and support peers who are grieving.

Lessons on death, grief and bereavement fit with the new Ofsted framework and PSHE curriculum focus on wellbeing. Emotional literacy, empathy and resilience are all essential qualities which can be developed through the teaching of this topic.

At Hawridge and Cholesbury we will endeavour to teach children about death and grief in a sensitive manner through our PSHE lessons and through discussion of current topical issues. We will aim to discuss the topic of death openly and address it with confidence when it arises in the classroom.

Template of a letter informing parents of the death of a member of staff

On school headed paper:

Dear Parents,

Your child's class teacher has had the sad task of informing the children of the tragic death of **name** who has been a teacher/member of staff at this school for a number of years.

Our thoughts are with **name's** family at this time and in an effort to try to respond to **his/her** death in a positive way, all the children have been informed.

When someone dies it is normal for family and friends to experience many different feelings like sadness, anger, confusion and children are likely to ask questions about death that need to be answered honestly and factually in terms they will understand.

The children have been told that their teachers are willing to try and answer their questions at school but if there is anything else your child needs to know, please do not hesitate to ring the school office and we will be more than happy to help you.

Yours sincerely,

Headteacher

Template of a letter informing parents of the death of a pupil

Note: before sending a letter home to parents about the death of a pupil, permission must be gained from the child's parents. The contents and distribution list must be agreed by the parents and school.

On school headed paper

Dear Parents,

Your child's class teacher has had the sad task of informing the children of the death of **name** in year **x**.

Name died from an illness **called cancer**. As you may be aware many children who have **cancer** get better but sadly **name** had been ill a long time and died peacefully at home yesterday.

He/she was a popular member of the class and will be missed by everyone who knew **him/her**.

When someone dies it is normal for their friends and family to experience lots of different feelings like sadness, anger and confusion. The children have been told their teachers are willing to try and answer their questions at school but if there is anything more that you or your child needs to know, please do not hesitate to ring the school office and we would be more than happy to help you.

We will be arranging a memorial service/event in school in the next few months as a means of celebrating **name's** life.

Yours sincerely,

Headteacher

BEREAVEMENT – FACT FILE

Name	
Year group	
Relationship to person who died	
Communication with family (what are their wishes about how information is to be shared, returning to school)	
Communication with child/young person (what are their wishes)	
Cause of death (long term illness, short term illness, coronavirus, sudden death, accident, suicide)	
Religious beliefs of the family around death	

Circumstances: • What were the circumstances surrounding the death? • What was the cause of death? • Expected? Sudden? Violent? • Might the pupil worry that this could happen again to another family member, or to them? • To what extent was the pupil informed, included, involved? • What is the reaction of other family members to death?	
Personality & background: • How old is the pupil and what is their stage of development? • What do they understand of death? • What is the pupil's personality? • Has the pupil experienced a death or other losses before? • How does the pupil act and communicate within the family? • Are there any cultural or faith considerations? • What are their views of death? • Does the pupil share the beliefs of the adults in the family?	

Environment • What support does the pupil have available in their home and community? • What is the impact of this loss on the family unit? • How stable is family life after the death? • Does the pupil come from a complex family set up? • Is the child given an opportunity to express their feelings and memories? • How are feelings expressed by other family members? • Who is supporting the pupil? • Does the child have on going relationships with other significant adults?	
Secondary loss: In addition to the bereavement, there may be additional losses which can impact on grief Home life: Has the family structure changed? Is the child or young person lacking attention due to the grief of others in the family? Has the routine been disrupted meal times, sleep patterns, visitors to the house Will the child/young person have to move house?	

Finances: Will there be an impact on the financial position of the family due to loss of income, work capacity, reduced allowance? Will remaining parent have to go out to work when previously at home? Change of role in family: How they see themselves if he/she was a carer for the person who died? Change of position/responsibility in the family when a parent/sibling dies? Schools: Will there be changes to before and after school routines, possible change of school? Security: Pupils sense of security may wobble or feel different after a bereavement Friends: Feel isolated from friendship groups as their friends can't understand their experience Sensing that their friends don't have patience for their grief and move on when they haven't	
Any other relevant information	

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RETURNING TO SCHOOL – CHECKLIST

Have you met with the pupil to discuss their return to school and what support they may need?	
Who is their trusted adult in school who they can go to?	
How do they indicate to teaching staff that they need time out?	
Where can they go if they need time out?	
Have all teaching staff been notified of their time out strategy	
Lunchtime/breaktime – where can they go, who can support them?	
Key dates to note: Anniversary of death Relation's birthday Mother's Day/Father's Day Religious Parents evening	

Curriculum subjects to be aware of and how to manage those? (i.e. Fire of London)	
Transitions (note holidays, teachers leaving, moving year, moving school can all be triggers)	
What do they need to help them in school (transitional object from home, home/school journal, notebook between teacher/student, time out card)	
Month 1 (how are they feeling, how is their behaviour, how are their grades, how are their friendships)	
Month 2	
Month 3	
Month 4	
Month 5	

Month 6	
Month 7	
Month 8	
Month 9	
Month 10	
Month 11	
Month 12	
Month 15	
Month 18	
Month 21	

Month 24	
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NB – Grief never leaves a child or a young person and their responses can be delayed or change as their understanding of death changes. Therefore, it is important that the information above is handed on to teaching staff year on year and schools as they move on.