



## **Bereavement Policy October 2024**

**To be revised October 2025**

**Alison Oliver**

## **Policy Statement**

Walbottle Primary School is fully committed to supporting all those affected by loss and death in a supportive and caring environment in which everyone can respond appropriately to individual circumstances. We believe that the key to being a great school is to ensure that all children have access to a happy, challenging and a safe learning environment. Our school is fully committed to the emotional health and well-being of our children and staff. We are dedicated to the continual development of a healthy and thriving school community and strive to work towards this in all aspects of school life. We are passionate about providing an ethos, environment and curriculum that can provide support during difficult times, including a time of death or dying.

This policy outlines practical measures to be taken when people are in shock, or upset, especially with sudden or multiple deaths or traumatic circumstances -

## **The Role of the LAB**

- To approve the policy and ensure it is implemented.
- To review the policy every year.
- To support the Head Teacher in overseeing the way in which the bereavement is tackled in the curriculum.

## **The Role of the Head Teacher**

- To monitor progress and liaise with external agencies.
- To respond to media enquiries.
- To be the first point of contact for the family/child concerned.
- To keep the LAB fully informed.

## **Procedures to be followed in the event of a death within the school community.**

1. Contact with the deceased's family should be established by the Head Teacher or a member of the SLT and their wishes respected in communicating with others.
2. Factual information is essential to avoid rumour and confusion, whilst being sensitive to any cultural and religious considerations.
3. Staff should be informed before pupils and be prepared to share information in age-appropriate ways, as agreed for each individual circumstance.
4. Pupils who are affected should be informed, preferably in small groups, by someone known to them.
5. A letter to all school families affected should be composed at the earliest opportunity and a decision made as to whom, and how, it should be distributed.
6. The school should be aware that the school timetable may need a degree of flexibility to accommodate the needs and wellbeing of children affected by the situation. However, minimal disruption to the timetable also offers a sense of security and familiarity.
7. Staff affected by the death will be offered on-going support as appropriate.
8. In consultation with the bereaved family, arrangements for funeral attendance may be clarified, with the consideration of full or partial school closure in some circumstances.
9. Where necessary, a press statement should be prepared by the Head Teacher.
10. School should be aware that the impact of bereavement follows a child throughout their school life so information should be recorded and shared with relevant people, particularly at transition points.

## **Staff Support**

It is important that all staff feel confident in delivering support for pupils and mutual support for each other and implementing this policy. Bereavement awareness training will be provided for a selection of staff.

## **Breaking News to Staff, Pupils and Families**

- This is usually done when a pupil or staff member has died. Publicly talking about a single pupil who has experienced a death of a parent or family member may not be the best thing to do.
- Speak to the family if possible, offer them condolences and support before ascertaining what they would like to happen. Give them a direct telephone number for someone they can contact in school.
- Obtaining factual information should be made a priority.
- It is essential that **all** staff are informed straight away, ideally before pupils.
- Decisions need to be made about where pupils will be told, if this is necessary. Identify the most vulnerable pupils and what support they might need.
- Pupils should be told as soon as possible. This is best done in familiar groups by someone they know. A large school assembly is usually not ideal.
- Staff may need guidance on words to use and the approach to take.
- If necessary, send a letter to families on the same day, if possible. A prepared script is attached (See Appendix 1-3) as it is difficult to find the right words when emotional and in shock.
- Map out the first few days after an incident. It is usually best to have minimum disruption to the timetable, but some flexibility may be required.
- Consider what the school approach will be if pupils or staff are too upset to attend lessons.
- If it is a teacher who has died, what will happen to his/her class?

## **Return to School**

- Consider a home visit, meeting in school, prior to the pupil returning to school.
- Ensure that the appropriate staff are aware and prepared.
- Inform their peers and prepare them on how to support the pupil.
- Plan a quiet place where the pupil can go if necessary, alone or with a companion.

## **Funeral**

- Establish whether the family would welcome involvement of members of the school community or if they wish to keep it private.
- Identify which members of staff and/or pupils may want to attend and the practicalities of issues such as staff cover and transport. It may be necessary to close the school.
- Decide whether to send flowers and/or make a collection.
- Cultural and religious implications need to be considered.
- If necessary, talk to the child regarding expectations of the funeral.

## **Support for the Bereaved Pupil**

- Not all children will need the support of specialist practitioners; they will need support from familiar people who care.
- Keep a routine, providing a sense of normality.
- Offer a safe place, away from an emotional intense atmosphere.

- Neutral space and people to share their feelings without the worry of upsetting a loved one (i.e. a surviving parent).
- Time to be themselves without feeling guilty (being with friends, time to play in a safe space outside the home environment).
- Regular correspondence with home, providing assurance about behaviours and general wellbeing, will ensure the child is managing grief.
- Access to appropriate resources re Bereavement.
- An individual link person to support the pupil/s when necessary.
- A suitable place in school for pupils who need some space if too upset to stay in the classroom and people to whom they can go for support.

### **Monitoring/Supporting Pupils**

- Support may need to be offered to other vulnerable pupils.
- The anti-bullying message needs to be reiterated and monitored closely.
- Therapeutic books could be used to assist with counselling.

### **Monitoring/Supporting Staff Members**

- Supporting bereaved pupils will be very stressful for staff who may already be struggling with their own reactions and emotions. Useful websites are  
[www.childbereavement.org.uk](http://www.childbereavement.org.uk)  
[www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk](http://www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk)  
[www.winstonwish.org.uk](http://www.winstonwish.org.uk)

Give staff time to attend the funeral if appropriate.

- Awareness of available resources and time to become familiar with what is available.

### **Support for Parents**

- Communicate with the family straight away and offer support.
- Send a letter of condolence from the school.
- Depending on the wishes of the family, give out information to appropriate people.
- Give the parents and/or family the opportunity to collect any personal belongings of the person who died.
- Send a representative to the funeral.
- Hold a collection or send flowers, as appropriate.
- Invite parents/family to any commemorative events held by the school, both at the time and in subsequent years.
- If memorial work has been completed, for example a remembrance book, this should be returned to the parents at an appropriate time and the pupils informed where it has gone.

## **Appendix 1 –**

### **Template letter to parents**

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

### **Sample letter on death of a pupil: -**

Dear Parent/Carer

Your child's class teacher had the sad task of informing the children of the death of xxx, a pupil who has sadly died from an illness called xxxxxx.

As you may be aware, many children who have xxxxx get better but sadly xxxxxxxx had been ill for a long time and died peacefully at home yesterday.

He/she was a very popular member of the class and will be missed by everyone who knew him/her. When someone dies it is normal for their friends to experience lots of different feelings like sadness, anger and confusion. The children have been told that their teachers are willing to try to 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.

Yours sincerely,

Mrs Alison Oliver  
Head Teacher

**Appendix 2 –  
Template letter to bereaved parents**

***Sample letter to bereaved parents:-***

Dear

We are so very sorry to hear of xxxxx's death. There are no words to express the sadness of losing a child and we can only begin to imagine the anguish you must be going through. The school community at Walbottle Village Primary will miss him/her very much and we are doing our best to offer comfort and support to his/her friends and classmates. He/she was a very much part of the school family community and will be greatly missed.

If there is anything that we can do to help with xxxxxxxx's funeral service please do let us know.

Please be assured that you are in our thoughts at this very sad time and please do not hesitate to contact us if we can be of support in any way.

With sympathy

Yours sincerely

Mrs Oliver  
Head Teacher

**Appendix 3 –  
Template letter to parents**

Before sending a letter home to parents about the death of a member of staff, permission must be gained from the deceased's family.

***Sample letter on death of a staff member: -***

Dear Parent/Carer,

I am very sorry to have to inform you that a much-loved member of staff has sadly died. The children were told today, and many have been quite distressed to hear the news. No-one wants to see the children sad, but we are very aware that factual information and emotional support are the best means of helping children deal with bereavement. I am sure that there will be many parents who are also saddened by the news. Children respond in different ways to bereavement, and may dip in and out of sadness, denial and anger and may wish to ask questions, this is normal and healthy. You may find that your child has questions to ask which we will answer in an age-appropriate way in school, but if you feel you would like more support and advice yourself, please do not hesitate to contact the school office. You may also find some very useful advice and resources online at [www.childbereavement.org.uk](http://www.childbereavement.org.uk).

We will share details of the funeral as soon as they are known. Children who wish to attend will be welcome to do so. It is likely that the school will be closed on the morning or afternoon of the funeral as staff will, naturally, wish to pay their respects to a very popular colleague. I am sorry to be the bearer of this sad news, and I appreciate an occurrence like this impacts on the whole school community.

I am so very grateful for the thriving partnership we have with parents and trust that we, together, will be able to guide and support the children through what may be, for many, a very new experience in their lives.

Yours sincerely

Mrs Oliver  
Head Teacher