Diocese of Chelmsford
Vine Schools Trust

Bereavement Policy

This is a mandatory policy for all Vine Schools and must be implemented with no amendments

Policy Reference:	SO14
Approved by Vine Schools Trust on:	Spring 2024
Adopted by this school on:	Spring 2024
Next review:	Spring 2025

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1. Introduction

"Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted"
Matthew 5:4

A school / academy which takes time to formalise a response before a critical incident or tragedy occurs, will be much better placed to cope should it ever have to be put into practice. However, every school / academy is different and every situation unique. What is deemed appropriate will vary. This policy should be viewed as a framework to work around rather than something prescriptive.

We believe that all people are made in the image of God and unconditionally loved. Our school is a place where we love one another as God loves us. We want everyone to thrive, irrespective of whatever life faces them with. Therefore, we aim to prepare and support pupils and staff to cope with the stresses of life and respond to needs as they arise enabling pupils and staff to flourish. (See the Church of England's Vision for Education, Deeply Christian, Serving the Common Good – Autumn 2016)

2. School background

We are a (small / large) (infant/ junior/ primary/ secondary) Church of England school / academy serving our local community. Our Christian vision shapes all that we do. (add vision)

We are an openly inclusive school, welcoming all children from the whole community to a caring and happy environment where they can achieve to the very best of their abilities. We emphasise the development of the whole-learner physically, intellectually, emotionally spiritually and ethically.

3. Rationale

Every 22 minutes in the UK a parent of dependent children dies, leaving about 41,000 bereaved children each year. Many more are bereaved of a grandparent, sibling, friend or other significant person, and, sadly, around 12,000 children die in the UK each year.

Within our school community there will almost always be some recently bereaved children who are struggling with their own situation –or sometimes the entire school community is impacted by the death of a member of staff or a pupil.

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We would hope to not encounter such circumstances, but the statistical inevitability of such an occurrence implies the necessity of having a Bereavement Policy in place in order that we might be proactive, rather than reactive, when responding to these sensitive situations. Empathic understanding in the familiar and secure surroundings of school may be all the bereavement support some children, families or staff require, though referral to more specialist support is always taken into consideration where the impact of grief is more complex.

4. Objectives

We will encourage a consistent, yet flexible approach based on a belief in the wellbeing of the 'whole child'. We aim to reflect our Christian vision, including a belief in life after death, whilst being sensitive to various other beliefs and practices. This policy provides a framework within which all staff, can work; and give guidance on how to deal sensitively and compassionately in very difficult and upsetting circumstances.

The core intentions of the policy are:

- To support pupils and/or staff before (where applicable), during, and after bereavement.
- To enhance effective communication and clarify the pathway of support between school, family and community.
- To identify key staff within school, the Diocese and Local Authority, and to clarify the pathway of support.

5. Role of the Governing Board & Headteacher

The Governing Board:

- To approve the policy and ensure its implementation, to be reviewed in three years.
- To encourage identified staff to engage with Diocesan training on bereavement issues and consider arranging bespoke training for school staff.

The Head Teacher

- To have bereavement support training and cascade learning to other staff.
- To refer to other relevant policies such as the school's Critical Incidents Policy, Mental Health and Well-Being Policy and /or the Church of England's Mental Health and Wellbeing: Towards a Whole School Approach as required.
- To contact and liaise with the school's incumbent or representative of the Parish Church.

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- To monitor situations and liaise with external agencies, if appropriate.

To respond to media enquiries after speaking with Tom Geldard Communications and Media Director at the Diocese of Chelmsford.

- To be the first point of contact or nominate someone to be the first point of contact for the family/child.
- To keep the governing body fully informed.
- To advise and support staff. Consider referral pathways and identification of complex grief, i.e. Diocese of Chelmsford School Adviser for Bereavement, spiritual advisors, school counsellors or mentors.
- If a pupil dies by suicide, ensure that staff know that the Samaritans provide a step-by step programme to support schools. Step by Step resources | Samaritans

6. Procedures

1. Contact with the deceased's family should be established by the Headteacher or nominated
   person and their wishes respected in communicating with others.
2. All staff should be informed including part-time, sports coaches and peripatetic staff before pupils and be prepared (through prior training) to share information in age-appropriate ways, as agreed for each individual circumstance.
3. Pupils who are affected should be informed, preferably in small groups, by someone known to them.
4. After speaking with the bereaved family, 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.
5. Staff affected by the death will be offered ongoing support as appropriate. The school's Critical
   Incident Policy to be used – as appropriate.
6. 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. The Headteacher will inform all relevant parties (Governing Body, Local Authority and Diocese) of any closure.
7. Where necessary a press statement should be prepared by the Headteacher – after speaking with the Communications and Media Director at the Diocese of Chelmsford.

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7. Points to note

Factual information is essential so people do not make assumptions, avoiding rumour and any confusion, whilst being sensitive to cultural and religious considerations.

All staff should be made 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.

The 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. This is particularly important on the age of the pupils affected by the bereavement and on transition from one school to another of the bereaved pupil/s.

8. Additional resources

Additional information and resources can be accessed at:

- Bereavement and loss resources | Chelmsford Diocesan Board of Education (cdbe.org.uk)
- 'Never the Same' - Resources for school leaders | The Church of England

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Appendix 1: Suggested templates for letters

Before sending a letter home to parents about the death of a pupil, permission must be gained from the bereaved parents.

Sample letter on death of a pupil:

Dear Parents and Guardians,

Your child's class teacher/form tutor had the sad task of informing the children of the death of
<Name>, a pupil in <Year>. <Name> died from … (insert something like – an illness called cancer). As you may be aware, many children who have cancer get better but sadly <Name> had been ill for a long time and died peacefully at home / hospital 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 and family to experience lots of different feelings like sadness, anger and confusion. The children have been told that their teachers and teaching assistants
/ Learning Support Assistants 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.

We will be arranging a memorial service in the school in the next few months as a means of celebrating
<Name's> life.

Yours sincerely

<Name> Headteacher

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Sample letter to bereaved parents:

Dear <Name>

We are so very sorry to hear of <Name'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. Clearly, as a school community, we will miss her/him very much and we are doing our best to offer comfort and support to her/ his friends and classmates. She/He was a much-loved member of our school family.

If we can do anything to help as you plan <Name's> funeral service or other memorial opportunities, please let us know. In time, we will also ensure that anything of <Name's> that remains in school is returned to you, including photographs we may have on the school system.

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

With our greatest sympathy,

<Name> Headteacher

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Sample letter on death of a staff member:

Dear Parents & Carers,

I am very sorry to have to tell you that a much-loved member of our school community <Name> has died. The children were told today and many will have been quite distressed at the news. No-one wants to see 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 there will be many parents who are also saddened by the news.

Children respond in different ways so may dip in and out of sadness, and may have many questions, whilst alternately playing or participating in their usual activities. This is normal and healthy behaviour. You may find 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 and www.winstonswish.org

We will share details of the funeral as soon as they are known. Children who wish to attend will be welcome to do so, though it will not be compulsory. It is likely that school will be closed on the morning/afternoon/day of the funeral as staff will, of course, wish to pay their respects to a dearly loved colleague.

Yours sincerely

<Name> Headteacher

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