

St Antony's Catholic Primary School



BEREAVEMENT POLICY

Learning Together In God's Love

Agreed by staff: March 2024

Agreed by Governors: March 2024

Review date: September 2026

St Antony's Catholic Primary School Bereavement Policy and Procedure



OUR MISSION STATEMENT :

At St. Antony's Catholic Primary School We Celebrate Our Special Talents as Children of God Therefore:

- We try to be like Jesus and always keep him in our hearts.
- We work together in our homes, school and parish to share our gifts and learn together.
- We understand that we are all different and we respect each other.
- We look after our world so that we may share it together in peace.

Our Vision : St. Antony's Catholic Primary School



Our vision at St Antony's has Christ central to all we do to inspire us. We see our school as an agent of change which engages all stakeholders: Governors, Teachers, Parents, Children, Church and Community; while inspiring all our children from Nursery to Year 6 (the next generation of our society and the future of our community) to work collaboratively with all relevant agencies to aspire to achieve their fullest potential. Our school will function as a centre of excellence and an axis of transformation and development within our community by enabling all under our care to aspire to achieve self-actualisation through: sound Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural formation while embedding effective behaviour for learning, solid personal and shared philosophies with a positive, progressive and professional approach to life and living while upholding our Christian and British Values- leading to the achievement of the highest academic, socio-economic and sustainable life goals.

Our School's Bereavement Policy Is Heavily Inspired by the words of Pope Francis and Our School's Mission and Vision Statements:

"All life has inestimable value -even the weakest and most vulnerable, the sick, the old, the unborn and the poor, are masterpieces of God's creation, made in his own image, destined to live forever, and deserving of the utmost reverence and respect." Pope Francis

St Antony's Catholic Primary will support all pupils, staff and parents as much as is practicable with coping with loss and bereavement via our Pastoral Care Team inclusive of the assistance of the Brothers of St John at St Antony's Catholic Church.

Context:

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 the vast majority of their time at school, teachers and staff members will be the primary source of care and support. Bereaved children will see school as a safe haven away from the turmoil of emotions at home and will look to trusted staff members for help.

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.

Rationale

The Governing Body believes that bereavement and loss are an inevitable part of learning and growing. No matter how prepared we think we are, death is often traumatic and unexpected. Its unpredictability can severely unbalance a school whose normal working environment is one based on routine.

Policy

The Governors feel strongly about the way death is handled and discussed in school and as such believe that the school should endeavour to provide:

- An environment that is sensitive and compassionate to the needs of those wishing to grieve, whatever their cultural or religious beliefs.
- A commitment to an education about death and the associated rituals and traditions of mourning.
- Opportunities for discussion that help lessen the stigma attached to death, reducing its status as a taboo subject.

Guidelines

1. The school will respond in a planned and agreed manner, so that all staff know what is expected and can contribute their part in a way that is consistent with the ethos of the school.
2. The Head Teacher will co-ordinate the school's response and be vital in creating an appropriate atmosphere. He will be the first point of contact and will liaise with all parties concerned and affected. He will allocate a specific person (usually the young person's Head of Phase) to support the bereaved. This person would, in the later stages of bereavement, offer support and check on the progress of any students involved.
3. In addition, a small group of staff will be identified to keep in touch with the family so contact from the family's point of view is manageable but also does not come to an abrupt end after all the initial attention. This group would probably consist of the student's Head of Phase or their representative, the student's form tutor, and or a member of staff particularly close to the student.
4. The Head Teacher or her representative will inform all staff.
5. Students and parents or carers will be informed at the same time and as promptly as circumstances will allow. Students in school will be informed face to face, parents or carers by letter on the same day. Absentees from school will be noted to ensure that they are also informed on their return by their form tutor. Staff who are absent will be informed by their line manager.
6. In living in a multi-ethnic and multi-faith society it is necessary to be aware of the differing cultural and religious traditions of grieving and mourning. The school should ensure that they do not deny young people the opportunity to grieve and mourn within the traditions of their own culture and religious beliefs.
7. The Head Teacher will liaise with the media and possibly the police.

8. Managing the First Day

- Upon hearing news of a death, members of staff should contact the Head Teacher.
- If a parent, relative or close friend of a student has died, the Head Teacher will decide (after speaking to the student's next-of-kin) who should approach the student.
- A parent or relative coming into school to break the news, possibly with support from a member of staff, would normally be the best and usual approach.

- If no parents, relatives or carers are able to attend, the Head Teacher will need to decide who is best suited/qualified to deal with the situation.
- The Head Teacher, supported by the Senior Leadership Team and the student's Head of Phase, should gather all details surrounding any death.
- It is vital to have all the facts. If the death/s have been particularly traumatic the media may be involved. It is essential that correct information is disseminated to all staff.

9. Multiple Deaths, Death in School

- In the event of multiple deaths, additional support and resources will probably be required. The senior leadership team should meet to agree a planned course of action.
- It is likely that there will be considerable (if unwanted) media interest. The Head Teacher will decide what information should be released. Clearly information that might upset, confuse or exacerbate the situation should be withheld.
- It is important that one individual, pre-selected and briefed by the team, acts as spokesperson, relaying consistent information. Another consideration might be the setting up and running of an emergency school hotline.
- It may be necessary to retrieve the personal belongings of the deceased for their return to the next-of-kin. Information on the school's database, including references and addresses will probably need to be amended and updated. This also applies to notice boards etc. The school may decide to write to parents to allow them to explain to their children the meaning and implications of an event.

Funerals, Memorial Services/Student Participation

- Before the bereaved student or member of staff returns to school there is likely to be a funeral. It is probable that students and staff will express a wish to attend, or take part in the service, but they should only do so with the agreement of the deceased's family or relatives' prior agreement, as well as the agreement of their own parents/carers. The Head Teacher, or his representatives, should be the only person representing the school and in contact with the family/relatives, will need to discuss funeral arrangements.
- If the bereaved family wish students and staff to attend, the team should be available to offer support before and after the service. If they do not wish the school to attend, their wishes should be respected and the school should consider arranging an alternative.
- Planning a memorial service, reading lessons, poems, or choosing hymns may all assist in the grieving process.
- The form most affected might like to write down their thoughts and feelings; these may be given to the bereaved family. It should be the role of the Head of Phase to ensure that no inappropriate remarks or comments are made. After either service, staff and students should be encouraged to meet and express their thoughts and feelings. Refreshments would normally be provided. Such services are important in initiating the mourning process.

Death of a Member of Staff

- When such an event occurs it is usually extremely traumatic, especially for members of staff forced to deal with their own grief as well as comforting students. Planning how a school manages such an event is important. To avoid rumours it is advisable that the news is broken as soon as possible. A gathering together of staff to allow them to grieve in private before announcing the news to the rest of the school is something that should be considered.
- Generally such news is broken in assembly, in a space where everyone maybe told simultaneously. Later in class students should be allowed the opportunity to express their grief individually with the support of the form tutor. Some students may have already experienced death and their way of coping with such events is sometimes observed in emotional outbursts. Some may express feelings of anger, panic or relief. It is important to try to remember that this is a time when everyone is hurting.
- For a community as close knit as a school, a memorial service in keeping with the ethos and ethnic beliefs of the school is normally a good idea. The coming together of the whole school collectively for one purpose helps each individual come to terms with his/her own grief in a shared experience – ie helping to initiate the grieving process. Such services also offer the opportunity for those who may have been unable to attend the funeral to express themselves through drama, poems and letters.
- It is at times like these when members of the staff often feel insecure of their own abilities, finding it difficult to cope. Without encroaching on their privacy staff might keep an eye on those teachers particularly affected by the death of a close colleague.

12. Death of a Student

- The death of a fellow student is probably the most demanding situation a young person might be forced to face whilst in school. Comprehending and coming to terms with such an event is going to be equally difficult and will require great emotional support from the school staff.
- If faced with a sudden death the Head Teacher should contact the deceased parents/carers/next of kin as soon as possible thus enabling compliance with any of their wishes. The immediate class friends and siblings of the deceased should be gathered and the news, if not already known, be broken before an announcement is made to the rest of the school, thus allowing private grief. To avoid rumours an announcement should be made to the whole of the school as soon as practically possible. Additional support from fellow teaching colleagues may well be required as well as the assistance of the school's bereavement counsellors.
- In event of a young person becoming terminally ill their wishes and those of their parents or carers should always be respected. Should the young person wish to attend school year staff may need to inform students of the young person's condition. Occasionally the student may wish to talk to their fellow classmates about their predicament themselves. Honesty about death and dying we feel is the best line of approach.

13. Supporting the Family

- Parents and carers often feel that teachers are experts on their children. They may invariably therefore turn to the school for advice and information, especially on matters of bereavement. It is important to remember that the family, friends and the immediate community often best support those suffering from bereavement, as is the case with other stressful life events. The following are some points that may be helpful to bear in mind when talking to parents and carers:
- A death in the family will disrupt the family for many months; in fact the family will never be the same again. Family members are grieving, relationships alter, and members may take on new roles. Sometimes there is a change of carer, house or school, all of which add to the disruption and distress experienced by the young person. To support the young person it is helpful to minimise, if possible, changes and disruptions in their normal daily routine and life in school.
- The bereaved family members may emotionally and physically withdraw from the young person, to protect themselves from more distress. Some adults will deny the bereaved person is grieving, as it will be distressing for them to acknowledge the young person's pain. This may cause distress and confusion, causing grief reactions of anger, withdrawal or psychosomatic behaviours such as, headaches, stomach ache or sickness.
- The bereaved young person may regress in behaviour, becoming clingy, difficult or withdrawn. His/her schoolwork may suffer. These changes will be partly due to grief but also to the disruption and changes within the family, causing the young person to feel confused and unsafe. Even the simple withdrawal of attention from the young person can lead to problems; the young person may feel resentment, jealous or guilt towards the dead person. The expression of this verbally can cause the remaining family members distress and shock. Parents and carers need to know this is normal and will decrease as the young person and the family become more stable and settled.
- Parents and carers need to be informed of the benefits that a young person gains in being involved in the ceremonies and rituals that follow the death. An explanation as to how mourning practices help young people to express their feelings and come to terms with and accept the reality of their loss can be very beneficial.
- Finally, teachers need to remember that parents and carers will often use them as role models, counsellors or extended family; looking to them for support for themselves as well as finding appropriate ways of supporting and talking with their children. Teachers therefore may require their own support structures, so they too can turn to others for emotional support, advice and information if needed. Supporting bereaved families, whilst rewarding, can also be emotionally draining.

14. Self-care for those working with the bereaved

- It's easy to overlook the stressed and anxieties placed on those dealing with the bereaved. In many instances these can be quite exacting and yet because our sympathy and attention naturally rests with those grieving we can easily forget the emotional weight resting on the shoulders of those offering support. To assist, the following points we think are worth bearing in mind:
- Anticipate possible reactions you may experience with grief and loss. Each one of us is likely to react differently depending on our age, personality, cultural and religious background. If you are ever unsure about how you should react to others' grief, honesty is always the best line of approach.
- Try to accept that you may experience emotional reactions yourself. Such an event might trigger thoughts of your own past grief experiences. You may even find yourself doubting your own abilities. It is not unusual to experience existential thoughts and find yourself querying life's injustices, questioning perhaps your own beliefs.
- Panic attacks and worries about death – your own, or perhaps that of your family – may also become a preoccupation.
- Try to accept that giving such support can affect you in perhaps ways you had not considered. Normally these reactions will subside after a few days or weeks but if they persist do not be afraid to ask for professional support.
- Never take on too much. If you find that you are having difficulty in managing to cope, look to others to offer support – a partner, friend, or colleague.
- It is important to remember that you alone cannot carry other peoples' grief.

Appendix 1

Information Sharing Pathway following Death of Head of School

Death of Head Teacher Information Shared With

Senior Leader

and

Chair of Governors

Info shared with identified key
person at LA/MAT/Diocese

CoG/SLT to undertake roles
and responsibilities including
liaising with Press if needed

Info Shared with School Staff Members → identify SLT/ staff to carry out

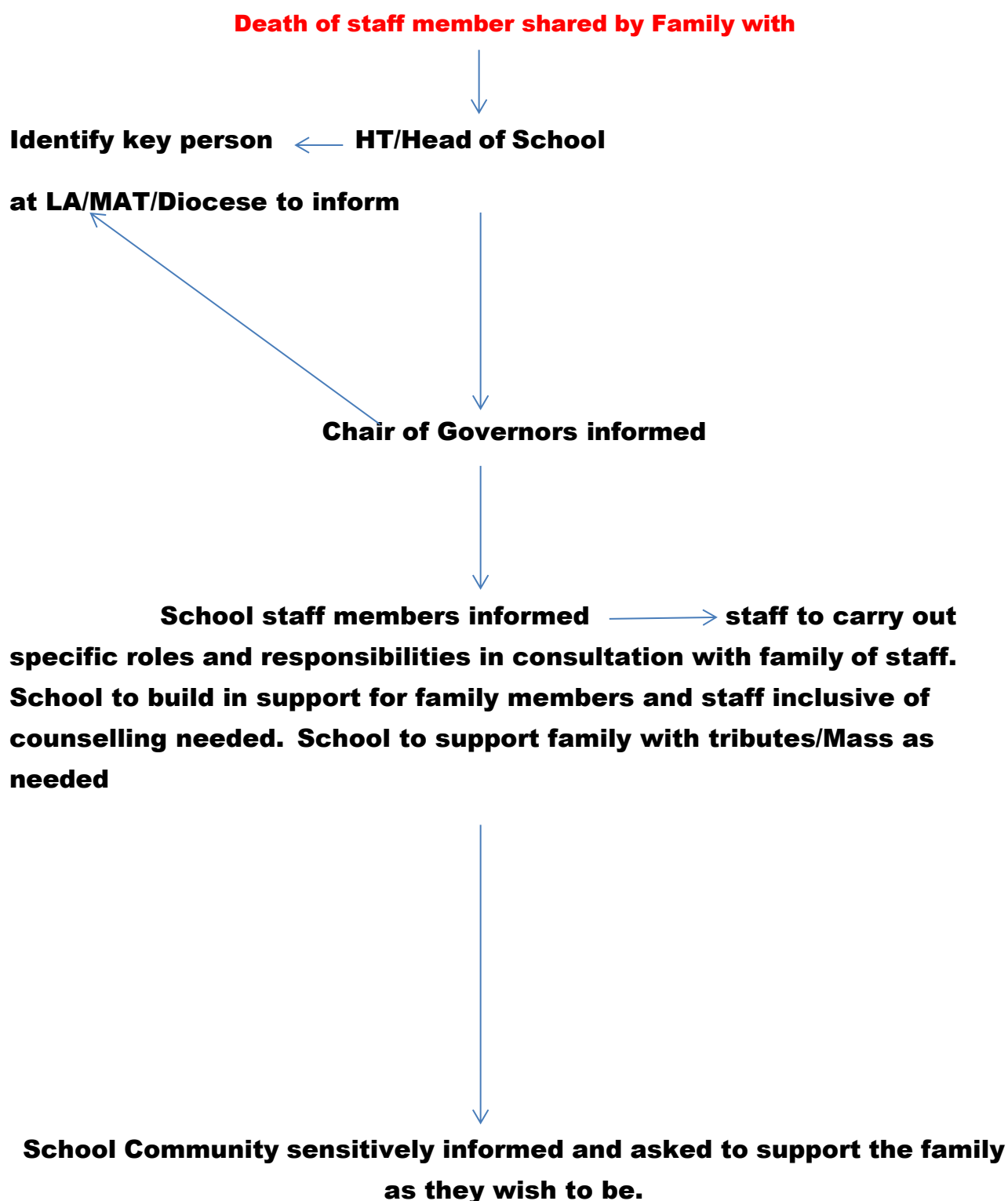
Specific roles and
responsibilities

**Information Shared formally with wider School Community by Chair of
Governors & SLT**

***School works in collaboration with family to arrange tributes/mass**

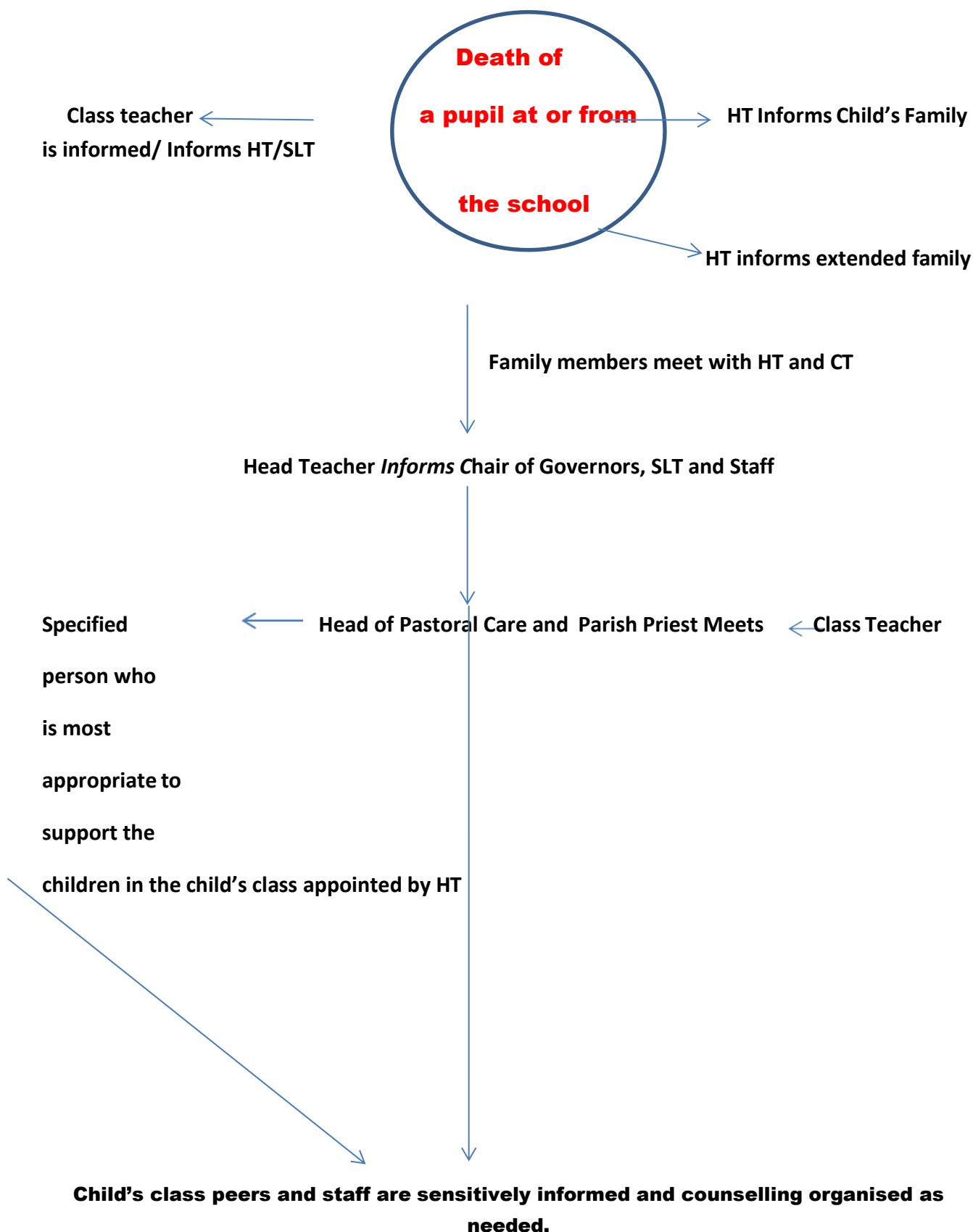
Appendix 2

Information Sharing Pathway Following Death of a Staff Member



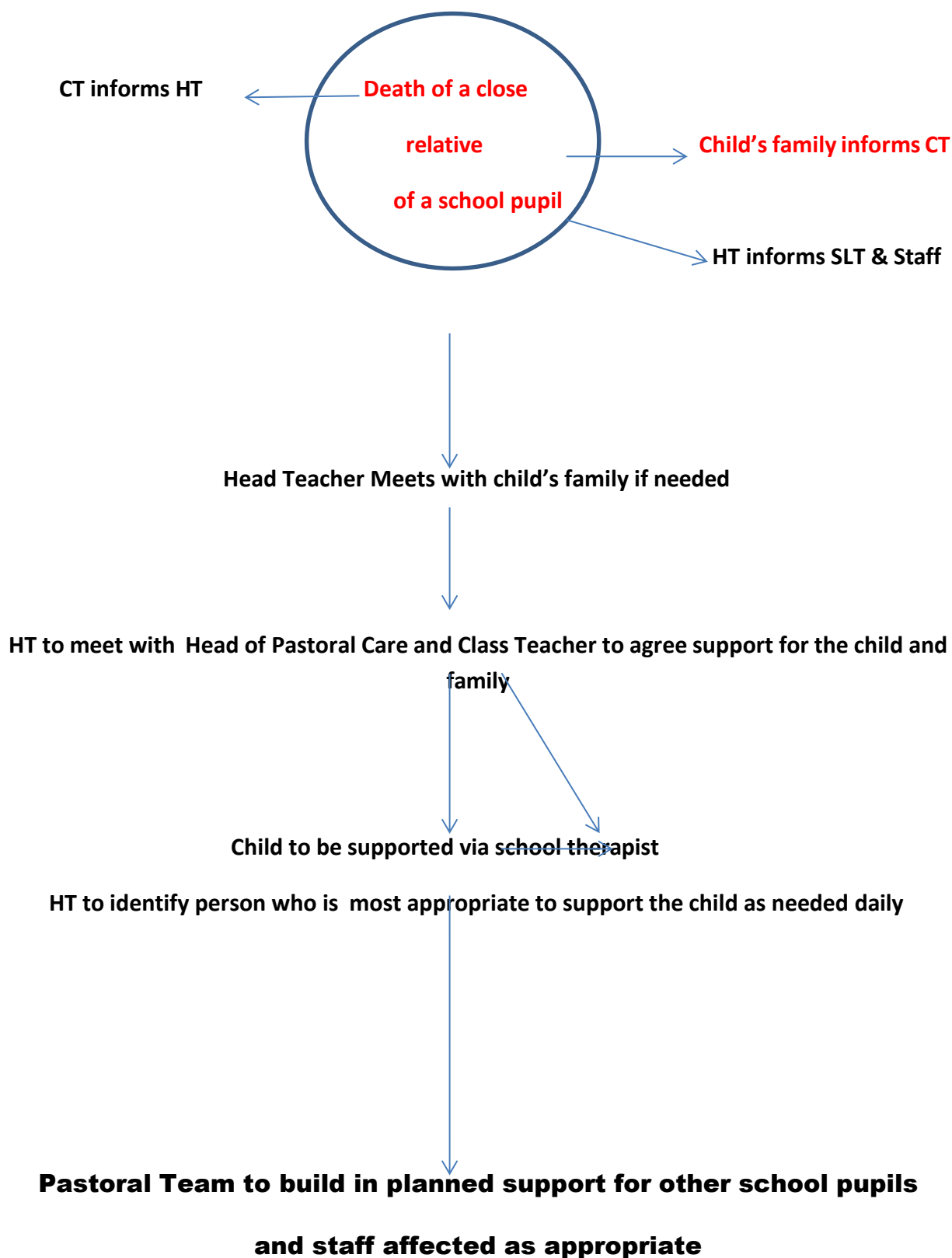
Appendix 3

Information Sharing Pathway following death of a Pupil



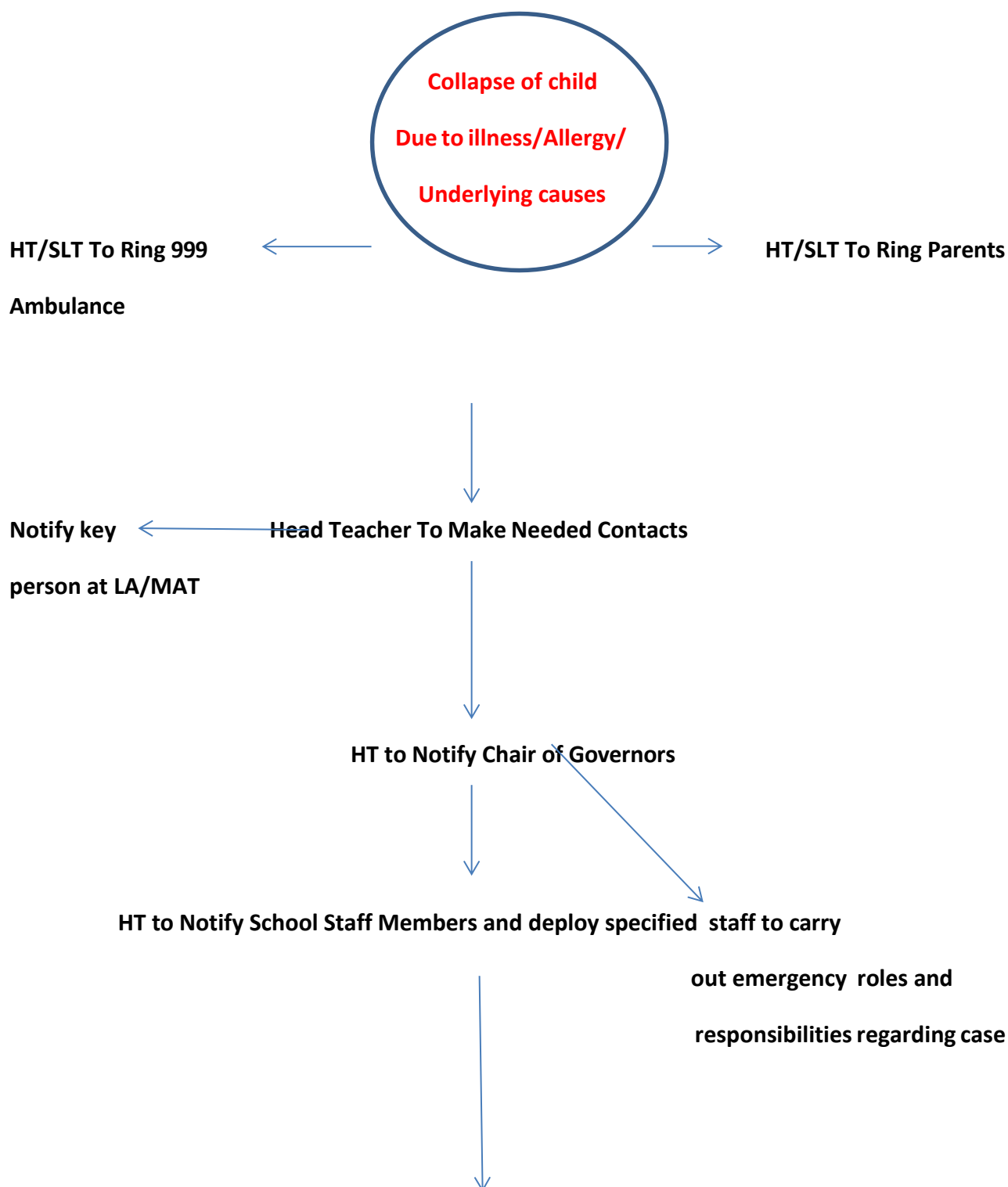
Appendix 4

Information Sharing Pathway following death of close family member of school pupil



Appendix 5

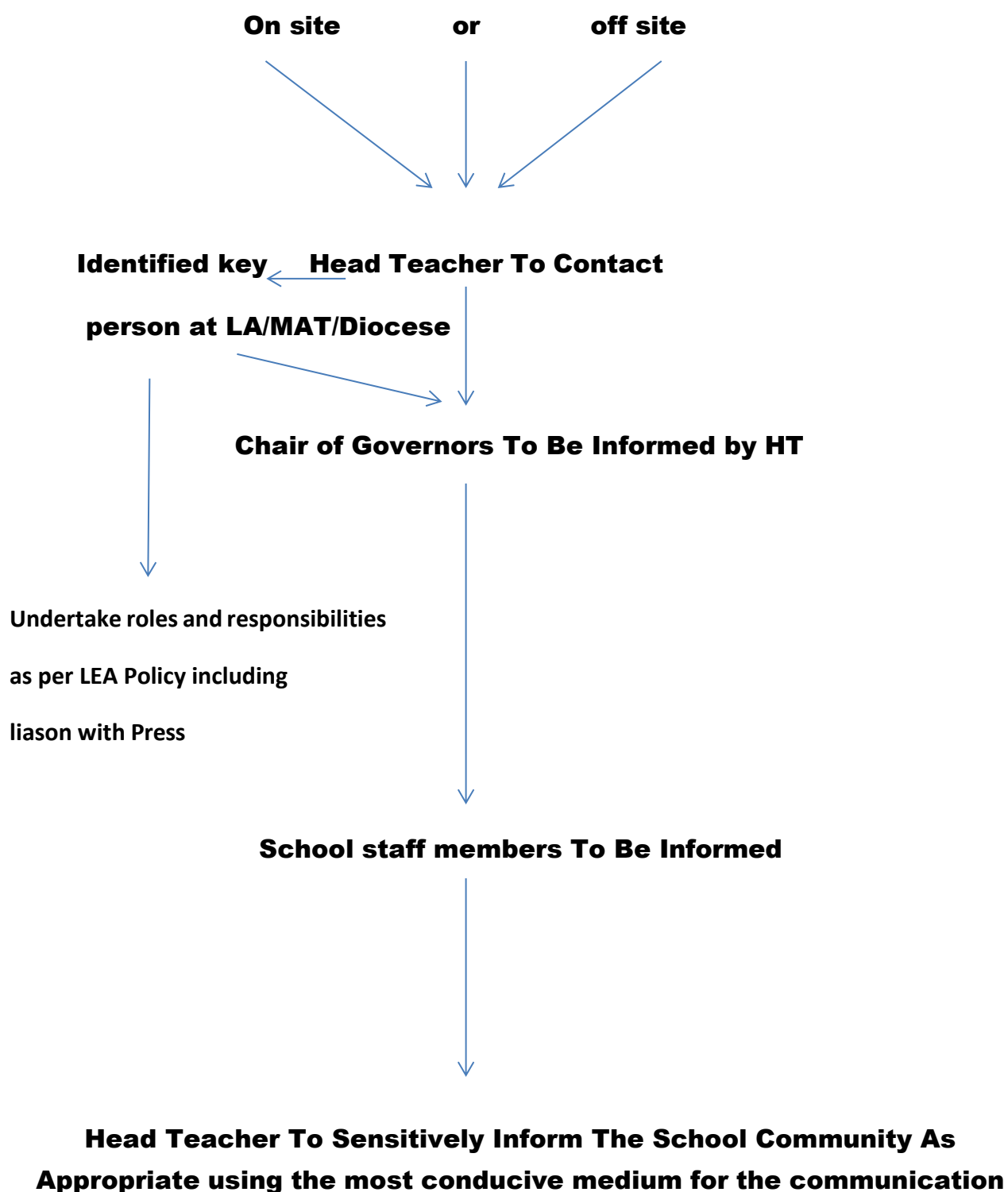
Information Sharing Pathway following Death of Child in School



Head Teacher To sensitively notify School Community building in Pastoral Support as needed in classes, small groups and individually for CT, Best Friends and Family

Appendix 6

Information Sharing Pathway Following A Major Incidents



Appendix 7

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

Dear Parents

Your child's class teacher had the very sad task of informing the children of (class name) of the tragic death of (Name) who has been a teacher 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 and confusion, and children are likely to ask questions about the death that need to be answered honestly and factually in terms that 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 you or 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

Head Teacher

Appendix 8

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

***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 school.**

Dear Parents

Your child's class teacher had the sad task of informing the children of (class name) of the unfortunate death of (Name) , a pupil in (Class) died from an illness called (illness) . As you may be aware, many children who have this (illness) get better but sadly (name) 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 and family 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.

We will be arranging a memorial service in the school in the next few months as a means of celebrating as a school family (name of child's) life.

Yours sincerely

Head Teacher

Appendix 9

Guidelines for breaking news about a death to staff and Governors

- Arrange a staff meeting which should take place as soon as possible.
- Impart factual information. Never make assumptions or repeat what has been said by rumour.
- Give news sensitively and empathetically, being aware that people may react in different ways. Be cognisant of the relationships staff may have had with the person who has died.
- Ensure that there is someone responsible for telling people who are unable to attend the staff meeting i.e. part time staff, peripatetic staff, lunch time supervisors. Consider the best way of imparting the information to those absent e.g. by doing home visit, by telephone, text or e-mail etc.
- Identify individual members of staff who feel able to: a) support members of staff b) support groups of children The most appropriate person to support the children should be well known to them and trusted.
- Identify a member of staff who will liaise with the individual's family, to deal with staff condolences and any funeral arrangements (if necessary).
- Identify an appropriate member of staff who will take 'phone calls and/or direct them as appropriate. Try to establish a "protected" telephone line to ensure free flow of accurate information. Telephone line providers may provide an additional line if the situation requires one.
- Identify a member of staff who will provide a newsletter for parents (see examples of letter templates) which should be sent the same day.
- Arrange a staff meeting at the end of the day to ensure staff are coping with the situation. Identify any unresolved problems or ongoing issues. Ensure that those staff who live alone have contact numbers of friends in case of need.
- Identify sources of advice and support to access for help in coming to terms with the bereavement.

Appendix 10

Guidelines for breaking news of the death to the children/young people

- Inform the children/young people as soon as possible about the death.
- Where possible, the pupils should be informed in small groups i.e. class or tutor groups. Identify those children who had a long term and/or close relationship with the person who has died so they can be told separately. If appropriate, a special assembly could be held at a later time in the day to remember the person who has died.
- Allow the children/young people to ask questions and answer them honestly and factually in terms that they will understand.
- Allow the children/young people to verbalise their feelings.
- Allow the children/young people to discuss the situation and share their experiences of death.
- Be honest about your own feelings and talk about your relationship with the person.
- Avoid using euphemisms.
- Those children/young people who have had more involvement with the person should be given the opportunity to share their feelings and experiences either within the group or on a one-to-one situation.
- Ensure the children/young people understand that the death is nothing to do with anything they have said or done. It is in no way their fault.
- Reassure them that not all people who are ill or have had an accident will die and that many people get better.
- Put an appropriate time limit on the discussion. It is preferable to resume normal school activities as soon as possible thus ensuring minimal disruption within the school.
- Conclude the discussion with a prayer or special poem to remember the person who has died and their family.
- Be available for any child/young person who needs additional help and support.

Appendix 11

Things to consider in the days following the news of the death

- It is important to consider any cultural or religious implications and seek advice if necessary.
- Ensure nominated staff with responsibilities for supporting staff and children, are available to do so. It may be necessary temporarily to provide staff cover for their normal activities.
- Identify an allocated quiet place where children, young people and staff can go if necessary. It is preferable for there to be minimum disruption to the timetable but some flexibility may be required.
- Try to engender an awareness of when people need help and support, particularly those who worked closely with the person who has died and secretaries/administrative staff who are taking telephone calls, dealing with parents etc.
- Through the nominated staff member who has responsibilities for liaising with the individual's family, ascertain their wishes about the school's involvement in the funeral, if any. Consider practical issues like:-
 - Putting an obituary in the paper, sending flowers to the home or to the funeral, making a collection etc.
 - Who will attend the funeral, making a collection etc.
 - Cover for any staff who may be going to the funeral.
 - Transport to and from the funeral.
 - Informing the parents of those pupils who will be involved.
 - Possible closure of the school. If this is the case remember to tell lunchtime supervisors, caretaker etc in advance.

Monitoring, Evaluation and Review

The policy will be monitored, evaluated and reviewed triennially, by the Pastoral Committee and specifically after bereavement has occurred.

Dissemination of the Policy

This policy is available on the school website, on request to parents, the LA and OFSTED through the Head Teacher.

Other policies that have relevance are:

Pastoral Care

Mental Health and Well Being