

Bereavement Policy for St Michael's CE Primary School

Issued: October 2023
Next review due: Autumn 2026



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

This policy is for all staff, pupils, parents and carers, governors, visitors and partner agencies working within the school. It provides guidelines and procedures as to how our school can best prepare for, and respond to, bereavement in the school community.

Bereavement can come in many forms:

- a pupil or a member of staff in school
- a pupil or member of staff who has left the school, but is still part of the school's memory
- a close family member of a pupil or member of staff in school

Each of these will require different approaches, and so the policy here needs to be tailored to the situation.

1.0 Introduction

1.1 At St Michael's CE Primary School, part of the Church of England, 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 the situations they face. Therefore, we aim to support pupils and staff as they cope with the stresses of life and respond to needs as they arise, enabling pupils and staff to flourish.

2.0 School Background

2.1 We are a large primary Church of England school serving our local community. Our Christian vision shapes all that we do.

I have come that [you] may have life, and have it to the full' John 10:10,

[Therefore],

'Be strong and courageous. The Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.'

Joshua 1:9

These biblical texts underpin our vision summary, 'Courage to flourish in the love of God'. Jesus' words from the New Testament describe his desire for everyone to be a full and flourishing version of their created selves, experiencing life in all its vibrant fullness, individually and in community. Our ambition is for everyone to encounter this fullness through the life and work of the school, whatever their background, beliefs or circumstances. God's words to Joshua from the Old Testament illustrate how life, and

learning, can be challenging, bringing setbacks and discouragement. These words inspire us to keep on going in those circumstances, confident that God watches over us and walks beside us.

The joining of these biblical texts is meaningful for the particular circumstances of our school community. It gives coherence to our aspirational vision that will grow courage and resilience as enablers of 'life in all its fullness' for everyone.

To support our vision, we have the overarching Christian Values:

Value	Biblical texts that underpin our values
Courage	Philippians 4:13 'I can do all things through him who strengthens me.'
Hope	John 1:5 'The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.'
Love and Forgiveness	1 Corinthians 13:4-8 Love is patient and kind; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth. 1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, he is just and will forgive us
Trust	Proverbs 3: 5-6 'Trust in the lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him and he will make your paths straight.'
Community	Hebrews 10:24 'Let us be concerned for one another, to help one another to show love and to do good.'
Thankfulness	1 Thessalonians 5:18 'Be thankful in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you.'

3.0 Rationale

3.1 Experiencing a bereavement can make children more vulnerable. Bereavement, whether it is an expected death because of illness or a sudden and unexpected death or suicide, is something that can impact on members of our school community at any time.

3.2 We recognise that members of the school community will be affected by a range of losses including separation and divorce. Some aspects of this policy may also be helpful in these cases.

4.0 Objectives

We will encourage a consistent, yet flexible approach based on a belief in the wellbeing of the 'whole individual'. 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 gives 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 the initial phase of bereavement.
- To enhance effective communication and clarify the pathway of support between school, family and community.
- To identify key staff within school, the Trust and the Diocese, with whom to liaise, and to clarify the pathway of support.

5.0 Roles and Responsibilities

5.1 The Trust:

- approve the policy and ensure its implementation, to be reviewed every three years
- CEO/Executive staff to provide support and advice to the Headteacher
- consider arranging bespoke training for school staff on bereavement issues

5.2 The Local Academy Board:

- advise and support staff who are supporting the bereaved children including offering wellbeing support to the headteacher and advise on referral pathways
- ensure that appropriate attention is given to how bereavement issues are addressed within the curriculum
- ensure that approaches to bereavement are respectful of religious and cultural values and beliefs
- ensure that staff are given appropriate opportunities for training, reflection, and access to support if they need it.

5.3 The Headteacher:

- to have bereavement support training on request and cascade learning to other staff
- to refer to other relevant policies
- to contact and liaise with the school's incumbent or representative of the Parish Church
- to keep the Trust fully informed via the CEO
- to monitor situations and liaise with external agencies if appropriate
- to respond to media enquiries **after** speaking with the Trust and Birmingham Diocesan Communications comms@cofebirmingham.com
- to be the first point of contact or nominate someone to be the first point of contact for the family/child
- to advise and support staff and consider referral pathways
- if a someone dies by suicide, ensure that staff know that the Samaritans provide a step-by step programme to support schools.
<https://www.samaritans.org/how-we-can-help/schools/step-step/>

5.4 School staff:

- know how to access support for themselves, for other staff and for the family, if advice or information is needed
- know how to report a concern if the bereavement or sudden and unexpected death has placed a child at significant risk of harm
- know how to support a child when they are distressed and how to refer to specialist support if needed
- not to use social media to disclose any information
- have a basic understanding of a child's needs when facing loss and change
- provide individual support as and when needed and in consultation with the head teacher and pastoral team
- teach about loss and bereavement as part of the planned curriculum
- inform the headteacher at the earliest possibility if they hear about a death of someone in the school community

5.5 Bereavement Pastoral Team

For advice and support for staff:

- Headteacher
- Deputy Headteacher
- Inclusion Lead

6.0 Procedures

- 6.1 Contact with the deceased's family should be established by the Headteacher or nominated person and their wishes respected in communicating with others.
- 6.2 All staff should be informed including staff who are absent/on leave, part-time, sports coaches and peripatetic staff **before** the pupils. They should be advised about how to share information in age-appropriate ways, as agreed for each individual circumstance.
- 6.3 Pupils who are specifically likely to be affected should be informed, preferably in small groups, by someone known to them.
- 6.4 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.
- 6.5 Staff affected by the death will be offered ongoing support as appropriate. Staff should initially be signposted to the BDMAT Health Assured scheme which offers bereavement counselling for staff and governors
- 6.6 In consultation with the bereaved family, arrangements for funeral attendance by pupils and staff may be clarified – the headteacher should always liaise with the CEO regarding these arrangements
- 6.7 Where necessary, a press statement should be prepared by the Headteacher after speaking with the Trust and if necessary, the diocesan communication team.

7.0 Pre-bereavement procedures

- 7.1 In some situations, it is known in advance that a death is going to occur imminently, usually because of a long illness.
- 7.2 In cases where this is an adult within the school community, individual conversations will be held with the headteacher in terms of support, information exchange and practical considerations.
- 7.3 When the expected death is of a child, or a member of a child's family we will:
 - contact the family to confirm factual information and explore what support could be provided to them
 - identify a key point of contact in school in terms of information exchange and to update when things change
 - ensure that all relevant adults are clear about what information has and needs to be shared with the pupil

- keep lines of communication open to ensure that all information is received in a timely fashion
- explore the possibility of signposting to other organisations or a local hospice
- look to involve faith or community leaders, in particular the school's incumbent, when appropriate, and with the agreement of the family
- explore what support for the pupils affected might look like in practice
- arrange training for specific members of staff to ensure all involved are confident in their ability to support the pupil
- if appropriate, consider and reflect on how to communicate with the wider school community for example the pupil's peer group
- if appropriate, begin conversations around practical considerations in the events leading up to the death and following the death

8.0 Points to note

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

8.2 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.

8.3 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.

9.0 Staff leave

9.1 Compassionate leave

This is paid leave granted at the 'Line Manager's' discretion and is for a maximum of 5 days in a rolling 12 month period in total and is for incidents related to **close relatives only**. Close relatives are defined by BDMAT:

<i>Wife</i>	<i>Mother</i>	<i>Mother-in-law</i>	<i>Stepfather</i>
<i>Husband</i>	<i>Father</i>	<i>Father-in-law</i>	<i>Stepmother</i>
<i>Partner/Civil Partner</i>	<i>Brother</i>	<i>Grandmother</i>	<i>Stepchildren</i>
<i>Son</i>	<i>Sister</i>	<i>Grandfather</i>	<i>Stepbrother</i>
<i>Daughter</i>	<i>Guardian/Ward</i>	<i>Grandchild</i>	<i>Stepsister</i>

9.2 Funerals

This is granted outside of compassionate leave and is for one day per funeral and is restricted to family or close friends. This will be paid leave for members of close family only (those defined in 3.12), other funeral attendance (including other family members and friends) will be unpaid and discretionary. Where the funeral is a significant distance from the member of staff's home then up to an additional two days paid leave may be granted.

10.0 Additional resources

School staff may find the following links useful in supporting staff and pupils:

[Church of England](#)

[Childhood Bereavement Network](#)

[Winstons Wish](#)

[Child Bereavement UK](#)

[NHS advice](#)

[Marie Curie](#)

11.0 Related policies

This policy also links to the following other policies we hold in school:

- Safeguarding policy
- PSHE policy
- Anti-bullying policy
- Equality policy
- Health and safety policy
- Leave of absence policy (staff)

APPENDIX 1: Letter templates

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

Sample letter on the 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.

<Name of child> was a very popular member of the class and will be missed by everyone who knew them. 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

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 <Name> 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.

As a Church School, we are well supported by our vicar: <Name> from <Church name>. If you would like them to contact you, please let me know and I will put you in touch with each other.

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 at this so difficult time.

<Name>
Headteacher

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 all keep <Name> in our thoughts and prayers and remember them with such fondness.

Yours sincerely,

<Name>
Headteacher