

Sacred Heart School



A Catholic Voluntary
Academy

Bereavement Policy

Updated and reviewed March 2026

Sacred Heart School was founded by and is part of the Catholic Church. The school is to be conducted as a Catholic School in accordance with the canon law and teachings of the Catholic Church and in accordance with the Trust Deed of the Diocese of Hallam.

School Mission

Love one another as I have loved you
(John 13:34)

Equality Act 2010

In accordance with *The Equality Act 2010*, each person in our school will be given fair and equal opportunities, with positive regard to gender, ethnicity, cultural and religious background, sexuality, or disability.

POLICY STATEMENT:

We acknowledge that death while being the inevitable end of life, is often unexpected and traumatic. Its unpredictability can cause severe distress and can shock and disturb the whole school community.

We acknowledge that should our school community be informed of a death, our response should be a planned, tested and considered one. An unplanned response could make the situation worse for all concerned; we need to ensure we are able to react sensitively and professionally.

We acknowledge that the communication of any death within our community must be planned and handled with great sensitivity. While recognising the need to act speedily, we will ensure that the immediate family of the deceased have been consulted prior to any wider communication through the school website, text, telephone, email, or social media sites.

We will be mindful and respectful of cultural attitudes to death.

Policy for dealing with media.

The school will liaise and seek advice from the media team in the Multi Academy Trust, Local Authority or Hallam Diocese.

We will establish a "*School Bereavement Team*" to be chaired if and when necessary by a '*Bereavement Team Leader*' who will be the most senior appropriate member of staff in the school.

Members of the Team will be ...

Lynsie Tuplin (Headteacher), Claire Jessop (Deputy Headteacher), Stephen Moran (Pastoral Manager) and Chana Lapper (School Manager).

We acknowledge our responsibility to all those who grieve as a result of a life-changing significant loss in their lives. We will provide opportunities for pupils to share their feelings in the school environment supported by trained staff and when appropriate, through the use of age-related structured bereavement programmes. Appropriate support will also be offered to staff.

The Bereavement Team will ensure all staff and governors are aware of our policy and procedures. This policy and the accompanying procedures will be reviewed every two years or in the event of a death within the school community.

PROCEDURES TO BE FOLLOWED IN THE EVENT OF A DEATH WITHIN THE SCHOOL COMMUNITY:

We will ensure that school office staff are prepared to receive the news of a death within the community and respond in an appropriate manner.

Should we receive the news of a death, in **ALL** cases the person receiving the news will:

- Confirm the information, check it, record it and check it again. (*It is essential to have the facts confirmed*)
- Share the news as soon as possible with an appropriate senior member of staff and a member of the Bereavement Team.

The senior member of staff and the members of the Bereavement Team will:

- Consider the action required, follow the agreed procedures, take notice of the guidance and examples and be aware of the impact of shock on each other and on the wider community.

THE SUDDEN DEATH OF A PARENT OR CLOSE RELATIVE

We acknowledge that in the case of the death of a pupil's parent or close relative, it is best that a family member break the news with the support of an appropriate member of staff. If this is not possible the Bereavement Team Leader will ensure someone suitable to break the news to the pupil or member of staff concerned. The news of the death will be given to all relevant staff as soon as possible.

THE DEATH OF A PUPIL

Should we receive the news of a pupil's death, we will call appropriate colleagues together *having consulted with the family of the pupil to ascertain their wishes,*

We will:

- Encourage staff to voice the concerns they have about telling the rest of the pupils/students.
- Consider the most appropriate way of communicating the news within the school; be that a full school assembly, year groups, or a class
- Give pupils opportunities to express their feelings at the time they are informed and over the following days and weeks.
- Avoid rumours, exaggerations and embellishments of the event, by agreeing on the facts which will be stated openly and honestly without assumptions or judgements.
- Remember that such news will be greeted with a mixture of emotions and feelings. Some may deny or disbelieve the announcement. Others may feel panic; some may show feelings of anger. There may well be tears and distress. Planned support will be available.
- Inform parents the same day in the most appropriate way via text, website, email, phone or newsletter depending on the circumstances
- Ensure time for corporate grieving amongst the staff and enable them to share how they feel about what has happened.

THE DEATH OF MORE THAN ONE PUPIL

Members of the *Bereavement Team* will be called together to be briefed on the facts and to decide what steps are to be taken. Information may already have been 'sent' from the incident.

We will consider:

- Who will contact parents, if necessary?
- Who will meet with parents who arrive at school? Where?
- Who will inform the staff? When? Where?
- Who will inform the pupils? When? Where?

It is imperative that rumours and interpretations of the truth be avoided. In the case of multiple deaths, there is bound to be some media interest. Members of the Bereavement Team responsible for dealing with the media will prepare all necessary statements. Such statements should deal only with facts in as sympathetic a way as possible. We will agree on a format for the response to telephone enquiries, including approaches from the media. In all telephone conversations, the bereavement team will stick to the facts not feelings.

THE DEATH OF A MEMBER OF THE STAFF

We acknowledge that if such a death occurs it is doubly traumatic for the staff; supporting the pupils but also grieving on a personal level for a colleague.

Should we receive the news of the death of a member of staff; the appropriate senior member of staff will call together colleagues from the Bereavement Team.

We will use the guidance notes below:-

- a. Gather together the staff and inform them of the news.
- b. Allow time for corporate grieving amongst the staff.
- c. Allow the staff to share how they feel about what has happened.
- d. Inform the teachers that they may need to address what has happened in their classes.
- e. Impress on the staff what facts are to be announced to the pupils/students. To avoid rumours, exaggerations and development of the event, the agreed facts should be stated simply.
- f. Communicate to the staff how the announcement will be made. Should it be a full school assembly, year groups, or a class?
- g. It must be remembered that such news will be greeted with a mixture of emotional feelings. Some will deny or disbelieve the announcement. Others may feel panic; some may show feelings of anger. There may be tears and distress; everyone will react in their own way.
- h. Under such circumstances some staff may have difficulty coping with the loss themselves. Colleagues will need to be aware of those staff who seem particularly affected by the death.

RETURN TO SCHOOL

We acknowledge our responsibility to 'keep a special watch' on pupils who have been bereaved, especially on their return to school and for at least a two-year period and at times of transition. We further acknowledge our responsibility to prepare staff and pupils appropriately before a bereaved member of our community returns. Members of our Bereavement Team will advise an appropriate response, depending on the individual's circumstances.

MANAGING ANTICIPATED DEATH AND THE TERMINALLY ILL

We acknowledge that the anticipated death of a member of our community, whilst very difficult to manage, enables us to establish appropriate communication with the family to support those likely to be most affected before and after the death.

We acknowledge our responsibility to support adults, children and young people within our community who have to face the painful reality that a parent or someone close to them is terminally ill.

When supporting children and young people who are experiencing anticipatory grief, we will:

- Confirm the facts concerning the pupil's sick relative or friend
- Communicate the information as appropriate (in line with school procedures and the family's wishes)
- Never give false hope to the child or young person
- Discover what the pupil has been told about the illness
- Allow the pupil to talk freely about the sick person in an appropriate setting
- Enable the pupil to talk freely about how he/she is feeling
- Be honest! If we do not know the answer to a question we will say so
- Not inform the pupil about any progression concerning the illness unless the family have given permission and requested us to do so

THE PLACE OF DEATH AND BEREAVEMENT WITHIN THE CURRICULUM

We acknowledge the importance of remembering anniversaries of death. At key times, with the support of families of the deceased, we will hold memorial services/acts of prayer

We also acknowledge our responsibility to explore issues surrounding death and bereavement within the curriculum. This will take place within relevant curriculum areas such as RE/PSHE and this will be appropriate to the age/needs of the children.

LONG-TERM SUPPORT FOR THOSE WHO GRIEVE

We will offer pupils access to a range of age-related peer support programmes or counselling.

SUPPORT FOR STAFF WHO SUPPORT BEREAVED PUPILS AND COLLEAGUES

We will ensure that all staff are familiar with this policy and these procedures for responding to bereavement. Whenever necessary we will request additional support from colleagues or from external support agencies.

SUPPORT FOR CHILDREN WHO GRIEVE.

Children will be allowed to have their feelings acknowledged even years after the event. Staff will be aware that some children will want to share how they feel, and others will need quiet. All children will have adults they can talk to in school through the Emotionally Available Adult system. For children who need them, the following supports may be put in place:

- a quietly acknowledged sign/signal that the child needs some time out of class.
- a quiet place available to talk
- a quiet space with games/colouring books available to take the child's mind off their worries.