

## Mavisbank Bereavement Policy

### Rationale

In a special school such as Mavisbank, pupils, parents and staff form very close relationships over long periods of time. Consequently the loss of a pupil or a member of staff is felt very deeply. Likewise, the parents may have supported each other for a long time and may need support from school.

This Bereavement Policy has been prepared for use by all school staff in an attempt to provide a framework of support and communication for the school community in the event of a bereavement. The caring and supportive school environment has a key role to play and we recognise that every situation is unique and demands sensitive and compassionate handling, with the wishes of the family being of paramount importance. It is also important that as normal a routine as is possible is maintained because this will provide security and stability at a very difficult time.

Much of the information and guidance in this policy follows the advice given by the Child Bereavement Charity and further advice can be found on their website [www.childbereavement.org.uk](http://www.childbereavement.org.uk)

### Background

Everyone's reaction to a bereavement will be unique, and dependent upon their levels of awareness, understanding and intellectual development, as well as their relationship with the deceased.

At our pupils' stage of development, they are not able to understand about death, but may experience the loss as a separation from someone to whom they may have had an attachment. Due to their limited ability to communicate verbally, pupils may express this loss in other ways e.g. becoming withdrawn, crying etc.

The extent of the impact of the loss could be missed because of the pupils' limited ability to express feelings, but it is most important that all staff use their knowledge of individual pupils to support them in the most appropriate way.

## Procedures

- It is important not to make assumptions or repeat what has been heard through rumour. Impart factual information only.
- It is essential to sound out the family's wishes. The family may well welcome involvement of members of the school community but equally, may wish to keep it private.
- Cultural and religious implications need consideration.
- A letter should go to families the same day if possible informing them of the bereavement. Details of the funeral arrangements, flowers, family requests etc to be distributed to all staff and parents too if appropriate.
- Organise training for all involved in communicating the bereavement. Delegate responsibilities e.g. class teachers to phone all members of their class. Don't forget part-time, peripatetic staff and outside agencies, local priest and minister etc.
- Identify which staff may want to attend and the practicalities of issues such as staff cover and transport.
- Support each other at all times. Some people will be more affected by the loss than others. Appropriate support must be offered especially to those closest to the person.
- Make arrangements for a memorial service in school. The school's Christian religious contact members are Reverend MacDonald and Fr. Taylor who will offer support as required. Invite parents and outside agencies who have known the pupil if appropriate.

The Memorial service may include

- Lighting a special remembrance candle. ( N.B. only if there are no Oxygen cannisters within the room)
- Favourite songs or poems of the person who has died.
- Staff taking it in turns to recount stories or memories.
- Photographs of the person or child who has died to give a visual reminder
- Powerpoint presentation of happy moments in the child's life
- Group activity
- It is best to arrange the assembly before a break. Pupils and staff will need space to reflect before carrying on with the normal school timetable.
- It is preferable for there to be minimum disruption to the timetable but some flexibility may be required.
- Identify an allocated quiet place where staff can go if necessary.
- Compile (and keep updated) a list of outside professionals and agencies who can come into the school in the event of a traumatic death to counsel staff both long and short term

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

<Address>

<Date>

Dear Parents

It is with sadness I have to inform you that one of our pupils, XXXX, died on xxxxx

XXXX's funeral service / mass will be celebrated in xxxxxx on xxxxx

Everyone is invited to attend the funeral service.

Our thoughts are with XXXXX's family at this time.

Yours faithfully

**Monitoring and Evaluation**

The effectiveness of the policy will be monitored and evaluated by the Head Teacher and the management team giving consideration to:

- Feedback from parents affected by bereavement.
- Feedback from staff involved in supporting a bereavement situation.
- Discussion with external agencies involved.

Reviewed: John Lochrie, Eileen McDonnell Sept 2014

Date of next review: Sept 2017