

The background features a faded, light blue school crest. The crest is shield-shaped with a crown at the top. The shield is divided into four quadrants: top-left is red with a white crown, top-right is yellow with a red hand, bottom-left is yellow with a blue vertical stripe, and bottom-right is yellow with a blue vertical stripe. The shield is surrounded by a laurel wreath. Below the wreath is a ribbon with the text 'BELFAST BOYS' MODEL SCHOOL'.

# **Bereavement Policy**

Reviewed November 2022

## **Aims & Ethos**

Our school is committed to the emotional health and well-being of its staff and pupils. We wish to work towards this in all aspects of school life, and to provide an ethos, environment and curriculum that support and prepare pupils for coping with difficult experiences.

Our school will endeavour to help children and young people to explore and develop an awareness and understanding of death, as well as to support those who are personally affected by it.

## **Rationale**

1 in 29 pupils, aged five to sixteen-years olds, has been bereaved of a parent or sibling.

Many more are bereaved of a grandparent, relative, friend or other significant person.

Within a school community there will almost always be some pupils who are struggling with bereavement – or sometimes the entire school community is impacted by the death of a member of staff or a pupil.

It is important that children are helped to understand bereavement in clear and unambiguous ways and given opportunities to experience the full range of emotions that may accompany a bereavement within a safe and supportive environment.

## **Objectives**

In Belfast Boys' Model School, we aim to create a bereavement aware culture which supports all stakeholders. We do this by:

- Providing a framework for all staff to give guidance in how to deal sensitively and compassionately with the bereavement.
- Supporting pupils and/or members of staff before (where applicable), during and after bereavement.
- Enhancing effective communication and clarifying the pathway of support between members of staff, pupils, the family/carers and the community.
- Identifying key staff within school and the Education Authority

- Having clear expectations about the way school will respond to a death, and provide a nurturing, safe and supportive environment for all.

## **Roles and Responsibilities**

The Critical Incident Management Policy provides clear details on the roles and responsibilities of staff when there is the death/serious injury of a child or member of staff.

If there is the death of a close family member of a pupil, the most appropriate member of staff will liaise with the family. Depending on the pupil and the circumstances of the death this may be the Principal, Pastoral Vice-Principal or a Pastoral Leader.

## **Procedures**

Our school will:

- Speak to the family and offer them condolences
- Obtain factual information to avoid unnecessary speculation
- Inform staff as soon as possible
- Decide where pupils will be told, if this is necessary
- Identify the most vulnerable pupils and give the support they might need
- A familiar adult/teacher will tell the pupils as soon as possible, in small groups
- Send a letter to parents/carers as soon as possible, if required
- Give guidance to parents on supporting bereaved children

Some families may want to share information with the school community, while others may not. Confirmation of the death must be confirmed by speaking with a family member. The school can help to prevent speculation and rumours, as well as be a source of support for the family and the school community.

Staff involved will be given a prepared script when delivering sad news.

If appropriate, we will allow a limited break in the timetable for pupils to process the news and take a little time-out.

Although school can provide stability and normality for staff and pupils, some flexibility may be necessary. Bereaved young people may need time to grieve and manage overwhelming feelings, being able to leave a classroom and take time out in a safe space can be very welcome.

The location for a temporary tribute/book of condolence needs to be safe, accessible and ideally where pupils can be supervised. There will be consultation with staff and pupils before removing any temporary tribute, giving notice to prepare them beforehand.

## **Funerals**

Our school will:

- Find out the family's wishes and how they wish the school to be involved
- Consider the cultural and religious implications, if appropriate
- Send cards/flowers, if acceptable
- Identify which staff and pupils may want to attend. Enable the person(s) who had the closest relationship with the child/children to attend the funeral - this would usually be the current class teacher/Form teacher but may be a staff member who had worked closely with the family in a previous class, and be able to have absence to attend.

## **Support for Pupils**

Not all children and young people will need the support of specialist practitioners; they most often need familiar people who care. Pupils will react to bereavement in a variety of ways; no two reactions are the same. Personality, family support and life experiences will all impact on children's responses.

Adults often wish to shield children from pain and distress. Experience and research have shown, however, that children are best supported by having the incident acknowledged in an appropriate way rather than having it ignored.

It is important to be available and receptive to pupils, to listen to them, to empathise with them and normalise their emotions, thus enabling the development of healthy coping strategies.

## **Support for Staff**

Supporting bereaved pupils can be very stressful for staff who may already be struggling with their own reactions and emotions. At certain points in time, some members of staff may be more vulnerable due to circumstances in their own lives.

Our school will:

- Support bereaved staff and acknowledge they may be struggling with their own reactions and emotions while supporting pupils
- Plan for informal mutual support to give staff an opportunity to share feelings and reactions
- Give people time to attend the funeral, if appropriate
- Offer general training for all staff
- Be aware of all supporting information and resources available

## **Remembering**

Consult the family of the person who died about any plans for a memorial or other tribute. A more permanent memorial (a tree, a special garden, a piece of artwork, a bench) may be appropriate, but in future the removal, relocation or replacement will need to be managed sensitively.

## **Supporting a bereaved pupil to return to school after a bereavement**

Our school will:

- Acknowledge what has happened
- Ask our pupils how we can help
- Be flexible and understanding
- Create a supportive environment
- Maintain routine
- Listen with our eyes, ears and heart

Our school will offer:

- A routine, which can have a stabilising effect
- Neutral space and people to share their feelings without the worry of upsetting a loved one

- Time for the pupils to be themselves without feeling guilty (being with friends, time to play in a safe space outside the home environment)
- Regular communication with home, providing reassurance about behaviour and general well-being, ensuring the child or young person is managing their grief
- Access to appropriate resources via Form teacher/Year Counsellor
- Preparation time for children and young people to discuss what to say and how to behave when the bereaved child or young person returns to school
- Time for staff to be aware of changes in behaviour that may be related to the death
- An individual link person to support the pupils, when necessary
- A suitable place in school for pupils who need some space if too upset to stay in the classroom and people to whom they can go for support

### **Longer term support**

Bereaved pupils will, in the first instance, be supported by the Year Counsellor, Head of Year and form teacher. When it is appropriate, FSES support will be offered. This can take the form of one-to-one counselling, group work or alternative therapies. If the pupil does not feel ready for this support, it will be offered again at regular intervals.

When pupils transition from KS2 to KS3, primary school staff will be asked if the pupil has suffered a significant bereavement along with the date/nature of the loss they experienced. This information will be shared by the Senior Teacher responsible for Care and Support with the Y8 Counsellor.

When pupils transition from KS4 to KS5, the Year 12 Counsellor is responsible for passing on the relevant details to the Y13 Counsellor.

Throughout the bereaved pupil's time in BBMS, his behaviour and progress will be monitored, and interventions put in place, if necessary.

### **Death, grief and bereavement in the curriculum**

As part of our preventative curriculum, pupils will learn about death, grief and bereavement during assemblies, pastoral period, LLW and RS as it will help pupils to understand feelings of grief and

prepare them for the future. Recently bereaved pupils may find it helpful if they are given the option to work elsewhere or step outside, if they think it would be too painful to attend.

### **Inclusion and equality**

Our school recognises that there is a range of cultural and religious customs and procedures concerning death and that there may be different expectations of the bereaved pupil and family. We will try to present a balance of different approaches to death and loss. Pupils and staff will be made aware that there are a range of different responses to bereavement and that we need to value and respect each one of these.

### **Responding to the media**

Some incidents and deaths, particularly those in sudden or traumatic circumstances, may attract media attention. All members of staff will be advised not to respond to journalists and to refer all enquiries to the Principal, who will make a considered response.

### **Staff support and training**

It is important that all staff feel confident in delivering support for pupils and mutual support for each other. We will ensure members of staff update their skills and knowledge as required. All staff will be reminded that they have access to support from Inspire.

### **Links to other policies**

The Bereavement Policy complements and supports a range of other school policies including:

- Managing Critical Incidents
- Pastoral Care
- Anti-bullying
- Safeguarding & Child Protection
- Positive Behaviour Policy
- School Attendance

### **Monitoring and evaluation**

This policy will be reviewed annually by the Principal in consultation with staff and pupils. Consideration will be given to any developments and will take into account the learning from ongoing practice and experience. Any changes made will be shared with the staff and presented to the Board of Governors for approval.