

THE WISHFORD SCHOOLS’ BEREAVEMENT POLICY

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ANNEX A – Suggested Reading

1. Introduction

Every year 23,600 children under the age of 18 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 our 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 this 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.

In the past, people have sometimes underestimated the impact of death upon young children. While it is true that their understanding of death develops over a prolonged period of time, it is clear that young children can suffer deeply as a result of the death of a member of their family. This suffering is more intense when they do not have opportunities to talk or to grieve openly, and do not feel that those close to them recognise their feelings - even though they themselves may not yet have the words to express them.

Reactions to bereavement can include withdrawal, open distress, tears, panic, aggression, anxiety, fear or other signs of stress. Bereaved children may act out this stress in unexpected ways, such as nervous giggling, stoical bravery, untypical aggression, becoming the class clown, or total denial - all these are normal grief reactions. They may also become extremely tired, to the point of exhaustion, as so much emotional energy goes into dealing with the loss and the stress of the changes in the family. For some children, there may be additional terrors; if the death has been referred to as 'falling asleep' or 'being taken', then it is sometimes the case that children become afraid of going to bed or to sleep. Words like 'loss' or 'lost' can put fear into a young child's mind, too.

In addition the death of a terminally ill pupil or member of staff can be planned for with full support being given before the actual event. Often pupils will want to create a memory board to allow their emotions to be shared with others and a book of condolence where they feel that they are writing a message to the deceased person all help. Open discussion and realistic language are often the best way to deal with issues that arise. Once the pupil or member of staff dies then it is important that all emotional support is given and the need to mourn is recognised. If it is possible over a prolonged illness, it can help to have a message from the member of staff which is about living life to the full and an opportunity to raise funds for that member of staff's favourite cause.

2. The death of a pet

The School should also be aware of the emotional impact the death of a family pet might have on a pupil or a member of staff. Emotional support can be offered through the normal channels of teachers, form teachers, HoYs, the Head and peers and again discussion and honesty are vital. Terminology is again important as children may associate 'falling asleep' etc with the death. Again pupils and staff should be encouraged to be honest with their emotions and talk about their memories of their pets. Whilst much of the Bereavement Policy deals with the death of people we should not underestimate how important the death of a pet to pupils and staff can be.

3. The death of a grandparent or other

When a pupil who is attending the school, experiences bereavement the following issues should be considered:

1. The pupil's family should be asked how much and what the child already knows and how they have been involved.
2. The relevant member(s) of staff should maintain strong channels of communication with the family to ensure that the child may be best supported when at school.
3. The importance of both school and the pupil's parents or carers in reporting changes in behaviour. (Eating and sleeping patterns may change or behaviour in school may deteriorate or the pupil may become withdrawn.)
4. If necessary outside agencies may need to be contacted as appropriate.

It is important to stress the importance of communication between school and home. Without it ultimately both parties will fail the child.

When a child who has suffered bereavement returns to school, it will probably be necessary for the relevant member of staff to reassure them you know what has happened.

The following are a useful set of guidelines for handling a bereaved and grieving child:

- Explain you know 'what has happened' and that 'you are there' if they need you or want to talk.
- Provide a special place for time alone in case they need it.
- Watch for changes in behaviour – never be cross.
- When they want to talk – find time to listen.
- Listen, show you care and encourage them.
- Be ready – there are always questions.
- Always be honest – don't be afraid of saying 'I don't know'.
- Don't say: 'You'll feel better soon' (changing the subject will only make things worse.)
- Show them that when someone they loved has died it is good to keep all the happy memories alive by talking about them.
- Explain 'I care how you feel and we don't understand why they had to die, we only know that they loved you and that you'll never ever forget them'

It will take time and compassion – often with steps backwards and hurdles to jump- but only then can the healing begin.

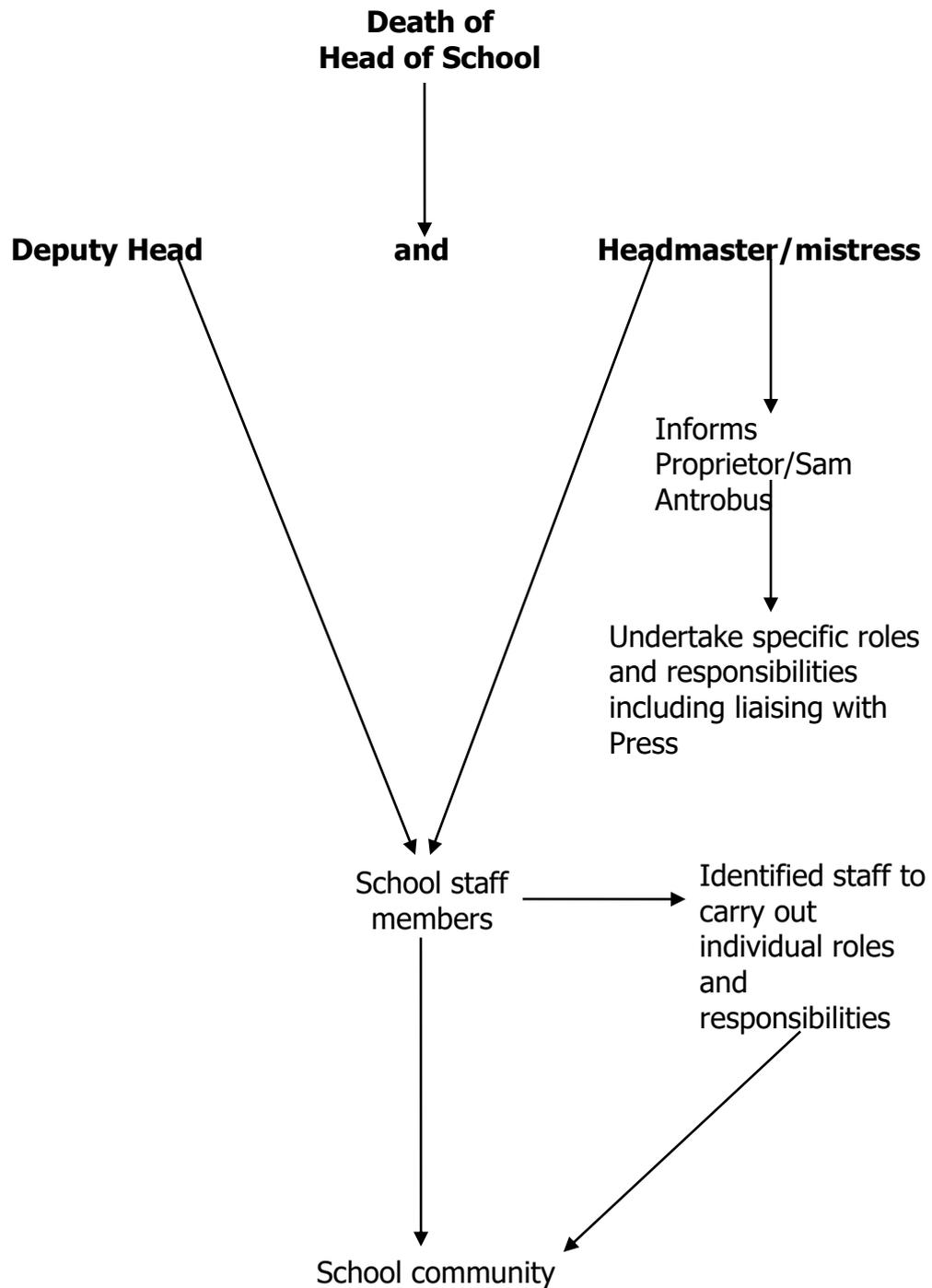
When the school is informed of the death of a child or member of staff, the following action should be considered;

1. Discussion should take place with the family and their wishes taken into account before decisions are taken on how and what to tell the children in school.
2. Counselling should be available if necessary e.g. in cases of sudden or violent death (outside agencies should be involved with this).
3. Staff and children should be supported throughout the grieving period; anyone displaying signs of stress should be offered appropriate support.

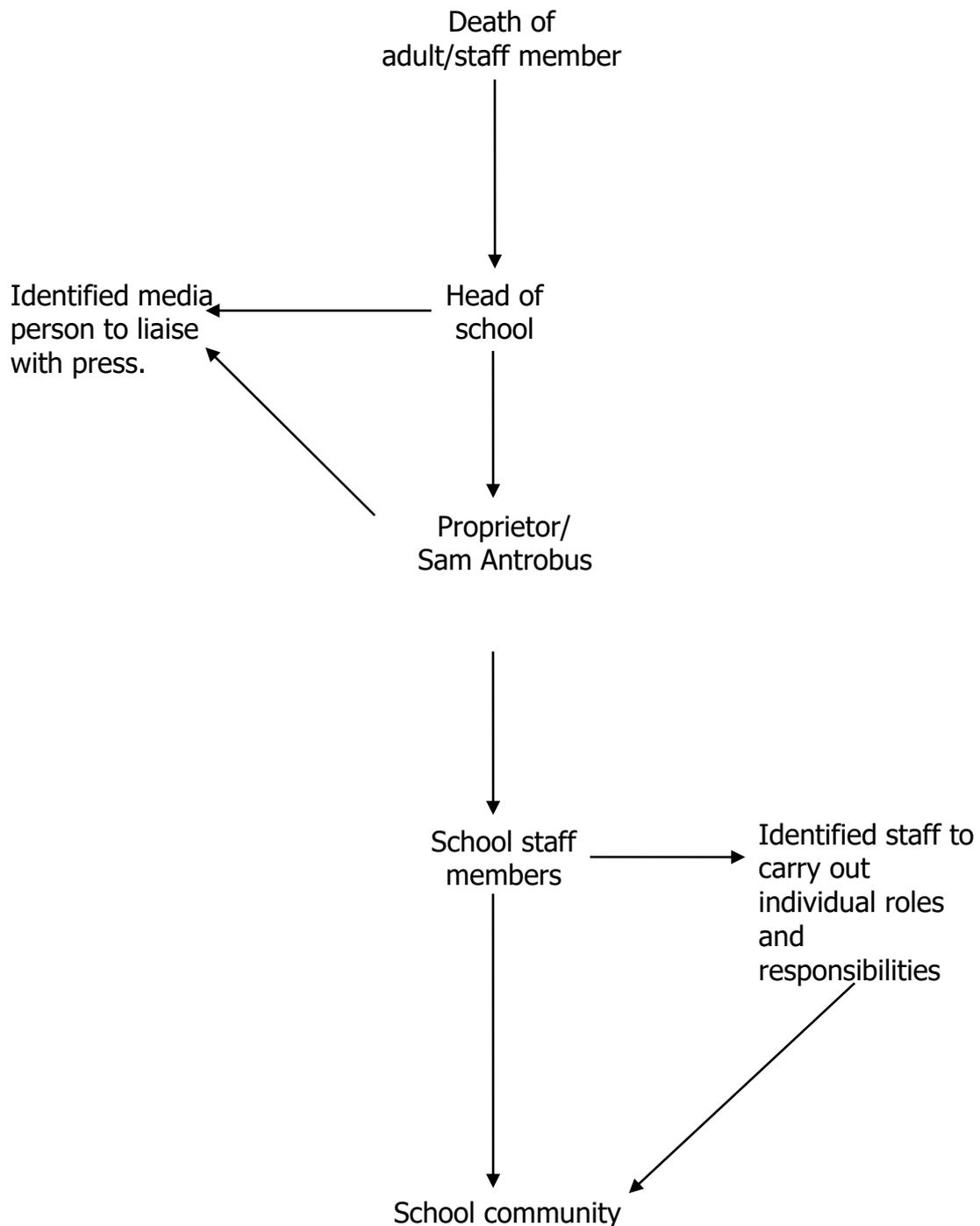
Resources

It often helps to raise difficult concepts with the children through stories. Suitable books for younger children are listed in Appendix 1.

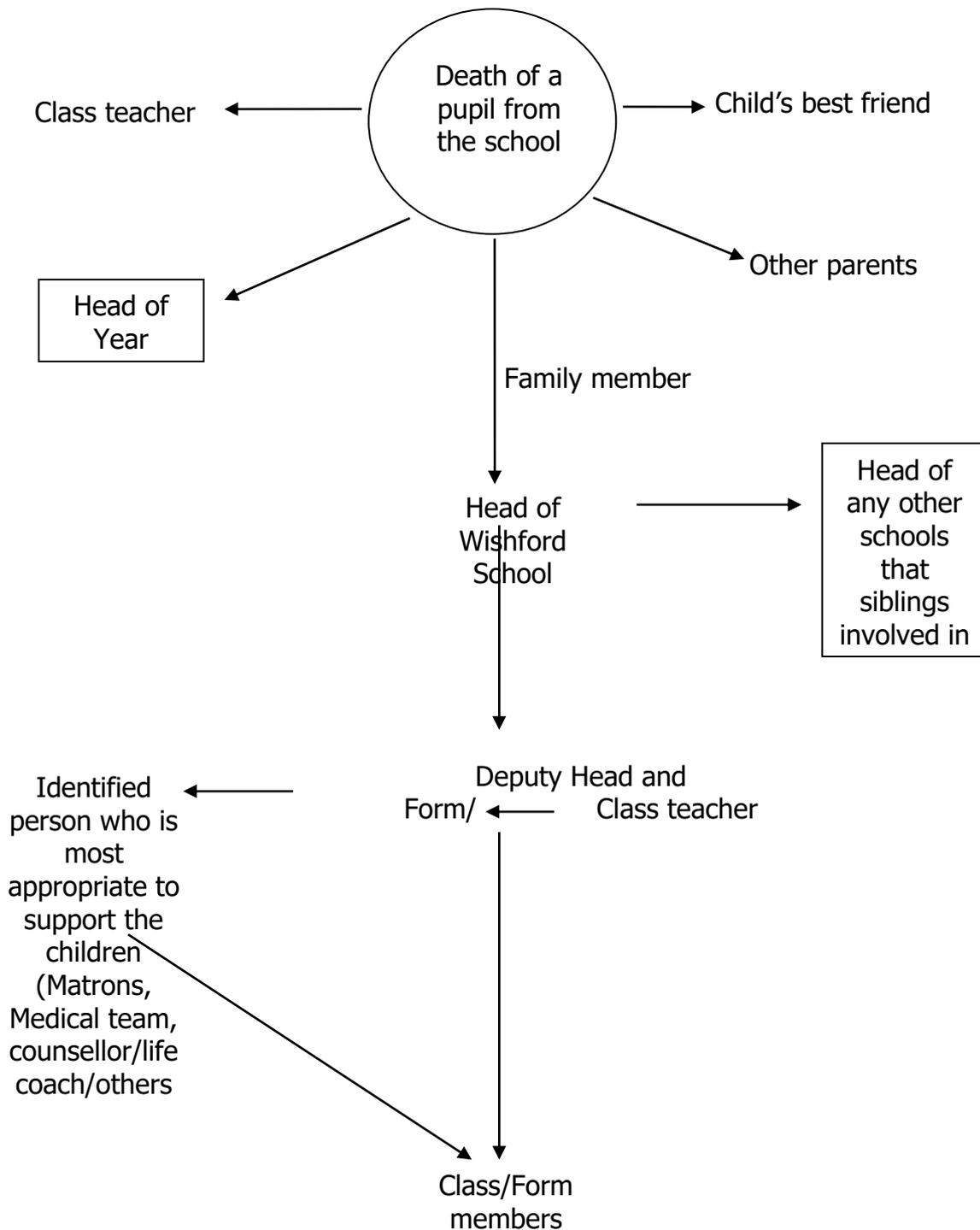
4. Information Sharing Pathway following expected or unexpected death of Head of School



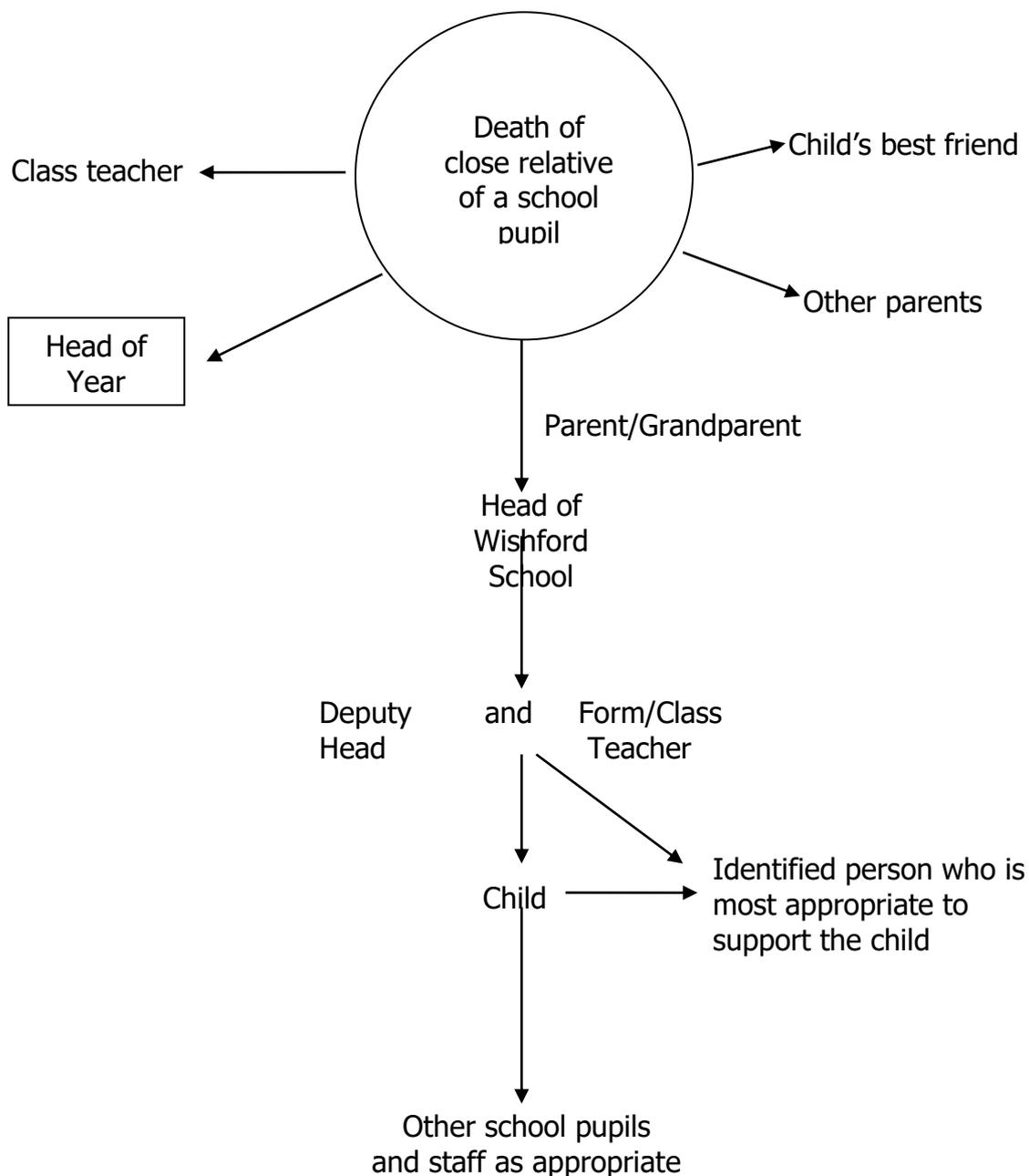
Information Sharing Pathway following expected or unexpected death of a staff member



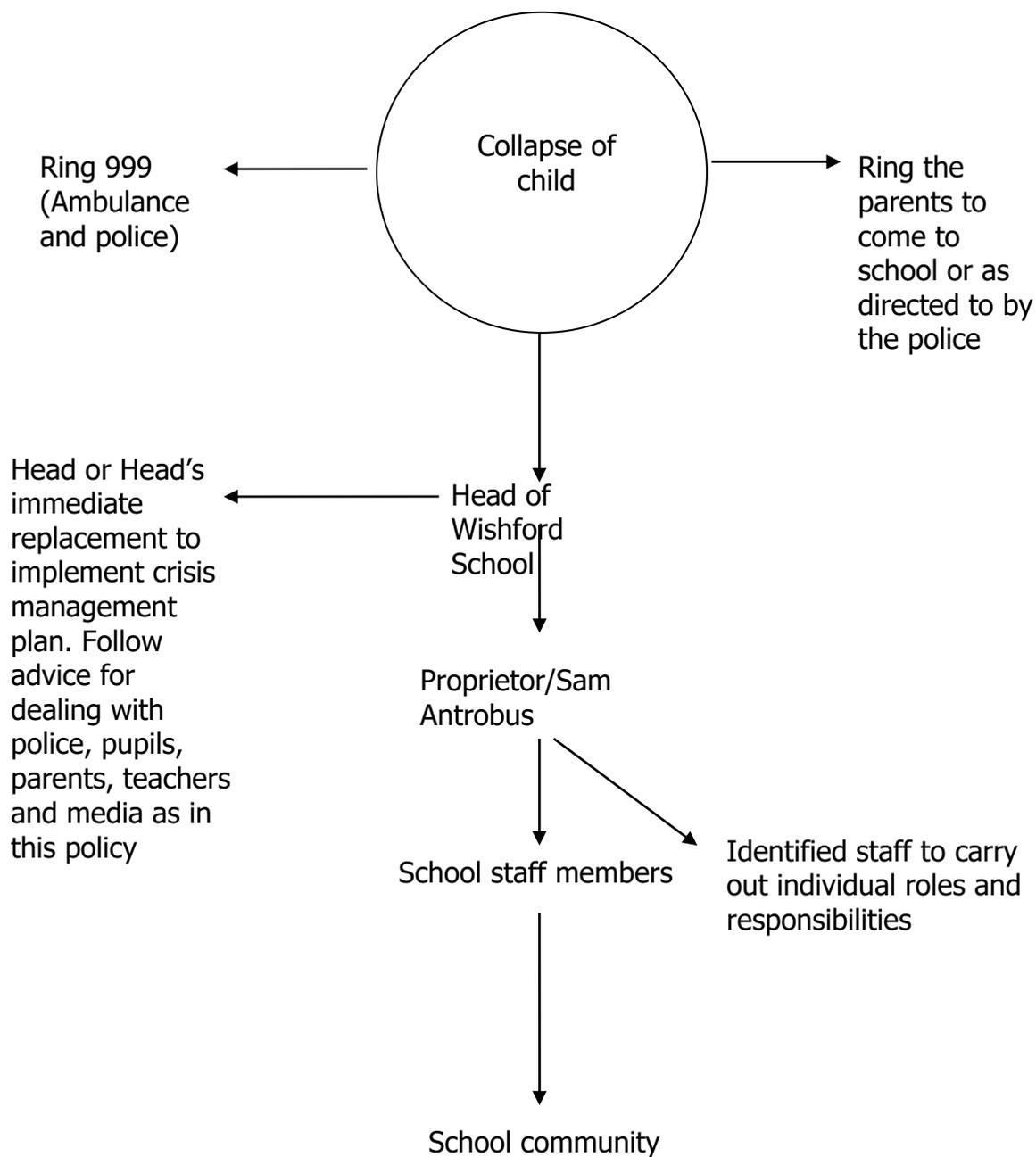
Information Sharing Pathway following expected or unexpected death of pupil



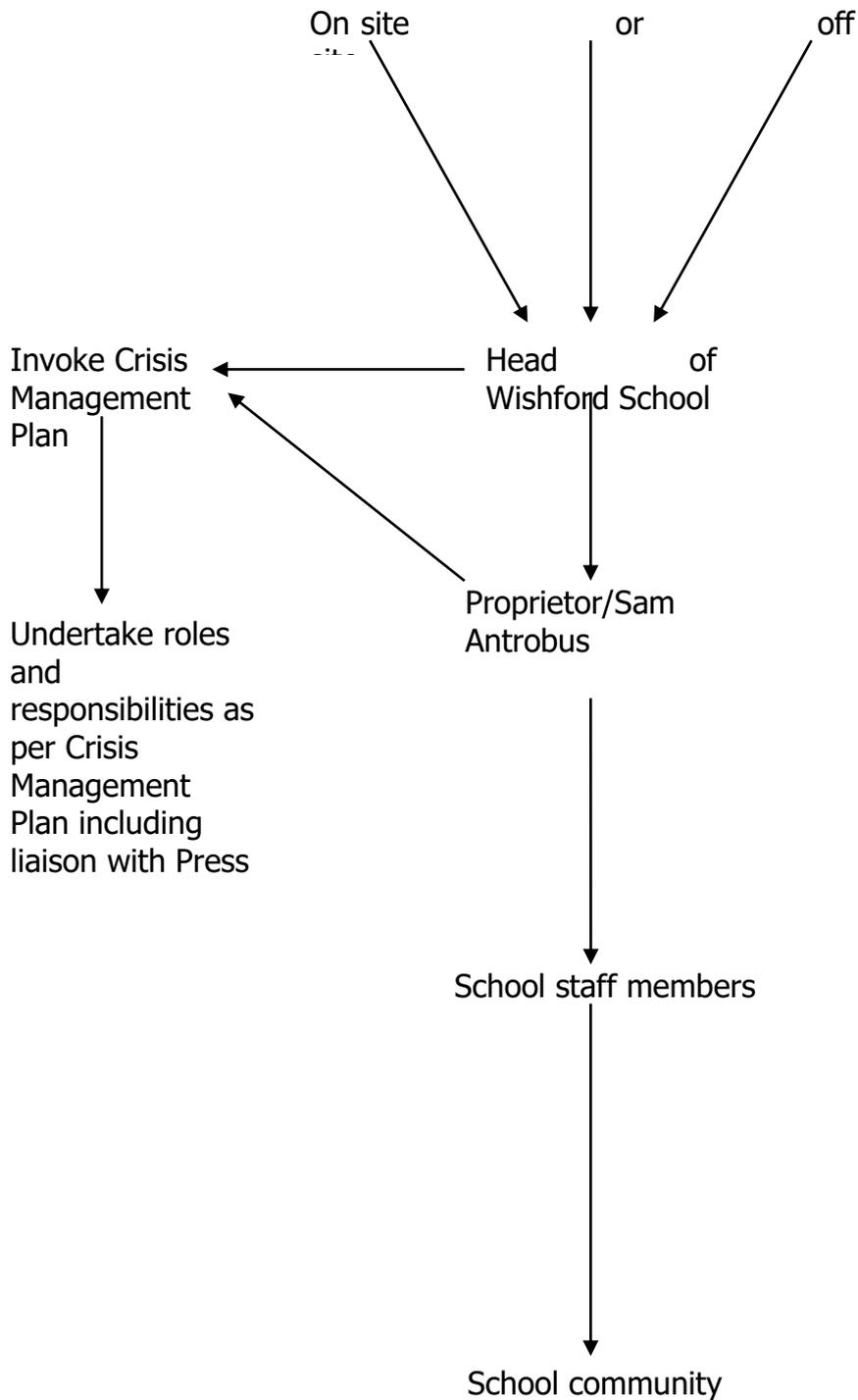
Information Sharing Pathway following expected or unexpected death of close family member of school pupil



Information Sharing Pathway following unexpected death of child in school



Information Sharing Pathway following major incidents



5. Immediate Response to an Emergency

If a child dies at school or on a school trip the Crisis Management Plan should be put into operation immediately. All staff should be aware of the key aspects of this plan. On discovery of a possible death, the member of staff should:

- 1) Call the emergency services at once, including paramedics and police.
- 2) Summon Medical Centre staff (if on site) and Head/Deputy (to activate Crisis Management Plan)
- 3) Secure scene and remain with the body until help arrives

At School

- In responding to an emergency during normal school activities it will be the responsibility of the Head to nominate as appropriate to ensure that:
 - The building, if appropriate, has been evacuated.
 - The necessary Emergency Services have been summoned.
 - A roll call has been taken to ascertain that all pupils, staff and any visitors are safe.

Off-Site Activity

It is the responsibility of the Teacher in Charge of the Group, *or*, where necessary, by delegation to another Member of Staff *or* Responsible Adult, to:

- Make sure that all members of the party are accounted for and that they are safe.
 - If there are injuries immediately establish their extent and administer appropriate first aid.
 - Call emergency services if required.
 - Ensure that the remainder of the party is adequately supervised throughout and make arrangements for their return to base, either School or Field Trip Base.
 - Arrange for at least one adult to remain at the incident site to liaise with the emergency services and to ensure that all the staff and pupils are accounted for.
 - Control access to telephones until contact is made with the Head . emergency contact point *or* designated senior member of staff and until he/she has had time to contact any parent whose children are directly involved.
- 4) It will be the job of the DSL to ensure that school records are updated and any other authorities informed.

6. Specific advice following a death for working with police, parents, children at school, teachers and media

Working with the police

Very soon after the death is announced the police should visit as they have to carry out an investigation into the circumstances.

You will need to clear rooms or spaces for them to work in.

They may want to collect evidence.

The police will normally tell the child's next of kin and will want to speak at once to the usually very upset teacher who will need someone with them and will probably need to stay at school.

The police will almost certainly tell you that you must not speculate on the cause of death. But remember that the media are under no such restriction.

Telling pupils

Where a pupil collapses during the school day when other pupils are present, is rushed to hospital and subsequently dies, those pupils will need to know what has happened before they leave at the end of the school day. We will consult with the family regarding their wishes in sharing the information with the School community.

It is important to agree with the police the timing and content of the information that you give to pupils so as to meet the needs of the pupils whilst not impeding any police investigation.

Are there any siblings, close relatives, or boy/girl friend who needs to know first? Advise them first, but only when parents are ready to collect them.

Gather the whole year group together with 20 minutes to go before the final bell. Timing is everything. The pupils will listen intently until you tell them that the pupil has died. Then they stop hearing. If the pupil has died as the result of an accident you may want to ask them not to speculate about the causes of the accident and not to spread rumours. Getting them to hear this is very difficult. Allow them ten minutes to just be together as a year group. They will need to cry. Expect that some pupils will contact the local press.

If you want teachers to tell other pupils, you should have a statement ready for them to read out before you advise them.

Telling teachers

This may have to be after you have told the key pupils. You will need to tell the teachers who were nearest to what happened first. Depending on who that teacher is, they will probably need someone with them. If you want teachers to tell other pupils for you, have a statement ready for them to read out before you advise them.

Telling parents

The police will tell the parents of the child. Getting a letter to other parents, which both expresses sympathy and gives factual information about the death, is very important. It saves the rumours, which can be intensely hurtful to other pupils, parents and teachers.

Dealing with the media

The nominated press officer should field enquiries. You may well need intense help. A press officer may be required for the whole day.

The press and local TV channels may contact the parents and they together with the press may speculate about the cause of death. This is a very hard thing to deal with, especially if a TV crew has filmed this speculation by distraught parents.

You may find you have no time to prepare interviews but aim to filter statements through the Head and Kate Ross. Keep expressing your sympathy for the parents so that editors will find it hard to cut this part of your statement.

If there is a post-mortem, this may happen very quickly, possibly within 24 hours of the death.
Ensure you are advised of the results of any post-mortem as soon as possible.
The best way to stop media speculation is to give them facts.

Main DFE Press Office number and General Enquiries: 0370 000 2288

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

<Address/Date>

Dear Parents

Your child's class teacher/form tutor/head of year had the sad task of informing the children 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

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.

<Address/Date>

Dear Parents

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 the illness we know as 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 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 <Name's> life.

Yours sincerely

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 that 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 (see bereavement toolkit).

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.
- Refer to the bereavement toolkit for further guidance.

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:-

- Remembrance book for children to sign and place for outward display of remembrance (flowers, toys etc.)
- 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 that 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 appropriate staff in advance.

Bereavement Toolkit

The Bereavement in School Toolkit is a resource to be used at The Wishford Schools offering guidance, examples and possible solutions to problems encountered on a day to day basis when trying to help bereaved children. It also includes a list of resources and useful contact details when looking for help and support.

How the school can help

- **Make sure that the right people are informed**

It is essential that all staff, including ancillary staff, know about the bereavement, so that they can respond sensitively.

- **Make sure that children are given an opportunity to discuss their feelings of bereavement with an adult that feels confident in this area and is able to give each child space for their different and normal feelings.**

When the report of the death first comes to school, it may be appropriate for the form teacher (of each bereaved sibling), to talk to the class, to create opportunities for them to ask questions and discuss how they can help their bereaved classmate. On the child's return to school, even close friends may need encouragement to voice difficult feelings, to say, "I'm sorry your brother died". One of the key 'hurts' which bereaved children recall is the feeling that few people, if any, acknowledged their loss.

Most children welcome the opportunity to talk privately to an adult about their loss. Even if the child cannot verbalise his or her feelings, it is helpful for a trusted teacher to show sympathy (without saying "I know how you feel"), and to use words like sad, lonely, upset, afraid, so that the child realises the school knows about the death. The family may be so overwhelmed by the trauma that little individual acknowledgement is given to the child's feelings when they are at home.

Some children need a retreat when grief overtakes them, and it helps if the school accepts a pupil's need to express their grief, providing a 'safe place' and a trusted adult to be with them. Once the bereaved child returns to school routine, it is helpful to share concerns with parents so that they know how he or she is coping in school. Most families appreciate some sort of direct communication from the school, especially if the child who has died was a former pupil.

Be prepared to create exceptional circumstances for particular children who need particular help. Set up clear boundaries and make it clear that you have allowed certain behaviours to happen. When the child is ready you can reverse these arrangements. A bereaved child for example may well need to be allowed to behave in a special way according to how they are dealing with the situation. The key is to try to create a normal environment for them by asking what they want to do. Drawing is a very common form of expression. It is always best to talk this through and share ideas the relevant pastoral team or the Safeguarding Officer. They will help you to decide what to share with other children.

Notes in italics from Jane Addis of Suffolk County

- **Seek creative, but sensitive ways of constructively moving the child forwards**

Books, stories, music and art can be very helpful in exploring loss, both with the class and with the bereaved child. There are many excellent books written on bereavement for different ages of children, both in the fact and fiction sections, now available from shops, libraries or the web, and many school libraries have a selection of such recommended publications. Sensitivity is needed so that deep grief is not triggered at an inappropriate time. For example, a school assembly using the book *Badger's Parting Gifts* might help the school to explore grief and loss, but not when a newly-bereaved child is present. The Scholastic book '100 Assemblies' contains some good ideas on assemblies dealing with loss and change (p.66 – 80).

- **Be aware that this is likely to take a long while and be prepared to allow for anniversaries and gestures over time**

The grief caused by the death will be long-lasting, and schools need to recognise that anniversaries and celebrations will be difficult – especially the first birthday and Christmas or other religious festivals. It will help if key dates and times are noted and passed on to the next class teacher or next school, along with other records and information. As children mature, the death is felt and questioned at new levels, both emotionally and intellectually, often causing renewed grief and distress.

Classmates, especially close friends of the bereaved boy or girl, or of the child who has died, will suffer varying grief reactions. Their teachers will probably need the support of colleagues at this time; they might need to be reassured that their ideas for giving comfort to the children are wise, and that they will be of benefit to those in their care. Many younger teachers themselves may not have experienced bereavement, especially of this kind, before.

If the dead child was a pupil at your school, you might feel it appropriate to send a representative to the child's funeral or a Memorial or Thanksgiving service – if the family are in agreement with this idea. Also, in these circumstances, the child's books and work should be kept carefully and returned to the family by a teacher at a suitable time.

Helping the school recover

This is a long-term issue. You can help a school recover through a memorial service or assembly and through the use of counsellors. Recognise that those who go to counsellors may well not be those whose need is greatest. A brother or sister may well have intense needs that appear later. It is very difficult for the school to know when to stop making allowances.

Annex A Suggested Reading

Pre-Prep/Years 3 + 4

Am I still a sister? Alicia Sims

Big A & Co, 1986. ISBN 0-9618995-0-6

Badger's parting gifts Susan Varley

HarperCollins, 1992. ISBN 000 664 3175

Remembering my brother Ginny Perkins

A&C Black, 1996 ISBN 0-7136-4541-5

Waterbugs and dragonflies Doris Stickney

Mowbray, 1997. ISBN 0 264 66904 5

Muddles, Puddles and Sunshine Diana Crossley

Hawthorn Press (2 Oct. 2000) ISBN 1869890582

Years 3 – 8

Charlotte's web E. B. White

Penguin, 1993. ISBN 014 036 4498

My brother Joey died Gloria Houston

TCF (USA), 1982. ISBN 0-671-42401-7

When someone dies: help for young people coping with grief Dwaine Steffes

Cruse Bereavement Care, 1997 (student edition). ISBN 0 900 321 113

Your friend, Rebecca Linda Hoy

Heinemann Educational, 1992. ISBN 043 512 3882

The Scar Charlotte Moundlic

Walker (7 Feb. 2013) ISBN 140634415X

Year 7 and 8 pupils — *Vicky Angel* by Jacqueline Wilson (for the loss of a friend)

Year 5 and 6 pupils – *The Heart and the Bottle* by Oliver Jeffers

Teachers

Forgotten mourners, The: Susan Smith

guidelines for working with bereaved children

Jessica Kingsley, 1999 (2nd edition). ISBN 1 85302 758 8

Good Grief – No. 2: Over 11s and adults Barbara Ward

Jessica Kingsley, 1995 (2nd edition). ISBN 1 85302 340 X

Homemade books to help kids cope: Robert Ziegler

an easy to learn technique for parents and professionals

Magination Press (USA), 1992. ISBN 0-945354-50-9

Talking with children and young people about death and dying Mary Turner

Jessica Kingsley, 1999. ISBN 1 85302 563 1

When someone dies: how schools can help bereaved students Dwaine Steffes

Cruse Bereavement Care, 1997 (teachers' edition). ISBN 0 900321 10 5

Supporting Bereaved Students in Primary and Secondary Schools — practical advice for staff is a booklet that has been developed by King's College London and the National Council for Hospice and Specialist Palliative Care Services, now the National Council for Palliative Care (NCPC). It offers advice and support to school staff and includes tips from teachers who have had experience with bereaved children. An extensive resource list is included for those who wish to look further into the issues explored or enlist further support.

The booklet can be ordered from NCPC by contacting Nick Hayes by email n.hayes@ncpc.org.uk or by telephone 020 7697 1520.

winstonswish.org is the UK's childhood bereavement charity that supports children and their families on the death of a child. They offer support to parents and schools as well and have a variety of publications to support.

Monitoring and evaluation

When an individual case arises, the policy is adhered to and therefore is monitored through this process and adjusted as required. The policy is evaluated in accordance with the policy monitoring and evaluation cycle and the date of renewal is stated on the header of this policy.

SAFEGUARDING STATEMENT

The Wishford Schools are committed to maintaining a safe and secure environment for all pupils and a 'culture of vigilance' to safeguard and protect all in its care, and to all aspects of its Safeguarding Policy.

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES STATEMENT

The aims of The Wishford Schools and the principles of excellent pastoral care will be applied to all children irrespective of differences in ethnic background, culture, language, religion, sexual orientation, gender and disabilities, so long as in the last matter the student is able to involve himself or herself in the activity concerned; equally these differences will be recognised and respected, and the School will aim to provide a positive culture of tolerance, equality and mutual respect, recognising liberty, the rule of law and different faiths and cultures.