WOODLANDS SCHOOL

Bereavement Policy

Date policy last reviewed: September 2026

Signed by:

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Statement of intent

At **Woodlands School**, we understand that bereavement is faced by members of our school community at different times, whether this is the death of a family member, a friend or a member of the school community. We understand the importance of providing support to pupils, staff, governors and the wider school community during and after bereavement.

This policy provides a framework whereby this support is provided and outlines how the school will respond to these sensitive situations.

Please note: In this policy, all mentions of 'the family' refer to the family of the deceased individual. The wishes of the family will always be considered when carrying out any of the actions outlined in this policy. If the family objects to any of the procedures, the school will work to ensure reasonable adjustments are made.

1. Legal framework

DfE (2026) 'Keeping children safe in education'
Employment Rights Bill (2025) – Extending statutory bereavement leave to close relatives and pregnancy loss before 24 weeks.
Paternity Leave (Bereavement) Act 2024.

This policy has due regard to all relevant legislation and statutory guidance including, but not limited to, the following:

- Children Act 1989
- Employment Rights Act 2025
- Equality Act 2010
- Parental Bereavement (Leave and Pay) Act 2018
- The Parental Bereavement Leave Regulations 2020

This policy has been created with due regard to the following guidance:

- DfE (2026) 'Keeping children safe in education 2026'
- Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (2018) 'Good Work Plan'
- DfE (2018) 'Mental health and behaviour in schools'
- Winston's Wish (2019) 'A Guide to Supporting Grieving Children and Young People in Education'
- Winston's Wish (2019) 'A Strategy for Schools: Positive Responses to Death'
- Samaritans (2017) 'Help When We Needed it Most'
- Child Bereavement UK (2018) 'Schools' Information Pack'

This policy operates in conjunction with the following school policies:

- Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy
- Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) Policy
- Behaviour Support Policy
- Anti-bullying Policy
- Disciplinary Policy and Procedure
- Maternity, Paternity, Adoption Paternal and Parental Bereavement Leave Policy
- Social Media Policy

2. Roles and responsibilities

The governing board will be responsible for:

- Overseeing the implementation of this policy.
- Reviewing this policy with the headteacher on an annual basis to ensure its effectiveness.

The headteacher will be responsible for:

- The overall implementation of this policy.
- Liaising with external agencies, as appropriate.
- Informing governors and staff when a death occurs and arranging for pupils to be informed, as appropriate and with approval from the family.
- Being the first point of contact for staff, pupils and parents directly involved in a death, or designating this role to another appropriate member of staff.
- Responding to any enquiries from the media or the wider school community, or appointing a member of staff to undertake these duties.
- Ensuring staff have the necessary training to support bereaved pupils and to deliver sensitive news.

Pastoral staff will be responsible for:

- Undertaking bereavement support training and conducting in-school training to share their knowledge with other staff.
- Supporting the headteacher in carrying out the procedures outlined in this policy.
- Supporting staff, pupils and parents following a death, as directed by the headteacher.
- Supporting other staff members with communicating the news of a death.
- Making referrals for pupils, staff and other members of the school community to receive support.

The media spokesperson will be responsible for:

- Liaising with the media as required.
- Monitoring media and social media activity regarding the death.
- Respecting the family's wishes in relation to what information can be provided to the media.

All staff members will be responsible for:

- Undertaking any bereavement support training arranged by the headteacher or pastoral staff.
- Seeking support from pastoral staff as appropriate.
- Supporting their colleagues and pupils following a death, as appropriate.

3. The initial response

If the family or member of staff contacts the school to inform them of a death, the member of staff that answers the phone will transfer the call to the headteacher or the most senior member of staff available.

If the school is made aware of the death through a source other than the family, the headteacher will contact the family either by phone or through a home visit.

The headteacher will gather factual information about what has happened and establish the family's wishes with regards to what information will be communicated to the school community and how.

If a death affects the entire school, e.g. the death of a pupil or member of staff, the headteacher will inform the family that staff and pupils will be informed as soon as possible.

If the death affects an individual member of staff, e.g. the death of a relative, the headteacher will ask the member of staff if they would like this to be communicated to any of their colleagues. If it is decided that the death will be communicated, the headteacher will discuss with the staff member what information will be communicated and how they would like it to be delivered.

If a death affects an individual pupil, e.g. the death of a parent, the headteacher will ask the family if they would like this to be communicated to the school community. If it is decided that the death will be communicated, the headteacher will discuss with the family, and the pupil if possible, what information will be communicated and how the family would like it to be delivered.

If the death of a pupil's family member occurs while the pupil is at school, a member of the pupil's family will be asked to come to the school to inform the pupil of what has happened and to take them home. If this is not possible, arrangements will be made for a member of staff to take the pupil home.

The headteacher will make contact with any other agencies as required, e.g. the police, and will decide if any temporary variation needs to be made to the school timetable, e.g. rearranging or cancelling certain lessons.

In the event of the death of the headteacher, the deputy headteacher will be responsible for the duties outlined above.

4. Informing staff and governors

Staff and governors will be informed of the death before pupils. All staff and governors will be invited to a meeting by the headteacher as soon as practicable. Absent staff and governors, including part-time and peripatetic staff, will be identified so they can be informed as soon as possible. If it is not possible for absent staff to be told in person, a phone call will be arranged.

Any information provided to staff and governors during the meeting will have prior approval from the family.

During the meeting, the headteacher, with the support of pastoral staff, will:

- Explain what happened leading up to the death.
- Give a factual explanation of how the death occurred.
- Allow time for staff and governors to discuss what has happened and how they feel.
- Designate a member of staff as media spokesperson who will be responsible for liaising with the media as required.
- Identify what internal and external support is available to staff and governors.
- Discuss the arrangements for informing pupils, including whether all pupils will be told and who will be responsible for informing them.

Staff members that will be responsible for informing pupils about the death will be provided with a script which sets out what pupils should be told and includes information on how to answer some difficult questions. The headteacher and relevant pastoral staff will create the script, with input from the family.

5. Informing pupils

The headteacher will have a discussion with the family about whether some pupils need to be informed about the death. It may be more appropriate to just inform certain groups of pupils. The headteacher will make the final decision regarding which pupils will be informed.

Where possible, pupils will be informed about the death in small groups at the same time by a member of staff that is familiar to them, e.g. during form time.

Pupils with specific needs that may influence their response to being informed about the death will be identified and told separately.

Where possible, a member of pastoral staff will be present when pupils are told about a death so they can help with answering any questions. Pupils will be given time to ask questions about what has happened and to talk about how they are feeling. Any questions that are asked by pupils will be answered factually. Pupils will be told who they can go to in school for support and will also be directed to any external support.

6. Informing parents

The headteacher will have a discussion with the family about whether any parents need to be informed about the death. If the death affects the whole school, e.g. the death of a staff member or pupil, the headteacher will strongly recommend to the family that all parents should be informed; however, if the death does not affect the whole school, it may be more appropriate to just inform parents that are directly affected, if any.

A nominated member of staff will compose a letter to parents about the death. The letter will contain the basic, factual information about the death, information about how the school is supporting pupils, how they can support their children, and who to direct questions or concerns to.

7. Funerals

If appropriate, the headteacher will discuss with the family whether any staff, governors or pupils are able to attend the funeral. With the family's approval, the headteacher will arrange for the school to be represented at the funeral and identify which staff and pupils may want to attend.

The headteacher and chair of governors will decide if it is necessary for the school to be fully or partially closed during the funeral. Transportation to and from the funeral will be arranged for staff and pupils, as appropriate. Necessary cover arrangements will be made for staff attending the funeral.

8. The media and social media

Any communication with the media or social media activity will be agreed with the family. The school will follow the Blackpool's media policies at all times. Only the appointed media spokesperson will deal with media enquiries and communications. Staff, governors and pupils will not respond to any media enquiries themselves or make any public statements about the death.

Staff, governors and pupils will not post any information about the death on social media. The media spokesperson will investigate any post made regarding the death and will refer any concerns to the headteacher. If information about the death is circulated on social media prior to the school making an official statement, the headteacher and media spokesperson will release a statement on the school's social media channels, with the agreement of the family, to prevent rumours from spreading.

Comments and other activity on school-posted social media statements will be monitored and moderated by the media spokesperson. If staff, governors or pupils find any false, negative or malicious information being posted about the death on social media, they will report this to the headteacher.

If a member of staff is found to have been posting content on social media or providing information to the media that is false, negative or malicious, action will be taken in line with the Disciplinary Policy and Procedure. If a pupil is found to have been posting content on social media or providing information to the media that is false, negative or malicious, action will be taken in line with the Behaviour Policy.

9. Support for the family

The headteacher will be the main point of contact between the school and the family, or will appoint another member of staff to this role where necessary. The headteacher will invite the family into the school to discuss how the school can best support them. The family's wishes and feelings will always be considered and respected when making decisions and conducting activities relating to the death.

Any support that is put in place will be decided on a case-by-case basis, depending on the family's needs and wishes. Support may include, but is not limited to, the following:

- Sending a letter of condolence
- Giving the family the opportunity to collect any personal belongings of the person who has died
- Inviting the family to commemorative events held by the school

10. Support for staff

Staff experiencing the bereavement of a close family member (including partners, parents, or siblings) will be entitled to at least one week of unpaid bereavement leave, in line with the forthcoming Employment Rights Bill (2025).
Staff affected by pregnancy loss before 24 weeks may be granted discretionary paid or unpaid bereavement leave in accordance with emerging statutory guidance.
The school will review this policy annually to incorporate future statutory bereavement leave entitlements as they are enacted.

Staff directly affected by the death, e.g. if they are a relative or close friend of the individual that has died, will be identified and the appropriate support will be put in place. The level of support will be decided on a case-by-case basis by the headteacher, and may include the following:

- Ensuring the staff member is supported by their colleagues
- Arranging for lessons or other duties to be covered

- Organising bereavement leave

Any member of staff who loses a child under the age of 18, or suffers a stillbirth from 24 weeks of pregnancy, irrespective of how long they have worked at the school, will be given a minimum of two weeks' paid bereavement leave; if the staff member has been employed at the school for at least 26 weeks up to the end of the 'relevant week' (i.e. the week, ending with a Saturday, immediately before the week of the death or stillbirth), they will be able to claim Statutory Parental Bereavement Pay (SPBP). To be eligible, the staff member must also:

- Continue to be employed up to the day the child dies or is stillborn.
- Earn on average £123 a week before tax over an 8-week period.
- Give the school the correct notice and information for SPBP.

Staff may take bereavement leave as either a single block of two weeks, or as two separate blocks of one week, each taken at different times across the first year after their child's death.

Staff members will be eligible for SPBP if they meet the government's eligibility criteria in its 'Statutory Parental Bereavement Pay and Leave' guidance. The government's tables showing relevant weeks and start dates for SPBP will be used to check staff members' entitlement to SPBP, and when it should be paid.

Full details regarding bereavement leave and SPBP can be found in the school's Maternity, Paternity, Adoption and Parental Leave Policy. Any member of staff who loses a child after 24 weeks of pregnancy, or during maternity leave, will not lose their entitlement to maternity leave and pay.

All staff members will be offered the opportunity to speak to a member of the pastoral team one-to-one. Staff members will be given information about the in-school and external support they can access.

A designated room will be made available to staff where they can go during break and lunchtimes to meet with other staff and share their thoughts and feelings. Staff will be vigilant to the signs that indicate their colleagues have been affected by bereavement and will offer them support or make a referral to a member of pastoral staff.

11. Support for pupils

Pupils that have experienced a significant bereavement, e.g. of a family member

A member of staff that is familiar with the pupil will be appointed to act as their main point of contact – the pupil will be made aware of who the staff member is. The headteacher will contact the pupil's family to discuss whether the pupil will be attending school. Any support put in place for a pupil will be pupil-led, based on their needs and wishes.

When deciding what support will be put in place for a pupil, the impact the death will have on the pupil will always be considered in the context of pre-existing factors. The following contextual factors will be considered:

- The circumstances surrounding the death, e.g. was it under traumatic circumstances, was the death expected, or did multiple people die?
- The relationship between the pupil and the person who has died

- The ability of the pupil's family to support them following the death, e.g. if a pupil's parent has died, how able is the surviving parent to support the pupil?
- Family factors such as size, financial state, structure, style of coping, communication and stressors that affect the child
- The support the pupil has from their peers and other organisations and people
- Characteristics of the pupil, including their age and any SEND they have

The pupil will be a part of discussions regarding who should be informed about the death and how, where appropriate.

If a pupil chooses to attend school immediately after a bereavement, they will be allowed a flexible timetable and staff members will be made aware that the pupil may not be able to work to their usual capacity. The designated staff member will keep in communication with the pupil's family to inform them about how the pupil is doing. If the pupil is absent from school following the bereavement, they will be made aware of who has been informed about what has happened and what they were told.

The designated staff member will make regular contact with the pupil during their absence. The headteacher, designated staff member, pupil and the pupil's family will make arrangements for the pupil's return to school, e.g. a phased return.

If a death occurs soon before or during a time where the pupil will take an exam, the headteacher will report the circumstances to the exam board who will decide if special considerations apply. If a pupil misses an exam due to the death of a close family member or friend, the headteacher will report this to the appropriate exam board who will then make a decision as to whether special considerations can be applied.

Any safeguarding concerns regarding a bereaved pupil will be dealt with in line with the Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy.

Support for all pupils

All pupils, even those not directly affected by the death, will need to be supported following a death, particularly if the death affects the whole school community, e.g. the death of a staff member. Pupils will be given the opportunity to speak to a member of pastoral staff. Staff will talk to pupils about what has happened using age-appropriate and developmental stage appropriate language.

Following a death in the school community, pupils will be invited to take part in remembrance activities, e.g. remembrance assemblies.

Staff will identify any pupils that may need more direct support and make a referral to the headteacher who will assess what support might be required in collaboration with pastoral staff.

12. Behaviour and SEMH issues

Staff will remain vigilant to the following behaviours that a pupil may display immediately after the death of someone close to them:

- Inability to concentrate

- Lack of motivation
- Tiredness and irritability
- Heightened sensitivity to comments and remarks
- Inability to take others' feelings into account
- Anger, frustration or aggression
- A general change in behaviour, e.g. becoming unnaturally quiet or withdrawn
- Anxiety
- Being easily upset by events that would normally not affect them
- Physical complaints, such as headaches, stomach aches and a general tendency to be prone to minor illness

The pupil's designated staff member will keep in contact with the pupil's family and share information about how the pupil is behaving at school and home. Any challenging behaviour displayed by bereaved pupils will be addressed using the individual graduated response outlined in the Behaviour Policy.

A record will be made of anniversaries and days with regards to the death which may act as a trigger for challenging behaviour.

Any incidents of bullying, where a bereaved pupil is the victim or perpetrator, will be addressed in line with the Anti-bullying Policy, taking into account the pupil's needs and circumstances.

The headteacher will ensure that all staff members are aware of the lasting impact that bereavement can have on a pupil's mental health, behaviour and education.

All staff members will remain vigilant to signs that a bereaved pupil is facing difficulties in relation to their psychological, physical and social development and will refer the pupil to pastoral staff who will put appropriate support in place. The school's Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) Policy will be followed to ensure pupils that may be vulnerable to developing or experiencing SEMH issues following a bereavement can be identified and appropriately supported.

13. Specific circumstances

The procedures outlined in this policy will be followed for all deaths affecting the school community and individual pupils; however, specific measures will be implemented for certain circumstances.

Pre-bereavement – when a family member is not expected to live

If a pupil has an illness where they are not expected to live, their family will make the school aware of the situation and the school will ensure the appropriate support is in place. A member of pastoral staff will meet with the pupil fortnightly to provide the pupil with an opportunity to talk about what is happening and how they are feeling.

All staff will remain vigilant to signs that the pupil is facing challenges in relation to their psychological, physical and social development and will refer any concerns to pastoral staff who will ensure appropriate support is put in place.

Pupils with a life-threatening illness

Pupils with life-threatening illnesses will be encouraged to take part in school routines as much as possible, and the school will continue to expect the usual standards of behaviour as appropriate.

The headteacher, the pupil and their family, and other relevant staff members (e.g. a member of pastoral staff) will decide how to share the news that a pupil is terminally ill with the school community. Other pupils will be informed about how they can best support the pupil in the most appropriate way.

If the pupil is receiving treatment from a local hospice or hospital, the key professional responsible for the pupil will be identified and the headteacher will contact this person for advice and support as necessary.

Suicide

The school will respond to a suspected suicide within 48 hours. The headteacher, or other appointed member of staff, will contact the police or the family as soon as possible to confirm the death and whether it is being treated as a suicide.

If the family does not wish the cause of death to be disclosed to the school community, the school will state that the nature and cause of death are still being determined and that additional information will be forthcoming. If the death is subject to an ongoing investigation, the headteacher will check with the police before speaking about the death with pupils who may need to be interviewed by the police.

Staff will be told about the death first, in line with the Informing staff and governors section of this policy. The script that staff will use to inform pupils of the death will be factual while avoiding excessive detail about the suicidal act itself.

Immediate emotional support will be arranged for any pupils and staff who require it. A designated room will be set up where pupils and staff can go to if they are struggling with the news.

Liaison with the media will be handled in line with The media and social media section of this policy. Any information distributed to the school community and media regarding the death will:

- Be factually correct but not include detail of the cause of death or method used.
- Not romanticise, glorify or vilify the death.
- Not include details of any suicide note.
- Not include speculation over the motivation for suicide.

Research indicates that pupils that have been directly affected by suicide are at an increased risk of taking their own life. Staff will report any concerns about pupils to the headteacher and the appropriate support will be put in place or a referral to specialist services will be made in line with the Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) Policy.

Cultural and religious behaviours

The school will keep in mind the cultural attitudes and behaviours relating to a death and will make sure these needs are taken into consideration when putting support in place for those affected, including the length of bereavement leave for members of staff.

Forces' families

The needs and feelings of bereaved forces' pupils will always be considered prior to any school activities relating to the armed forces, e.g. commemorating Armed Forces Day, and additional support will be put in place for pupils as required.

Appropriate support will be implemented for bereaved forces' pupils, particularly during times of change. Bereaved forces' pupils will be protected from any unwanted media attention and there will be a designated area in school that the pupil can go to if they are feeling overwhelmed.

A death involving murder or manslaughter

The headteacher will contact the police or the family to establish the facts about what has happened. A designated staff member will be available to talk to the pupil to help them to answer any questions they may get from their peers about what has happened.

Research indicates that pupils that have been bereaved due to murder or manslaughter can be at significant risk of developing PTSD. Any concerns relating to the pupil will be addressed in line with the Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) Policy. Media personnel will not be permitted onto the school site at any time.

14. Remembrance activities

Following a death in the school community, the school may conduct some remembrance activities, e.g. a remembrance assembly. The family will always be consulted prior to any remembrance activities being planned and will be invited to take part in the activities.

All members of the school community, including staff, governors, pupils and parents, will be invited to take part in remembrance activities. All remembrance activities will be planned so that they are respectful of the culture and religious beliefs of the family.

Pupils and staff will be warned about the risks of un-moderated online memorials (e.g. those on social media), such as their comments becoming public without their permission and online memorials attracting negative comments.

15. Managing transitions

Information about pupils that have been bereaved will be recorded. This information will be shared with relevant parties at key transition points, including the following:

- If the pupil moves school
- If the pupil moves class
- When the pupil will be taught by a new teacher

Good communication will be established with feeder schools so pupils that have experienced bereavement can be identified.

16. Teaching about bereavement and grief

Different aspects of the curriculum will be used to discuss relationships, feelings and emotions, and to think about how to manage these in relation to family events and death. Before delivering any lessons that cover topics of death and bereavement, the teacher will consider how the lesson may affect the bereaved pupils they are teaching.

Bereaved pupils and their families will be consulted over whether it is appropriate for them to attend lessons about death or bereavement, and alternative arrangements or additional support will be put in place as required. Where appropriate, the teacher will discuss what the lesson is going to cover with the pupil and will work with the pupil to design activities that the pupil feels they are able to get involved with.

Any lessons covering topics of death or bereavement will take account of religious and cultural beliefs.

17. Staff training

All pastoral staff can access training in bereavement support.

18. Monitoring and review

Updated October 2026 to reflect new national guidance and pending statutory developments regarding bereavement leave.

This policy will be reviewed on an annual basis by the governing board and headteacher.

Any changes to this policy will be communicated to all staff members and all relevant stakeholders.

The next scheduled review date for this policy is September 2027