



Bereavement Policy

Compassionate support for pupils families and staff

Policy owner	Headteacher and Designated Safeguarding Lead
Approved by	Local Governing Body
Policy date	September 2026
Next review	September 2027
Applies to	Pupils, families, staff, governors and volunteers

Our Mission

"We are proud of our school as a place of learning, prayer and happiness. Hand in hand with God, Our Lady and St. Joseph, we promise to work hard and be kind to one another so that we can grow stronger together in our faith."

This policy provides a framework. Every response will be adapted sensitively to the individual circumstances and the wishes of those directly affected.

1 Purpose and statement of intent

Bereavement may affect any member of the St Joseph's community. A death may be expected or sudden and may involve a family member, friend, pupil, member of staff or another significant person. Grief is individual: there is no single pattern, timetable or correct way to respond.

Our Catholic faith calls us to respond with compassion, dignity, prayer and practical care. This policy sets out a calm, coordinated and safeguarding-led framework for communication and support. It aims to reduce uncertainty, respect privacy, maintain appropriate routines and help pupils, families and staff access support over time.

The wishes of the bereaved family or individual will be central, but the school may need to share limited information or take safeguarding action where required by law, safety or operational necessity. Information will be shared only with those who need it and in accordance with data protection principles.

2 Principles

- Use clear, truthful and age-appropriate language; avoid euphemisms that may confuse children.
- Confirm facts before communicating and do not speculate.
- Agree communication with the family wherever possible and protect personal information.
- Recognise that grief may affect learning, attendance, behaviour, health and relationships at different times.
- Offer support without forcing a pupil or adult to talk, grieve publicly or take part in remembrance activities.
- Maintain familiar routines where possible while allowing reasonable flexibility.
- Respect Catholic practice alongside the religion, belief, culture and wishes of each family.

- Respond promptly to safeguarding, mental health or welfare concerns and seek specialist help when needed.
- Review support at transition points, anniversaries and other dates that may be significant.

3 Legal and guidance framework

This policy has regard to:

- The Children Act 1989 and Children Act 2004.
- Keeping Children Safe in Education 2026 and Working Together to Safeguard Children.
- The Equality Act 2010 and Public Sector Equality Duty.
- The UK General Data Protection Regulation and Data Protection Act 2018.
- The Education Act 1996 and current statutory school attendance guidance.
- The Employment Rights Act 1996, Parental Bereavement Leave and Pay Regulations 2020 and Parental Bereavement Leave and Pay Act 2018.
- Department for Education guidance on mental health and behaviour in schools.
- Specialist guidance from Child Bereavement UK, Winston's Wish and Samaritans Step by Step.

4 Roles and responsibilities

4.1 Local Governing Body

- approves and monitors this policy;
- seeks assurance that safeguarding, communication and support arrangements are effective; and
- ensures the policy is reviewed following a significant incident or change in guidance.

4.2 Headteacher

- leads the school's response or appoints a suitably senior coordinator;
- confirms information, contacts the family and agrees communication wherever possible;
- notifies the academy trust, governors, diocese, local authority, emergency services or other agencies where appropriate;
- decides any temporary changes to staffing, timetable, events or school opening;
- coordinates media communication with the academy trust; and
- ensures appropriate pupil, family and staff support and review.

4.3 Designated Safeguarding Lead

- advises on safeguarding, information sharing and vulnerable pupils;
- ensures concerns and disclosures are recorded and acted upon;
- coordinates referrals to children's social care, health or other services where thresholds are met; and
- supports risk assessment following a sudden or traumatic death.

4.4 Pastoral SEND and attendance staff

- help identify needs and plan proportionate support;
- agree adjustments, attendance and return-to-school arrangements with families;
- support staff working directly with a bereaved pupil; and
- monitor wellbeing, engagement and progress over time.

4.5 All staff

- follow the agreed communication plan and protect confidentiality;
- use sensitive, factual and age-appropriate language;
- notice changes in wellbeing, behaviour, attendance or learning;
- report safeguarding or welfare concerns promptly; and

- seek support if they are personally affected.

5 Immediate response

When the school receives news of a death, the member of staff receiving the information will pass it immediately and privately to the Headteacher or most senior leader available. Staff will not share unverified information.

The Headteacher or nominated lead will:

- verify the information with the family or an appropriate official source;
- express condolences and identify one named school contact for the family;
- ask what may be shared, with whom, by whom and when;
- establish whether the family has cultural, religious, communication or accessibility needs;
- identify pupils and adults who may be directly affected or particularly vulnerable;
- consider immediate safeguarding, medical, operational and staffing needs;
- contact the academy trust and other agencies where appropriate; and
- record key decisions, agreed wording and actions securely.

If a pupil must be told while at school, the school will normally ask a parent, carer or close family member to attend and tell the child in a quiet, private place. If this is impossible, the Headteacher will agree the safest alternative with the family. A pupil will not normally be transported home by a member of staff unless this is specifically authorised and risk assessed under school procedures.

If the Headteacher is the person who has died or is unavailable, the Deputy Headteacher or designated senior trust representative will lead the response.

6 Communication

6.1 Staff and governors

Staff who need the information will be told before pupils, preferably in person or by direct telephone contact. This includes relevant part-time, peripatetic, wraparound and agency staff. Communication will give only agreed facts, explain what pupils will be told, identify vulnerable individuals, set out available support and remind everyone about confidentiality and media enquiries.

6.2 Pupils

Pupils will normally be told by familiar adults in class or small groups using agreed wording. The school will avoid large assemblies unless the circumstances and family's wishes make this the most appropriate option. The bereaved pupil will be consulted, where appropriate, about what classmates are told and whether they wish to be present.

Staff will use the words "died" and "death" sensitively, give simple factual information, allow questions and acknowledge that people may react differently. Staff will not share unnecessary detail. Pupils will be told who they can speak to and where they can go for support.

6.3 Parents and carers

Where the wider pupil community is affected, the school will send a carefully agreed communication explaining what has happened, how pupils have been informed, what support is available, how adults can speak with children and who to contact with concerns. Communications will avoid identifying information beyond that agreed with the family or required for safety.

6.4 Media social media and rumours

Only the Headteacher, academy trust communications lead or another authorised spokesperson will respond to media enquiries. Staff and governors must not make public statements or share information, images or speculation through personal social media. Pupils will be reminded sensitively about privacy,

respectful online behaviour and the risks of rumours. Harmful or unsafe online content will be addressed under safeguarding, behaviour and online safety procedures.

7 Support for a bereaved pupil

A familiar key adult will be agreed with the pupil and family. Support will be based on conversation and observation rather than assumptions. The plan may include:

- a named person and agreed way to ask for time or help;
- a quiet, supervised space for short periods;
- a flexible timetable, reduced workload or temporary adjustments to homework;
- advance warning of lessons, books, celebrations or events that may be difficult;
- pastoral, ELSA or Faith in Families support where available and appropriate;
- regular but unobtrusive check-ins;
- support with friendships, questions from peers and significant dates; and
- referral to specialist bereavement, health or mental health services with appropriate consent, or immediately where safeguarding requires it.

The pupil will not be expected to work at their usual level immediately, but adults will maintain warm, realistic expectations and preserve access to learning and belonging. Support will be reviewed and reduced, continued or changed according to need.

8 Attendance and return to school

Bereavement may affect attendance, but absence is not assumed to be the best or only response. The school will work with the family to understand needs, explain attendance arrangements and enable a supported return as soon as appropriate. Plans may include a phased or flexible return, a morning welcome, access to the key adult and reduced demands for a short period.

Attendance decisions and coding will follow current statutory guidance and the school attendance policy. The school will maintain sensitive contact during absence and avoid creating additional pressure. Persistent difficulty returning to school will prompt a coordinated support plan and, where appropriate, work with health, early help or other services.

9 Understanding grief behaviour and mental health

Children may move in and out of grief and may show changes in concentration, sleep, energy, physical complaints, anxiety, sadness, irritability, anger, withdrawal, play, behaviour or attainment. Responses may appear immediately or later and may recur around transitions and significant dates. These signs do not by themselves indicate a mental health disorder.

Staff will respond with curiosity, calm boundaries and appropriate adjustments. Bereavement will be considered when applying the behaviour policy, but it will not mean that unsafe or harmful behaviour is ignored. The school will use a graduated, relational response that protects the pupil and others while teaching and reinforcing safe behaviour.

Any indication that a pupil may be at risk of harm, unable to keep themselves safe or experiencing serious or persistent mental health difficulties will be reported immediately to the DSL and managed under safeguarding procedures. Emergency help will be sought where there is an immediate risk.

10 Inclusion SEND culture and faith

Grief is experienced and expressed differently. The school will take account of age, developmental level, communication, attachment, SEND, previous loss, family circumstances, culture, religion and belief. Adults will avoid judging how a pupil or family “should” grieve.

For pupils with SEND, support may include visual explanations, social stories, concrete and repeated language, preparation for changes, sensory regulation, alternative communication and consultation with

parents and professionals. Reasonable adjustments will be recorded and reviewed. Information will be provided in accessible formats or with interpretation where needed.

Catholic prayer, liturgy and pastoral care may be offered, but participation will not be forced. The school will respect the funeral, mourning and remembrance traditions of other faiths and beliefs and will consult the family before arranging religious or commemorative activity.

11 Family support and partnership

The school will appoint one named contact to reduce the burden of repeated conversations. The family's wishes will be revisited because they may change. Support may include condolence communication, practical help with school routines, signposting, arrangements for belongings, attendance at a funeral or memorial, and sensitive contact around anniversaries or transitions.

The school will not promise services it cannot provide or pressure a family to accept contact, counselling, prayer or remembrance. Consent will be obtained before making routine referrals or sharing information, except where safeguarding or another lawful duty requires action.

12 Support for staff

The Headteacher will identify staff who are directly affected and consider immediate cover, workload, supervision and wellbeing needs. Staff will be offered a private conversation and signposted to the academy trust's employee assistance, occupational health, trade union, chaplaincy or other support where available.

Leave, pay and flexible working arrangements will follow the academy trust's current employment policies and statutory entitlements. Employees who experience the death of a child under 18, or a stillbirth after 24 weeks of pregnancy, are entitled to Parental Bereavement Leave. Eligibility for Statutory Parental Bereavement Pay is separate and depends on the statutory criteria. Any enhanced paid compassionate leave is determined by the trust's policy, not by this document.

Managers will agree appropriate contact during absence and a supported return to work. Staff will not be required to lead sensitive communication or support if they are too personally affected to do so.

13 Funerals remembrance and anniversaries

The Headteacher will consult the family about school representation at a funeral and any involvement of pupils or staff. Parental consent, supervision, transport, safeguarding and staffing will be considered. Any decision to close or partially close the school will be made with the academy trust and in accordance with legal and operational requirements.

Remembrance activities will be voluntary, proportionate, time-limited where appropriate and agreed with the family. Options may include prayer, Mass, a book of remembrance, artwork, charitable activity or a carefully planned assembly. Permanent memorials will be considered cautiously because they may create future inequity or distress. Online memorial activity will be moderated and reviewed.

The key adult and class teacher will note significant dates only where this is helpful and agreed, and will check in discreetly rather than assuming that a pupil wants public recognition.

14 Sudden traumatic or suspected suicide death

A sudden, traumatic or suspected suicide death requires additional safeguarding and specialist coordination. The Headteacher and DSL will contact the academy trust, relevant local authority services, police or other agencies as appropriate and will seek specialist postvention advice, including from Samaritans Step by Step.

The school will respond promptly, maintain routines where possible and identify people who may be particularly vulnerable. Communication will be factual, use agreed wording, avoid speculation and avoid unnecessary detail. The school will not romanticise the death, attribute a single cause, share private communications or allow unmoderated memorial activity through school channels.

Staff will monitor wellbeing and report concerns immediately through safeguarding procedures. Media and social media communication will be tightly controlled. Longer-term support and review will continue after the immediate response because distress may emerge later.

15 Anticipatory grief and life-limiting illness

Where a pupil, family member or staff member has a life-limiting illness, the school will work with the person, family and relevant health professionals to plan communication, attendance, learning, pastoral support and emergency arrangements. Information will not be shared beyond the agreed group unless required for safety.

A pupil with a serious illness will be supported to remain part of school life for as long as appropriate. Plans will reflect medical advice, the pupil's wishes and reasonable adjustments. Other pupils will receive age-appropriate guidance about how to be supportive without being given private medical details.

16 Teaching about death grief and change

The curriculum provides planned opportunities to learn about change, feelings, loss, remembrance, hope and sources of support through Religious Education, PSHE, Relationships and Health Education, literature and the wider Catholic life of the school. Teaching will use clear language and will acknowledge that families hold different beliefs about death and what happens afterwards.

Before a lesson involving death or loss, teachers will consider pupils known to have been bereaved and consult the pupil, family, DSL or SENCO where appropriate. Advance warning, alternative participation or additional support may be offered, but pupils will not routinely be excluded from important learning about emotions, safety and seeking help.

17 Transitions and records

Relevant information about a bereaved pupil, agreed support and significant concerns will be recorded securely. Information will be shared with a new class teacher, school or setting only where necessary, proportionate and lawful. The pupil and family will be involved wherever appropriate.

Transition planning may include a meeting, written support summary, familiarisation visit, named adult, identification of difficult curriculum content and agreed arrangements for significant dates. Safeguarding records will transfer in accordance with statutory guidance and school procedures.

18 Training

The school will ensure that staff understand the policy, know how to communicate sensitively, recognise varied grief responses and follow safeguarding procedures. Staff with pastoral, SEND, attendance or leadership responsibilities will receive additional development appropriate to their roles. Training will be refreshed after a significant incident or when monitoring identifies a need.

19 Monitoring review and complaints

The Headteacher will review the effectiveness of support after a significant bereavement, taking account of feedback from those directly affected where appropriate. The Local Governing Body will review this policy annually and sooner following an incident, change in law or updated guidance. Changes will be communicated to staff.

Concerns should normally be raised with the Headteacher. Formal complaints will be considered under the school's complaints procedure. Safeguarding concerns must be reported immediately to the DSL or through the academy trust's safeguarding arrangements.

20 Linked policies

Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy; Attendance Policy; Behaviour and Anti-bullying Policies; SEND Policy and SEN Information Report; Mental Health and Wellbeing Policy; Online Safety Policy; Data

Protection Policy; Critical Incident or Emergency Plan; Staff Leave and Absence Policy; Media and Communications Policy; and Complaints Procedure.

21 Current support and references

Department for Education: Keeping Children Safe in Education 2026

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/keeping-children-safe-in-education--2>

GOV.UK: Statutory Parental Bereavement Pay and Leave

<https://www.gov.uk/parental-bereavement-pay-leave>

Samaritans: Step by Step support for schools

<https://www.samaritans.org/how-we-can-help/schools/step-step/>

Child Bereavement UK: Support for schools and families

<https://www.childbereavementuk.org/>

Winston's Wish: Bereavement support for children and young people

<https://www.winstonswish.org/>