



Horton Grange Primary School
Bereavement Policy



Last reviewed: April 2021
Reviewed: Annually
Written by: SLT
Ratified by the Governors: May 2021

RATIONALE

We understand that bereavement is an experience which will be faced by all members of our school community at some point. It will be a more difficult experience when the loss is of a member of that school community - a child or staff member.

We believe that it is an issue to be addressed openly and guiding principles need to be outlined and developed in an objective manner. This policy will deal with bereavement following the death of a school pupil or staff member and will also address the procedures which will be followed should a child become terminally ill or die whilst at school.

FOLLOWING A BEREAVEMENT:

We believe that children and adults alike have the right to:

- Be given space and time to grieve
- Be given support from whichever source is deemed the most appropriate - if possible, of their own choice.
- Encounter a caring environment in which they feel safe to demonstrate grief without fear of judgement.

We recognise:

- That grief may not always be apparent to the onlooker, but its invisibility makes it no less real.
- That differing religions/cultures view death and bereavement from different perspectives and all viewpoints should be taken into consideration and given equal value in the school environment.
- That the death of a child has huge repercussions beyond the immediate teaching/care team of that child and every effort should be taken to inform and deal sensitively with the far reaching contacts.

THE MANAGEMENT OF BEREAVEMENT IN SCHOOL

The purpose of this policy is to give all staff a confidence in recognising and adopting a particular procedure. It should be noted that a universally accepted procedure outline will, in itself, not enable everyone to feel comfortable in dealing with the practicalities of death and bereavement. To this end, in addition to providing a Learning Mentor with bereavement counselling experience, the school will maintain a list of staff who have indicated a willingness to offer support in this way.

One of our main concerns must inevitably be the immediate family of the deceased and, as a school, we state our commitment to any such family as may need practical, emotional and ongoing support.

Upon notification of the death of a pupil:

The school may be notified in an infinite number of ways. Past experience has shown that if death occurs during school hours parents usually let the school know directly and the person answering the phone will put them through to the most senior member of staff on site.

Where a death occurs in the holidays or at weekends, every attempt will be made to contact the most senior member of the school team possible (through, for example, staff contacts in the local community) and that person will then assume responsibility for the dissemination of the information.

Dissemination.

It is important to agree, if possible, with the parent that the school will take on the role of informing concerned parties. Parents are usually happy to have this burden taken away from them as they have many people unconnected with the school to contact.

There can be no exact list of people to contact. It will be different for each child. The school should ensure that all people who are close to the child are told in a sensitive and supportive manner rather than risk them hearing it 'on the grapevine'. Bereavement is very difficult and the school needs to ensure it does not add to the sorrow by leaving people feeling marginalised.

If school is in session the head teacher will inform the SLT and admin staff as they need to help in the next part of the process. He will then immediately inform the child's class staff. Where possible the SLT will move into the class to allow the staff to come out and be told together.

These staff then need to be given as much time as they need to process the news and start to grieve. Should a member of staff be so distressed, then they may be sent home on full pay for that day. An appropriate private space will be dedicated to these people and to anyone else in the school who had a close relationship with the child.

The deputy head will arrange cover for the class and the head will begin the process of informing other classes - those with staff closest to the child first. This is never easy in a busy school. It is easy to see where these two functions will overlap as staff may need to be taken from one class to manage the 'bereaved class'.

It may be practical to call a teacher out of a class and ask them to let their staff know. Where the child is less known to the class this may be appropriate.

The next step will be informing people not at school. Again there can be no definitive list but these should include:

- Current school staff not in school that day - including therapy staff
- Previous school staff who worked closely with the child
- Social Work team
- SEN team
- Medical team - the school nurse will communicate to them
- Transport department
- Chair of governors

- Respite centres
- Other professionals who work with the child - Ed Psych
- Parents - if children have been informed it is appropriate to put out a note to parents informing them of the loss they may need to support or comfort their children. Some parents may need to be telephoned if their relationship is closer but may not have been informed by the family.

Telling the other pupils will be a decision for the head and the class teachers. With different aged pupils there will be different decisions made. The class teacher of the class with the loss may be the best person to tell the rest of the children in that class.

Where it is felt that the children will understand, the Head Teacher, a senior leader, or the class teacher will let the pupils know what has happened. The finality of death cannot be diminished, however if there are mitigating circumstances that may help, such as that the child was in pain and now is free of pain, this can be used to help alleviate sorrow. The member of staff delivering the news, must try to avoid adding worry - if the child died in hospital we do not want to give children a fear of hospitals for example. Children must be told that while they may feel sad they do not have to feel guilty if they go on to have fun and pleasure in their day ahead. They must not feel obliged to assume a burden of grief.

Children must be allowed to ask questions at this time or at any point in the following days or weeks. Staff must answer honestly and to the best of their knowledge. This is not a time to propound one's own religious beliefs but it is has always been seen as acceptable to tell the children that their friend is now in heaven. This is acceptable across cultures and whilst not a concept that can be fully grasped by the students it may have benefit in helping the children understand that the child has moved on to a new and happy place.

THRIVE groups may provide an avenue to explore grief, loss, bereavement and feelings where appropriate.

Memory Walls/Tables

Once sure that all relevant people have been informed an appropriate memory wall/table, area or activity can be developed such as a 'football' wall for a football fan; a wall of trees for a child that enjoyed trees; an area of garden.

Dependant on circumstances and the wishes of the child's family, developing a memory book could be considered.

THE FUNERAL

Depending upon the wishes of the child's family, and as school staffing allows, those members of staff closest to the child may be asked if they wish to attend the funeral. In the same way, the Head Teacher will always attend as a mark of respect.

REFLECTION

Following a bereavement in school, it is only to be expected that many members of staff will be emotionally affected and would benefit from the provision of a calm environment in which to meet with other colleagues and spend some time in reflective mode. One such means of accomplishing this would be to allocate a specific room e.g. the Rainbow or Meeting Room for the duration of a lunchtime to enable staff to meet and share their thoughts over a coffee or tea.

Memory Assemblies and Memory Roll

It may be appropriate to hold a memory assembly for the child. This can happen when staff feel strong enough to participate. Staff need to be able to show pupils that it is perfectly normal to feel upset at the loss of a friend, and tears cannot be helped, but they must not break down in front of the children.

IF A CHILD DIES IN SCHOOL

A member of the Senior Leadership team will notify the CEO of the MAT and the LA if there is a death in school

The above procedures and protocols will then apply as for a death out of school.

IF A CHILD DIES ON A SCHOOL TRIP.

If a crisis situation occurs whilst a child is out on a trip, then the adult with the child or the trip leader should telephone for an ambulance first and then contact the school to inform the Head Teacher. The school will take the responsibility of contacting the parents.

Again, once the ambulance team reaches the child, the child becomes the responsibility of the ambulance team and they will direct any subsequent actions.

The off sites visits protocols give guidance for such situations and should be followed.

The CEO of the MAT and the LA must be informed and the Head Teacher will do this.

The above procedures and protocols will then apply as for a death out of school.

ON GOING SUPPORT

For staff:

The MAT provides an Employee Assistance scheme, which includes free access to counselling. Staff are encouraged to use this service following a bereavement.

For Pupils:

Experience has shown that most pupils can be supported by the school staff, and that each child will have a favoured member of staff to approach.

The school employs a trained Learning Mentor, skilled in bereavement counselling, to whom pupils may be referred. The school nurse can also help some pupils understand. The Educational Psychology team and CAMHS can offer support to pupils who may need more help.

Social Stories may be one way to help pupils to understand loss and the autism support have some generic stories and will help staff produce specific stories as needed.

The Senior Leadership Team will ensure that we have suitable books and other materials to help children discuss death and come to terms with loss.

For the family:

Parents will be told that they are welcome in the school and will be encouraged to come and visit. The first visit to the school is often difficult and will be arranged sensitively in accordance with the parents' wishes.

It will then be for the parents to decide if they wish to maintain on going links, each family will be different, however the school will always be there to act as a source of support and information.

THE DEATH OF A MEMBER OF STAFF:

All the same principles and procedures apply as they do for the death of a pupil.

In addition to the above the school will notify the CEO of the MAT as employer.

THE DEATH OF A FAMILY MEMBER OF A PUPIL:

When the child or returns to the setting they may want to get straight back into friends, work and routine. They will have been surrounded by grieving family members and often a chaotic household of visitors. School maybe their break from that.

The following are some actions that may help the child to return but is not exhaustive and all of below does not have to be actioned:

- Identifying a member of the team who will be the main contact point for them and their family.
- Ensure **regular** contact, this may be daily or weekly depending on needs and wishes of the family. This helps you understand how they are coping, what support they may need now and in the future, to discuss concerns and worries and plan strategies to cope.
- If they stay at home, remember them. Have cards and messages sent to them from appropriate people (peer group and staff they have good relationships with) Activities such as these will give the other children the opportunity to discuss their own concerns or experiences with the family and help them to feel they are doing something positive to support them, you may want to collate them into a book. This death may remind others of their own experiences and so be prepared to support them. Staff may find out information about a child in their class that you didn't know before. They should be ready to listen to them all.
- Before they return, ensure all staff are aware of the bereavement and the possible effects on them, their behaviour and their learning, so that appropriate care and support can be given throughout the setting. Bereaved children and young people have 'physical' illness, such as headaches, tummy aches and feeling sick, as well as mental sadness including lack of concentration, feeling tired, disorganised anger and frustration. These will have an impact on work load and learning. Monitor how things are going on their return and maintain communication with all staff involved.
- Maintain normal rules and expectations of behaviour. This is important for the children and young people within the setting and the child or young person who have been bereaved. The rules and expectations are all part of the 'normal' routine and will help to make them feel secure. Remember the impact of bereavement on the whole family when giving sanctions and the impact the sanctions may have on the whole family.

- Consider ‘time out’ strategies that suit the child or young person and the setting. Time out cards, signals or signs can help them to exit the room quickly if they are feeling vulnerable or emotional. Make sure they have a safe place to exit to.
- Remember, there is no set pattern or time limit to grief - It is a unique experience and the process is a lifelong one. At different ages and during new or transitional times they will have new questions requiring answers and questions requiring a re-visit of what happened; to develop a better understanding and acceptance.
- It is not unusual for bereaved pupils to take time off school during the early stages of their bereavement. For some, the need to be with their families will be strong, and indeed they may suffer from separation anxiety when the time comes for a return to school. For others the familiarity, stability and routines of school life may prompt an early return. The time away from school will vary from pupil to pupil but when they do return, they may have a number of concerns - you will only know what these are and how they might be resolved if you ask. Some of the more common concerns might be:

How will staff and peers react- who has been told, what do they know, what will be said, how much will I have to say to people?

You can help by - meeting with them to welcome them back, acknowledge the death and talk through their concerns. Saying something simple like *“I am sorry to hear that your dad died - sometimes it helps to talk about it and if so, who would you like to be there for you?”* is usually much appreciated by them. If possible offer them choices about how things should be handled and what support would be helpful. Let staff and classmates know how they want to be received and supported.

Fear of sudden emotional outbursts - anger, distress, panic...

Staff can help by - normalising grief reactions and giving them choices about what strategies will help them to cope in the classroom e.g. able to leave lessons without fuss - “exit card” system, where they can go, who they can talk to.

Fear when they realise they may not remember what the deceased person looks like

A laminated photo of the deceased person may give enormous comfort when the visual image begins to disappear. A special teddy or other memento will often give great comfort in times of distress and upset. They may also want to show this when talking about the person who died. It should be stressed that whatever helps the child within reason should be encouraged.

Fear of being behind with work and unable to catch up

You can help by - clarifying with other staff what is essential to accomplish and what can be left, and offering appropriate help to achieve what needs to be done.

Inability to concentrate and feel motivated or sit still

Reassuring the child that this lack of motivation and concentration is normal and will pass. Offer shorter more manageable tasks, write down the task, give encouragement for achievements, and minimising difficulties can often help.

Family grief impacting on normal family functioning

Disrupted routines, sporadic meals, chaotic bedtimes are possible reasons why they may be inadequately prepared for school, does not have the necessary equipment, and may be tired or hungry.

Staff can help by - Talking with them to ascertain where areas of difficulty lie and try and work out strategies with them and their family to help keep things on an even keel in school. Identify their strengths and help them build on them.

Unable to meet homework/project deadlines because of altered responsibilities within the family and home

Staff can help by - helping them work out and meet priorities. Be flexible where possible and offer additional support where needed.

Forthcoming examinations

Staff can help by - Explaining the process of notifying examination boards and the possible outcomes.

Appendix 1

GUIDELINES ON HOW TO INFORM CHILDREN

Remember it is ok to show your emotions in moderation. It is important we model to children and young people healthy responses to sad news and a natural response to hearing about a death is to shed a tear.

- Be honest and factual.
- Use clear language - use the person's name, do not use euphemisms like 'passed away' or 'lost' use the words dead, died and death to avoid confusion.
- Allow the children/young people to ask questions and answer them honestly and factually in terms they will understand.
- 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 (even if that is the death of a pet).
- 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.

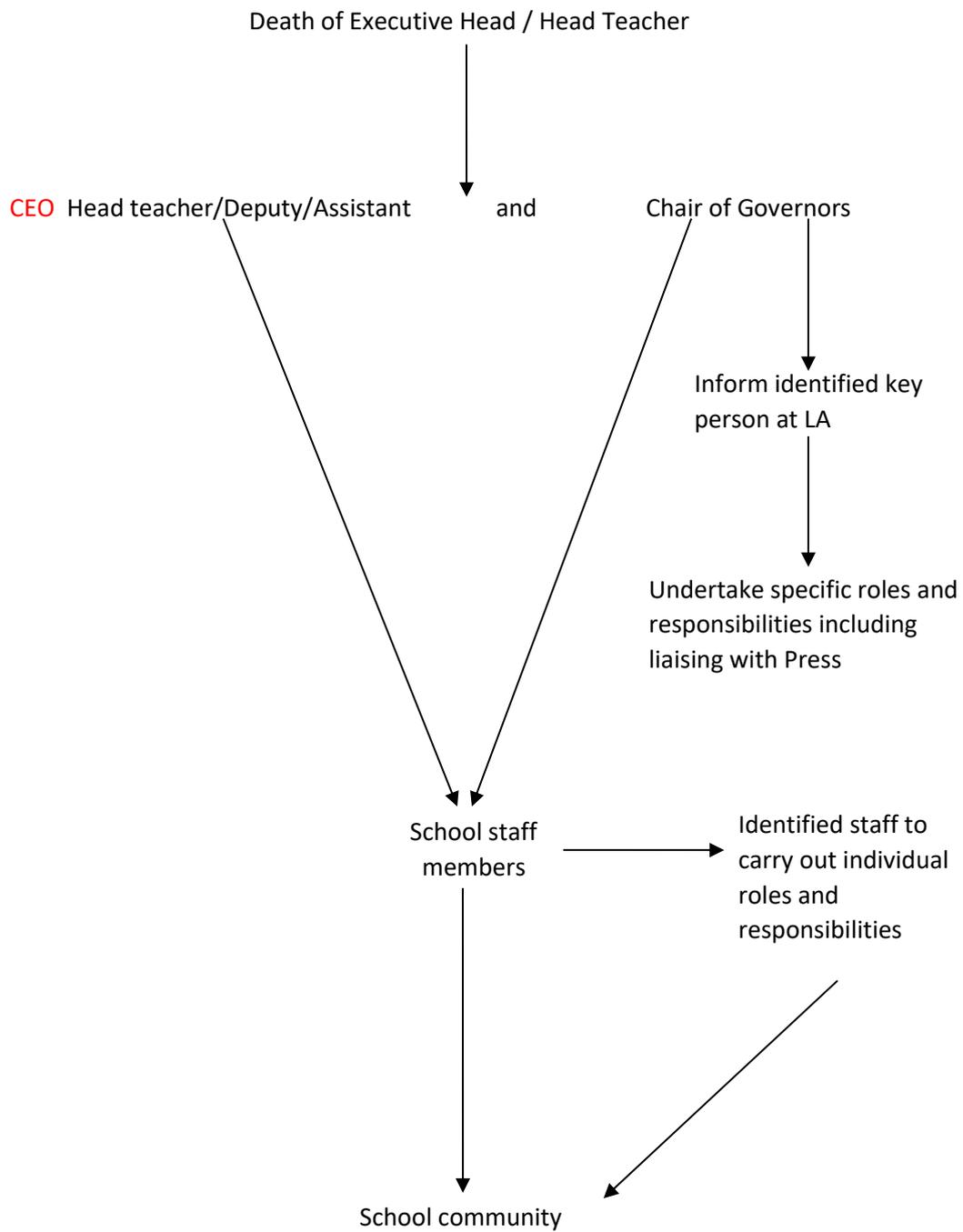
- Acknowledge some days will be harder than others
- Do not expect to go straight into maths, allow for a time of restoration preferably with a physical outlet.
- Put an appropriate time limit on the discussion. It is preferable to resume normal school activities as soon as possible thus ensuring minimal disruption within the school day which also offers a sense of security and familiarity.

Suggested scripts to use when someone dies:

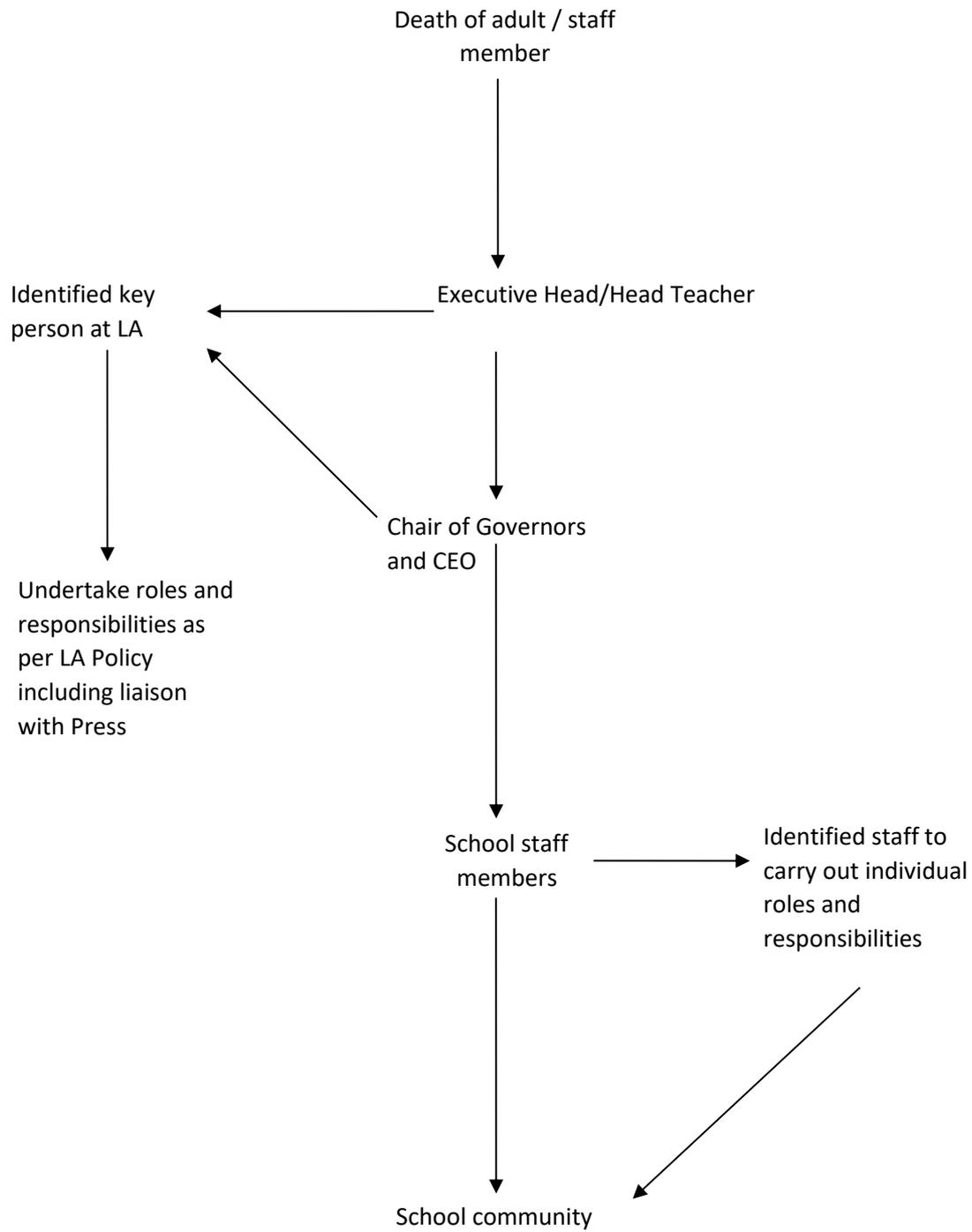
“I’ve got some really sad news to tell you today that might upset you. I know most of you will have heard of cancer, and know that sometimes people with cancer get better, but other times people die from it. _____, the Geography teacher and Year 11 tutor, has been ill with cancer for a long time. I have to tell you that _____ died yesterday in hospital”.

“Sometimes people have accidents at work, at home, at school or on the road. People may be hurt or injured in the accident and they may have to go to hospital for treatment. Sadly, there are some accidents that cause people to die. I have some really sad news to tell you that might upset you. Yesterday _____, who is in Year 4, was in an accident and he was so badly injured that he died”.

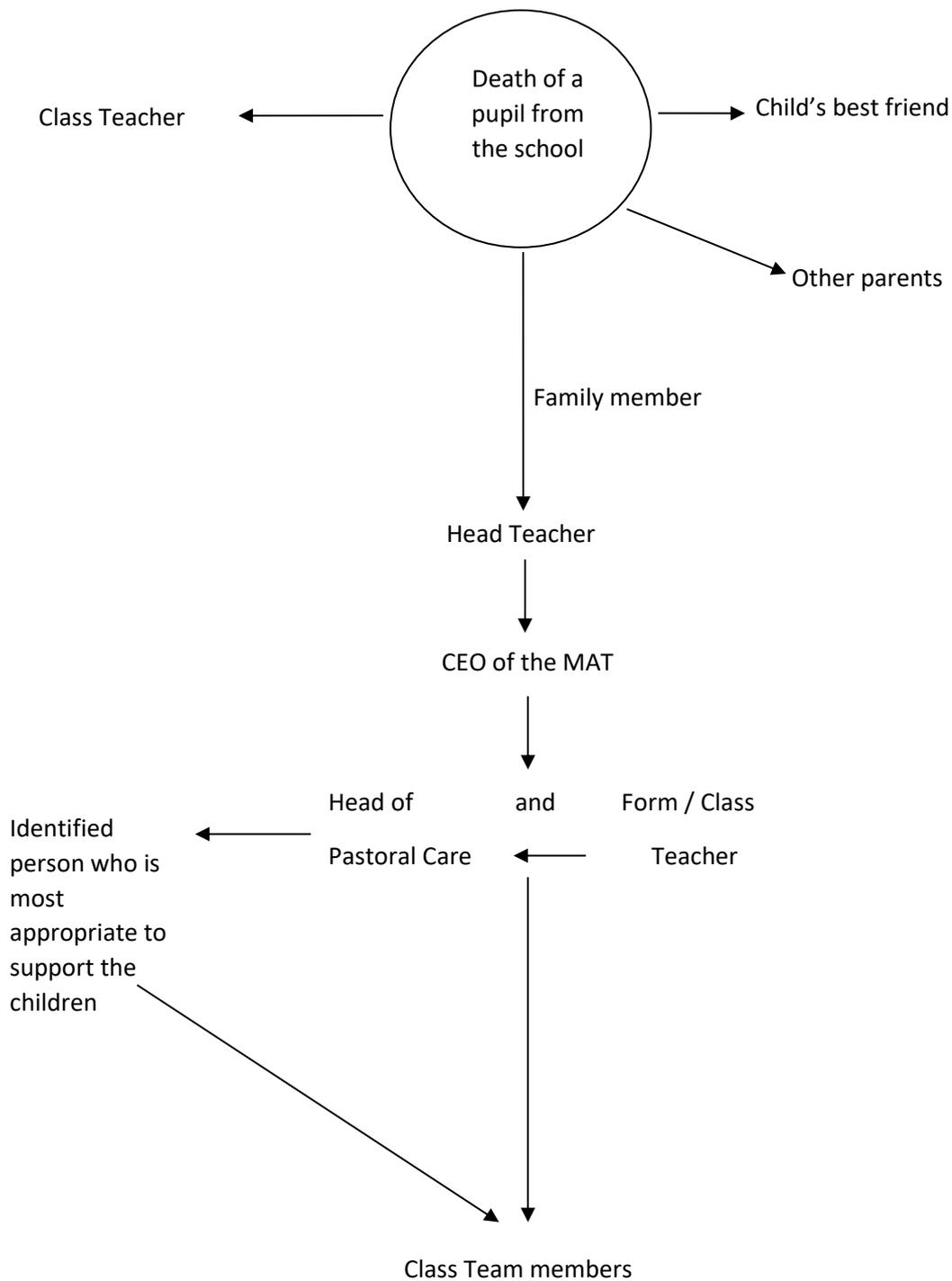
INFORMATION SHARING PATHWAY FOLLOWING THE DEATH OF EXECUTIVE HEAD / HEAD TEACHER



INFORMATION SHARING PATHWAY FOLLOWING DEATH OF A STAFF MEMBER



INFORMATION SHARING PATHWAY FOLLOWING DEATH OF PUPIL



INFORMATION SHARING PATHWAY FOLLOWING DEATH OF CLOSE FAMILY MEMBER OF SCHOOL PUPIL

