



Hendy Primary School Bereavement Policy

‘Death neither obeys the school timetable nor appears on it... it enters the classroom without knocking’

Background and Aims

Every year 20,000 children under the age of 16 years will be bereaved of a parent and many more will experience the death of someone else special in their life. Children may also experience ‘bereavement’ through parental break up and separation.

In addition, 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.

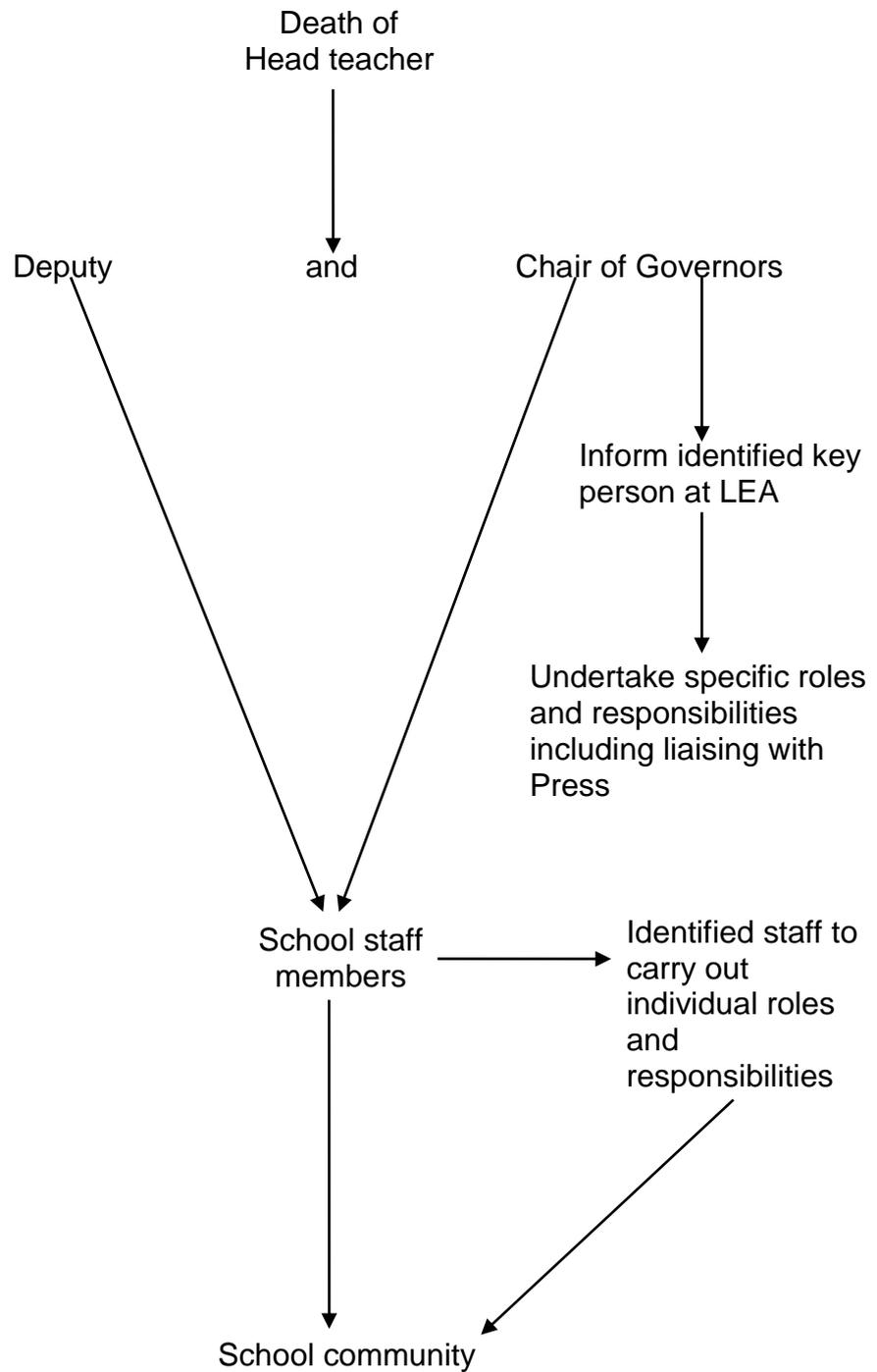
As children spend the vast majority of their time at school, teachers and staff members will be the primary source of care and support. Bereaved children will see school as a safe haven away from the turmoil of emotions at home and will look to trusted staff members for help.

Death is something that most people choose not to think about so when faced with it we often find ourselves ill prepared.

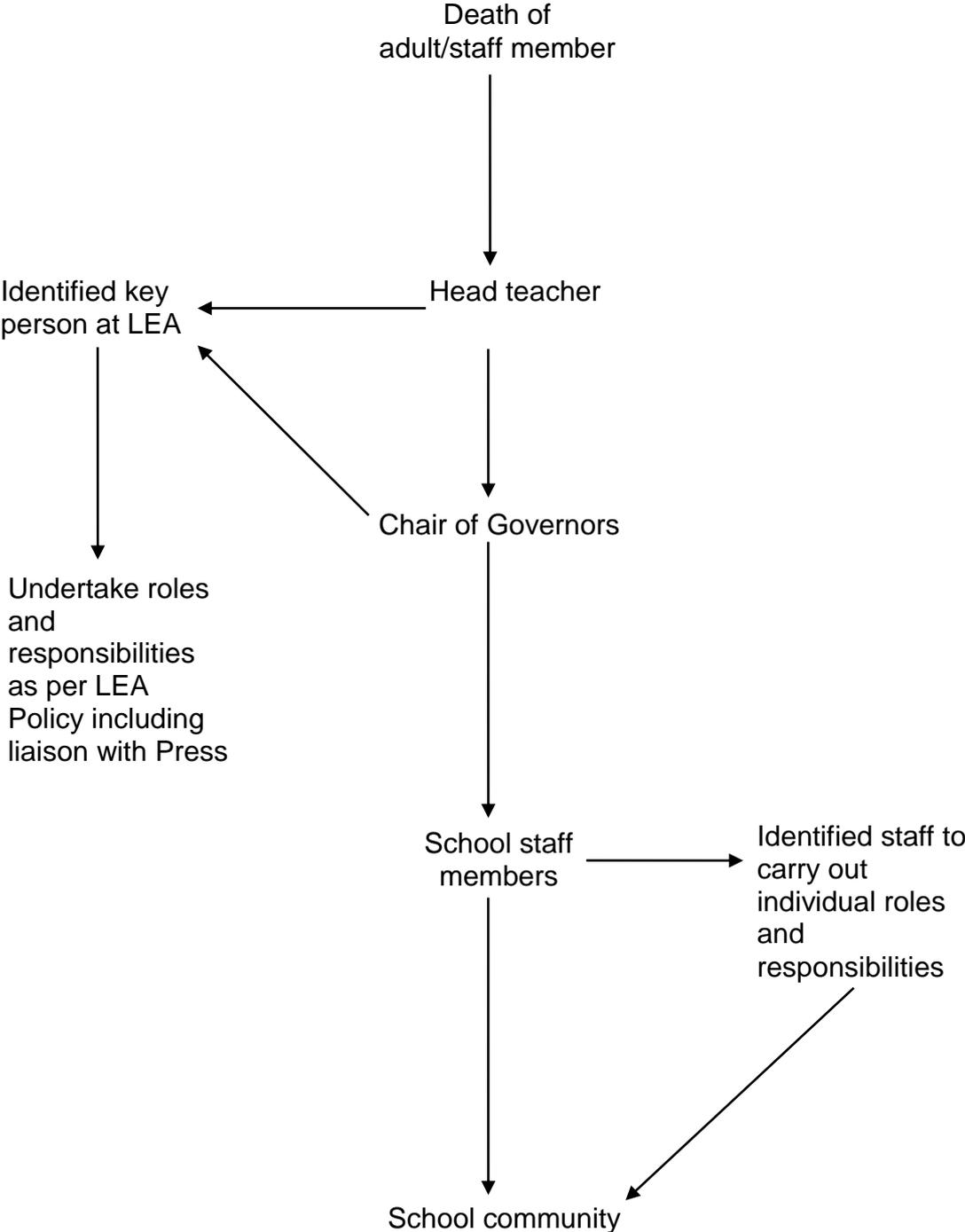
Grieving is an individual process and people respond to bereavement and express their grief in different ways.

The purpose of our 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.

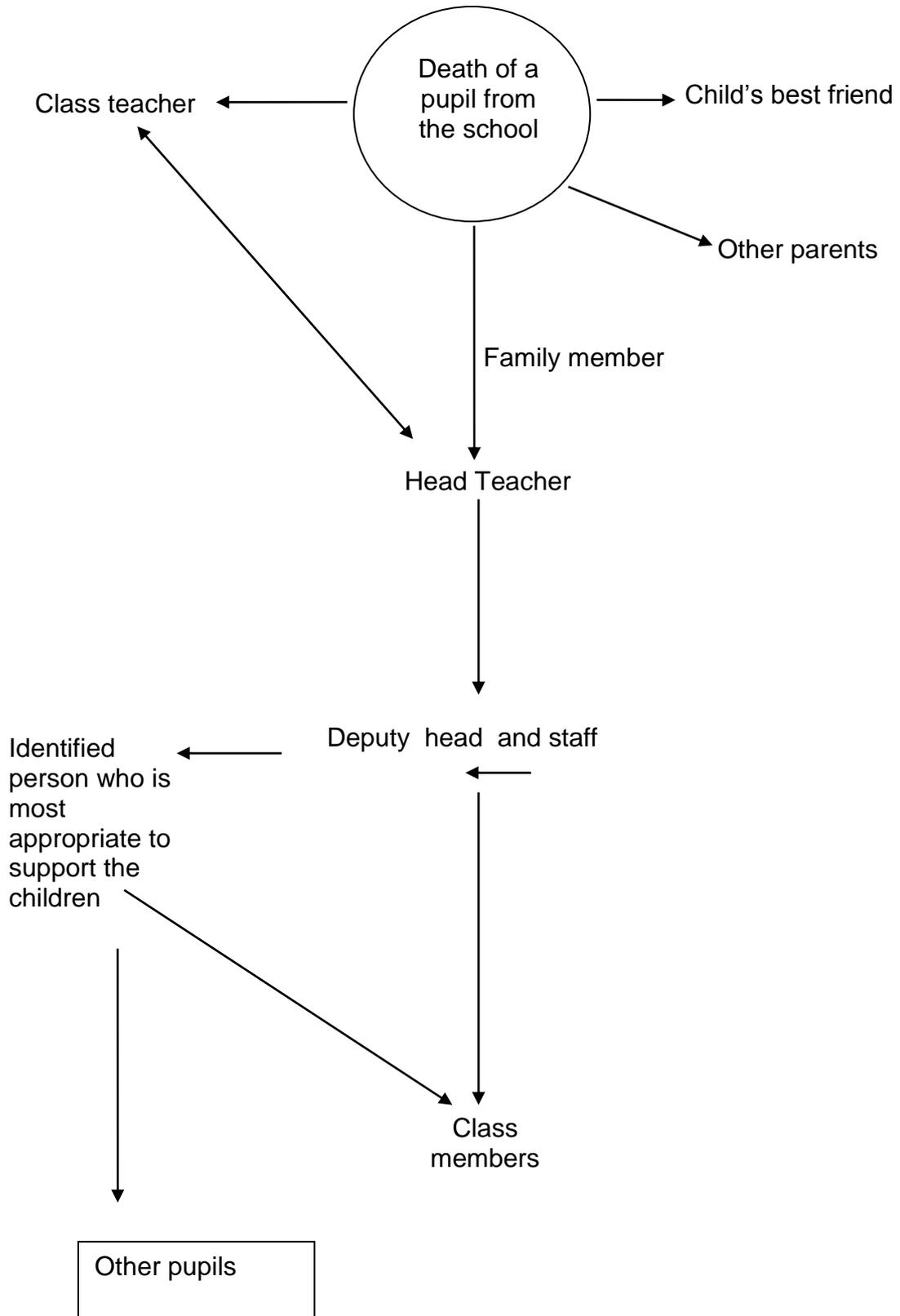
Information Sharing Pathway following death of the head teacher



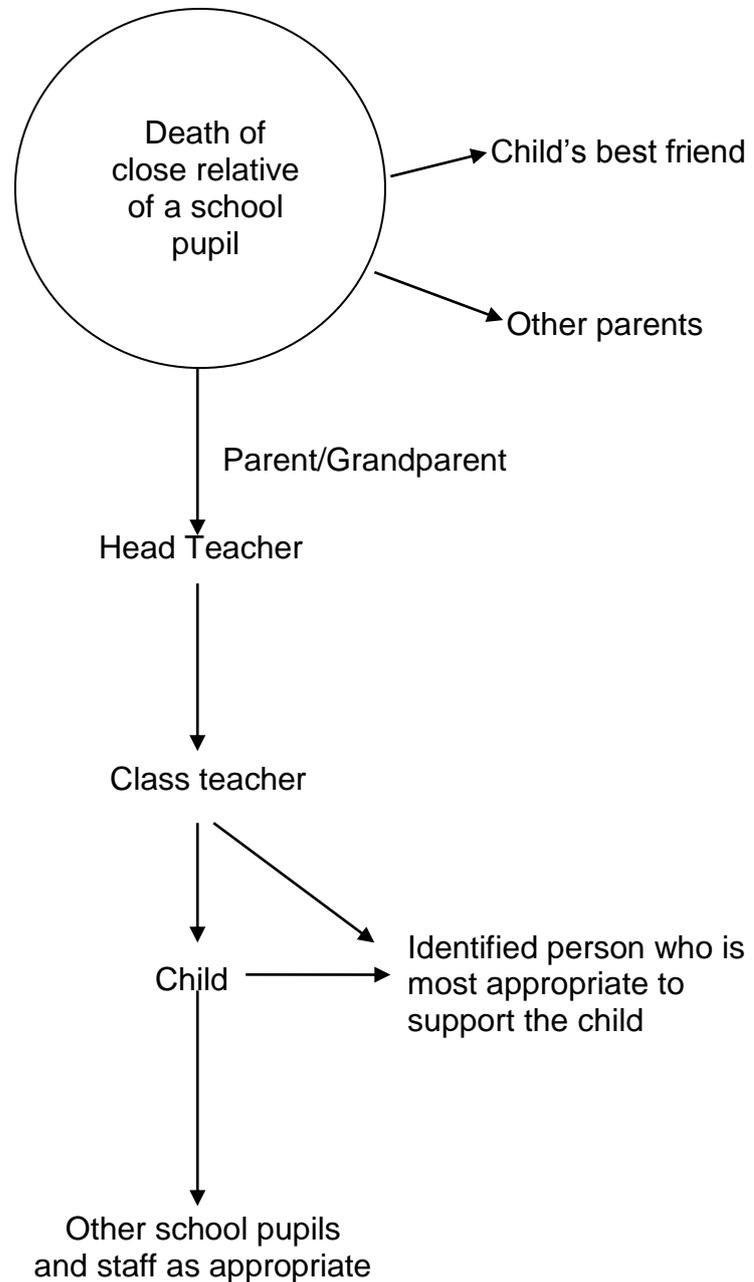
Information Sharing Pathway
following death of a staff member



Information Sharing Pathway
following death of pupil



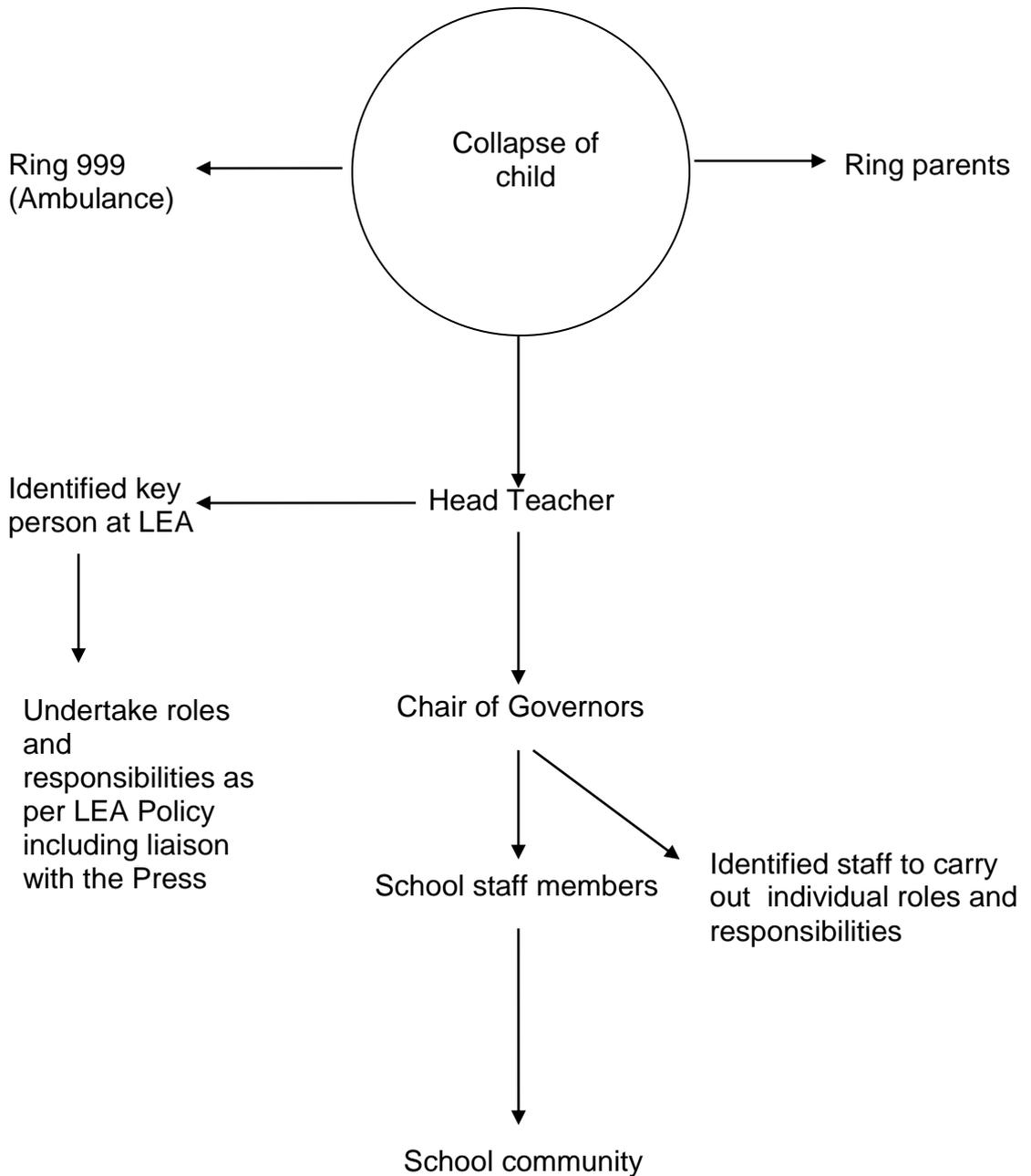
Information Sharing Pathway
following death of close family member
of school pupil



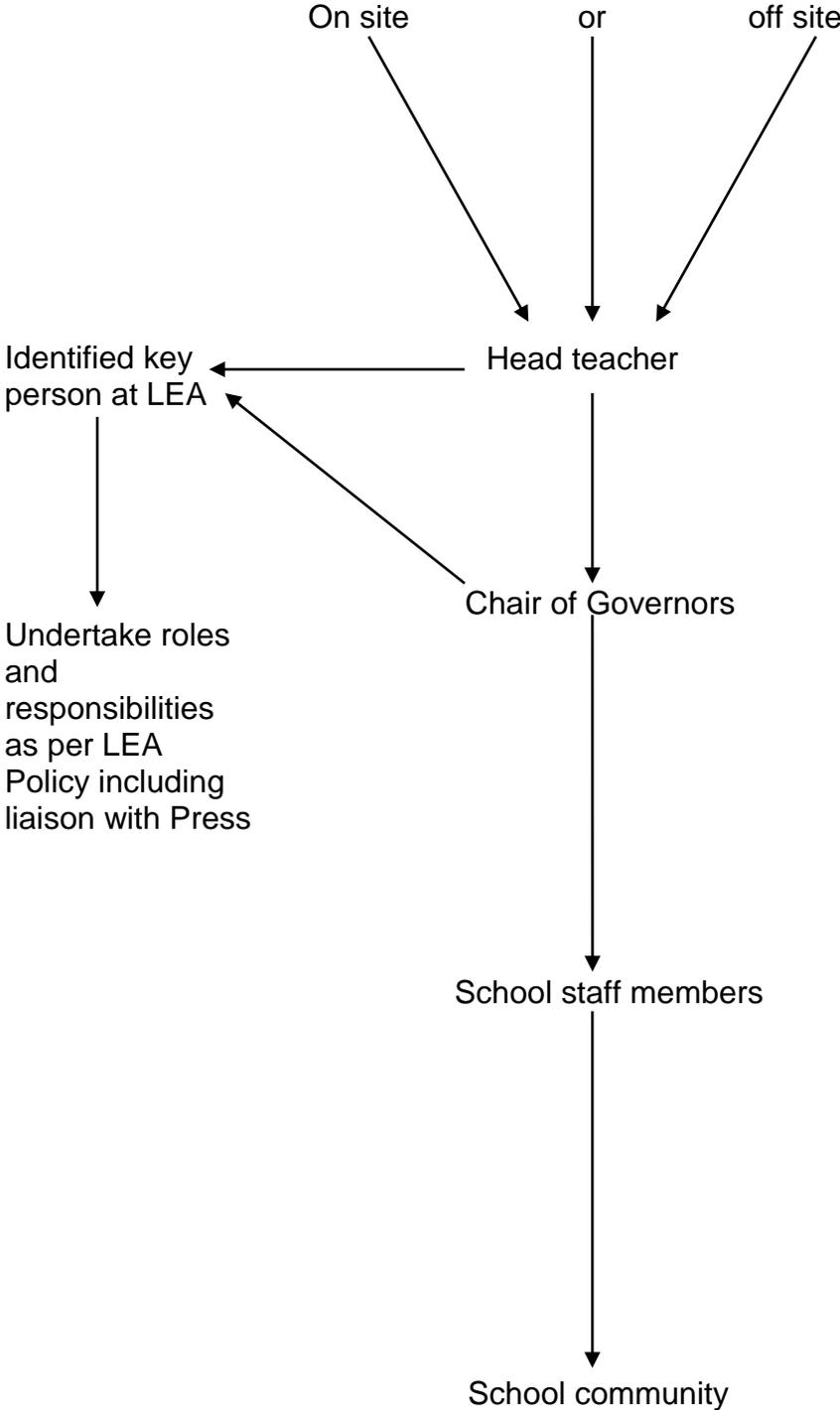
It is important that the school gains information from the family as to what the student has already been told so that the staff do not say anything that could confuse or upset the student. The family should be contacted and offered support. It should be explained to the family what support could be offered to the student in school

- The need for close communication should be stressed especially informing on any changes of behaviour etc
- If necessary outside agencies may be involved
- Let the student decide how much he/she wants to talk about their loss in school, but be 'on hand' if they do want to talk.

Information Sharing Pathway
following death of child in school



Information Sharing Pathway
following major incidents



When a member of staff or pupil dies

The death of a member of staff or a student can have a profound effect on the rest of the school. As a staff team we work very closely with our pupils and form close relationships both with them and their parents. Any losses will, therefore, have a greater impact on all of the members of our school community. It is important that as normal a routine as is possible is maintained because this will provide security and stability at a very difficult time.

- Discuss the situation with the family concerned and take their wishes into account before decisions are taken on how and what to tell pupils in school
- Letter to be sent to all parents informing them of the death
- Details of the funeral arrangements, flowers, family requests etc to be distributed to all staff (and parents too if appropriate). Keep everyone up to date at all times
- Outside agencies to be involved if necessary
- Release staff and students to attend the funeral if they wish to do so
- Support each other at all times. Some people will be more affected by the loss than others. Appropriate support must be offered especially to those closest to the member of staff/pupil.
- Make arrangements for a memorial service in school. Invite parents and outside agencies who have known the pupil/staff if appropriate. At an appropriate time consider a permanent memorial in school.

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 aware 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 and or by telephone
- 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 (usually the Head teacher) 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 who 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

- Inform the children as soon as possible about the death.
- Where possible, the pupils should be informed in small groups i.e. class 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 to ask questions and answer them honestly and factually in terms that they will understand.
- Allow the children to verbalise their feelings.
- Allow the children 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 and metaphors e.g. they have gone to sleep
- Those children 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 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 who needs additional help and support.

Tip

If a child or adult is crying have a box of tissues available but do not offer them a tissue or say, "Do you want a tissue?" as this gives a silent indirect message telling the child/adult to dry their tears and to stop the crying process. Crying is a natural and 'healthy' process.

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 administrative staff who are taking telephone calls, dealing with parents etc.
- Through the nominated staff member (usually head teacher) 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:-

- 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 who 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 lunchtime supervisors, caretaker etc in advance.

How children grieve

It is difficult to gauge how grief affects individuals, however the developmental age of children does have an impact on their level of understanding and it is useful to have some knowledge of understanding of what death means to children at various stages in their development.

2- 5 years

At this stage of development children believe that death is reversible. They may also be convinced that it was something that they said or did which caused the person to die.

Abstract concepts are not easily grasped, and so it is important that the child is spoken to in very concrete terms. In order to make sense of what has happened children at this age may often ask the same questions over and over again.

6-9 years

Children begin to develop the understanding that death is irreversible and something that happens eventually to all living things. Death may be regarded as something that is a bit 'spooky', and they may display what seems to be an unhealthy curiosity in the more morbid aspects of the death.

Children at this age may complain of headaches, tummy aches or other ailments. These are referred to as 'somatic' complaints and are generally physical manifestations of emotional pain.

Behaviour may change, but it is important to encourage children at this age to express their feelings and understand that what they are feeling is perfectly natural.

9- 13 years

By now children are much more aware of the finality of death, and the impact that the death has had on them.

The death of someone important may make them feel different, at the very time that they want to be the same as everyone else. They are aware of the longer term impact of their loss, when future milestones will not be shared with the person who has died. Relationships with others are becoming increasingly important, and any loss can lead to feelings of anger or severe distress.

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

<Address>

<Date>

Dear Parents

Your child's class teacher 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

<Name> Head Teacher

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 had the sad task of informing the children of the death of <Name>, a pupil in <Year>.

<Name> died from an illness called 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

<Name> Head Teacher

Books which can be used with children as suggested by the bereavement charity Winston's Wish

Ask Me

Antje Damm

Frances Lincoln Children's Books, 2005

ISBN 978-1-84507-386-2

This book offers an engaging way for primary school aged children to generate those really special conversations that happen when the defences are down and a child feels more able to open up. When you ask a child "What did you do at school today?" the answer is often "Not much". However, if you say "What questions did you ask, or want to ask today?", it takes the child's mind to a different, more interesting, thoughtful and curious place.

Flamingo Dream

Donna Jo Napoli

Illustrated by Cathie Felstead

Greenwillow Books, 2002

ISBN 0-688-17863-4

This bright and colourful book is narrated by a young boy whose dad is seriously ill and dies soon after a trip to Florida to see the place where he grew up. The collage style illustrations capture the things the boy collects to remind him of his dad. This is a sensitive but honest book, which emphasises the importance of memories.

The Huge Bag of Worries

Virginia Ironside

Hodder Wayland, 1998

ISBN 0-750026391

This book relates the simple story of a girl who finds she is carrying an ever growing 'bag of worries'. Eventually she receives help to share the worries with others. This book is a very useful starter to conversations with children under 11 about anxieties and concerns.

My Mommy Has Cancer

Carolyn Stearns-Parkinson

Park Press, 1991

ISBN 0963028707

This is an American story book about a child whose mother is in hospital for treatment for cancer. Suitable for use with children aged from three to six.

No Matter What

Debi Gliori

Bloomsbury Publishing, 1999

ISBN 0-747581347

This book gently and powerfully conveys the idea of unconditional parental love through the characters of Large and Small. It is suitable for children aged from three to eight.

On Eagles' Wings

Sue Mayfield

Lion Hudson, 2004

ISBN 0-745948901

Tony's mother is dying. There's nothing he can do about it and he can't always put a brave face on things. Often he wishes he could just fly away from everything, like an eagle, powerful and free. Gradually, through his experiences, Tony begins to understand that death can sometimes bring freedom. A very readable and sensitive story about growing up, family relationships and facing bereavement.

There's NO Such Thing as a Dragon

Jack Kent

Golden Books, 1975

ISBN 0-375832084

This is another really helpful story for children aged from four to eight. It is a funny, quirky story about a little dragon that gets bigger – eventually becoming an overwhelming size because no-one is noticing him. It subtly conveys to a child that even tough stuff can and needs to be talked about to make it more manageable.

The Secret C: Straight Talking About Cancer

Julie Stokes

Winston's Wish/Macmillan Cancer Relief, 2000

ISBN 0-9539123-0-2

Available from the Winston's Wish on-line shop or call 01242 515157.

This book aims to help children ask questions about cancer and answers some common questions. It has a simple description of what cancer is and the treatments. The book discusses side-effects in easy to understand language as well as the emotions that a child may have when a family member has cancer. Suitable for use with children aged from four to 11.

When Someone Has a Very Serious Illness

Marge Heegaard

Fairview Press, 1993

ISBN 0 96205 024 5

This workbook aims to help children understand their feelings when someone in their family is seriously ill.

When Your Mum or Dad Has Cancer

Ann Couldrick

Sobell Publications, 1991

ISBN 978-0951753736

Single copies available from Cancerbackup on 0808 800 1234.

This booklet for children uses simple cartoons to explain cancer, treatment and common feelings children may have. Suitable for use with children aged from three to eight.

Other suggested stories**Granpa**

J Burningham

Puffin

A simple picture book which can encourage discussion

Always and Forever

A Durant

Doubleday

A story book which reinforces the fact that the person who has gone is still in our hearts and that memories will last forever

Grandpa's slideshow

G Gould

Puffin

A useful book to use when a grandparent dies.

Fred

P Simonds

Penguin

Dealing with the death of a pet

Badger's parting gifts

S Varley

Julia McRae

A lovely book to illustrate death and the legacy of friendship

I'll always love you

H Vilhelm

Hodder and Stoughton

A book about the death of a boy's pet dog and the close relationship they shared.

Useful websites:

www.winstonswish.org.uk

Winston's Wish - the charity for **bereaved children**

<http://www.crusebereavementcare.org.uk>

Cruse Bereavement Care promotes the well-being of bereaved people and enables anyone bereaved by death to understand their grief and cope with their loss.

www.rd4u.org.uk

A young people's website within the Cruise website. Young people can download the leaflet, after someone dies. 020 8939 9530

www.youngminds.org.uk/bereavement

Information about how bereavement may affect **children & young people**

www.rcpsych.ac.uk/mentalhealthinfoforall/.../bereavement.aspx

Bereavement - resources from the Royal College of Psychiatrists.

www.rainbowtrust.org.uk

Rainbow Trust Children's Charity provides emotional and practical support to families who have a child with a life threatening or terminal illness.

www.thejoshuafoundation.co.uk

A charity dedicated to making life experiences for children with terminal cancer and their families

Useful contact details:

School:01554 773843

LEA:

Education Psychologist:

Conclusion

Bereavement affects everyone in different ways and for different periods of time. To some it may mean the physical loss of the one person who really understood their needs, for others the loss of their support system. Whatever the level of understanding about the bereavement, we have a duty to help and support our pupils when they could be feeling their most vulnerable, in the way that best meets their needs and level of understanding.

Policy Revision Information

This is the official document for Hendy C.P. School.

Renewal Period (years)	1
Date Adopted by Governing Body	November 2015
Signed - Chair of Governors	
Signed - Headteacher	
Next review date	