ST ANNE LINE
CATHOLIC INFANT SCHOOL AND NURSERY

Bereavement Policy

With Jesus, we love, we learn, we pray.
Together we grow our school each day.

Date of policy	November 2026
Review date	November 2027

1. Purpose

At St Anne Line Catholic Infant School and Nursery, we recognise that bereavement and loss may affect children, families and staff at any time. A death within a family or the wider school community can have a significant impact on an individual, a class or the whole school. Although we hope not to experience such circumstances, this policy enables us to respond thoughtfully, consistently and compassionately.

Our Catholic mission — "With Jesus, we love, we learn, we pray, together we grow our school each day" — guides our response. We seek to offer compassion, dignity, hope and practical care, respecting the beliefs and wishes of each family. We recognise that grief is individual: there is no single right way to grieve and children may express loss differently according to their age, development, communication and understanding.

For many children and adults, the support of familiar and trusted people in a safe school environment, alongside family and friends, will be sufficient. We also recognise that some circumstances require additional or specialist support. We will work with families, the Christus Catholic Trust, the Diocese and appropriate external services where needed.

2. Aims and principles

This policy aims to:

- Provide appropriate, compassionate support to pupils and staff before, during and after a bereavement, where this is possible and appropriate.
- Provide a safe, calm and familiar environment in which children and adults feel supported.
- Ensure communication between home and school is timely, sensitive, factual and respectful of the family's wishes.
- Help staff respond confidently and appropriately to death, grief and loss.
- Recognise the needs of the wider school community, including classmates, siblings, friends and colleagues.
- Identify when further support or referral to specialist services may be required.

Our response will be guided by the dignity of each person, the importance of relationships, the wishes and beliefs of the family, and the best interests and safeguarding of the children. Prayer, worship and other expressions of Catholic faith may offer comfort to some members of our community; these will be offered sensitively and never imposed. The beliefs and choices of families and staff will be respected.

3. Understanding bereavement in an infant and nursery setting

Children aged two to seven may have a limited or developing understanding of death. They may ask repeated questions, interpret language literally, believe that death is temporary or reversible, or move quickly between sadness and play. Some children may not show an immediate reaction. Changes may appear later through behaviour, sleepiness, anxiety, separation difficulties, regression, play, concentration or physical complaints.

Children with SEND, speech, language and communication needs, autism or other additional needs may communicate grief in ways that are not immediately recognised as grief. Staff should consider each child's communication profile, sensory needs, developmental stage and established support strategies. Visual supports, familiar routines, play, stories, simple language and additional processing time may help.

Staff should use clear, honest and age-appropriate language. Euphemisms such as 'gone to sleep' or 'gone away' should be avoided because they may confuse young children. Adults should answer questions simply and sensitively, without giving unnecessary detail or making assumptions about a child's understanding.

4. Roles and responsibilities

The Local Governing Committee and Trust

- Approve, oversee and review this policy in accordance with Trust and governance arrangements.

- Support a whole-school approach to emotional wellbeing and ensure that appropriate arrangements are in place.

The Headteacher

- Lead the school's response to a bereavement and oversee the support provided.
- Wherever possible and appropriate, make contact with the bereaved family before sharing information with the wider school community.
- Act as the main point of contact for the family, or delegate this responsibility to an appropriate senior leader.
- Agree with staff how and when information will be shared with pupils, parents and carers.
- Liaise with the Trust, Diocese, Local Authority and other agencies as appropriate.
- Prepare or approve communications to parents and carers and respond to media enquiries, seeking Trust and Local Authority advice where required.
- Consider whether the school day, staffing or timetable needs to be adapted to support the community.
- Keep the Local Governing Committee appropriately informed, respecting confidentiality.

A deputy senior leader will be identified to lead the response if the Headteacher is directly affected or otherwise unable to fulfil this role.

The SENCO and Designated Safeguarding Lead

- Advise on the needs of children with SEND or additional communication, emotional or sensory needs.
- Ensure any safeguarding concerns or significant wellbeing concerns are shared and managed through the school's safeguarding procedures.
- Work with class teams and families to identify children who may need additional monitoring, adjustments or referral.
- Support staff to plan appropriate strategies for children whose bereavement affects their learning, behaviour or access to school.

All staff

- Provide a calm, caring and predictable environment and act as trusted adults.
- Listen to children, allow them time and space to talk or express feelings, and respond without judgement.
- Monitor children's wellbeing and communicate concerns to the class teacher, senior leader and/or DSL as appropriate.
- Maintain confidentiality and share information only with those who need to know.
- Use agreed language and messages so that children receive consistent, accurate information.

The Christus Catholic Trust, Diocese and external partners

The Trust and relevant partners may provide advice, guidance, signposting and practical support. Where appropriate, the school may seek support through the Diocese, Brentwood Catholic Children's Society (BCCS), Essex Local Authority services, including educational psychology, and other relevant bereavement services. The suitability and availability of support will be checked at the time.

5. Procedures following a bereavement

5.1 Initial response and contact with the family

Wherever possible and appropriate, the Headteacher will contact the bereaved family before taking wider action. This will establish what information the family is comfortable sharing, who may be informed, any cultural or religious considerations, and whether there are particular wishes about how the school responds. The school will avoid speculation and protect the family's privacy.

If the death is already public knowledge and the family cannot be contacted, the Headteacher will seek advice from the Trust and/or Local Authority before deciding how to respond.

5.2 Informing staff

The Headteacher will inform relevant staff as soon as practicable, sharing only the information they need to support children and respond consistently. Staff will be given guidance on agreed wording, likely questions and where to direct concerns. The school will consider the impact on staff who may also be grieving.

5.3 Sharing information with children

The Headteacher and relevant staff will agree how information is shared with pupils. The approach will be age-appropriate and take account of the children who knew the person, the circumstances of the death, family wishes and the needs of individual pupils.

- Use simple, truthful and sensitive language, avoiding unnecessary detail.
- Explain that the person has died and will not be coming back, where this is appropriate to the child's age and understanding.
- Allow children to ask questions and acknowledge that people may feel differently.
- Reassure children about their immediate safety and who will care for them.
- Do not make promises that cannot be guaranteed or share information that the family has asked the school to keep private.
- Provide an opportunity for children to speak to a trusted adult, while recognising that some may prefer not to talk.

For Nursery and younger children, communication may need to be shared in small groups or individually, using familiar adults, short explanations, stories, pictures or play-based support. Parents and carers should be informed when sensitive information is shared with their child in school, where appropriate.

5.4 Communicating with parents and carers

The Headteacher will prepare a communication to parents and carers when appropriate, in consultation with the family and the Trust as necessary. The communication will be factual, sensitive and respectful of privacy. It may include advice on how to respond to children's questions and how to contact the school if a child is affected. Families will be reminded that children may react at different times and in different ways.

5.5 Support for children and staff

The school will identify children and adults who may be particularly affected, including close friends, siblings, classmates, staff members and children who have experienced previous loss. Support may include:

- Access to a trusted adult and regular check-ins.
- Maintaining familiar routines where possible, while allowing flexibility and time for emotional support.
- Age-appropriate stories, activities, drawing, play, memory-making or opportunities to talk.
- A quiet or calm space where a child can spend time with an adult when needed.
- Communication with parents and carers about changes in wellbeing or behaviour.
- Advice or referral to specialist support where the impact of grief is complex, prolonged or significantly affecting daily life.

Any support will be individualised and reviewed. Staff should not attempt to provide counselling beyond their training. Where a child or adult requires specialist help, the Headteacher or appropriate lead will discuss options with the family and relevant services.

5.6 The school day and practical arrangements

The Headteacher may adapt the timetable, staffing or routines to enable appropriate support. This may include additional staff availability, changes to planned activities or support from the Trust, Diocese, BCCS or Local Authority services.

A book of condolence, memory space or flowers may be arranged where appropriate and in consultation with the family. Any memorial activity will be considered sensitively, taking account of the age of the children, the family's wishes and the needs of the wider community.

5.7 Funeral attendance and commemorations

In consultation with the bereaved family, the Headteacher will clarify whether the school community is invited to attend a funeral or memorial. The school will consider the age and needs of pupils, supervision, staffing and the impact on the school day. Any decision about partial or full school closure will be made by the Headteacher in consultation with the Trust and relevant authorities.

5.8 Ongoing monitoring and records

Staff will continue to monitor the wellbeing of affected pupils and identify any concerns that may require further support. Relevant concerns, actions and agreed support will be recorded securely in the appropriate school system. Safeguarding concerns must be referred to the DSL and recorded in accordance with safeguarding procedures.

Where appropriate, relevant information about a child's ongoing support needs will be shared with future teachers or settings on a need-to-know basis, in accordance with data protection and safeguarding requirements. The school will avoid recording unnecessary sensitive detail.

6. Bereavement affecting the wider school community

The death of a pupil, member of staff, parent or another person closely connected to the school may affect the wider community. The Headteacher will coordinate the response, considering the relationship of children and staff to the person who has died, the likely impact and the family's wishes.

The school will work with the Trust and relevant partners to agree on communication, support, memorial arrangements and any practical changes. The school will consider the needs of children who may be indirectly affected, including those who have experienced previous bereavement or who find change and uncertainty particularly difficult.

7. Confidentiality and safeguarding

Information about a death and the circumstances surrounding it will be treated sensitively. Staff should not share information on social media or with people who do not need to know. Parents and carers will be asked to respect the privacy of the family and the wishes communicated by the school.

If a child discloses information that raises a safeguarding concern, or staff become concerned about a child's safety or significant emotional wellbeing, they must follow the school's safeguarding and child protection procedures and inform the DSL. Bereavement does not remove the need to respond to any separate safeguarding concern.

8. Monitoring and review

The Headteacher and Senior Leadership Team will review how the policy has been implemented following any significant bereavement, identifying learning and any additional support or training required. The Local Governing Committee will ensure that the policy is reviewed annually and updated where necessary in light of changes in circumstances, guidance or school practice.

Staff will be made aware of this policy and relevant procedures. The school will provide guidance or training, including how to share sad news with young children, how to respond to questions and how to recognise when further support may be needed.

Useful sources of support

The school will signpost families and staff to appropriate support based on individual circumstances. Potential sources include:

- The child's GP or other health professional, where appropriate.
- Brentwood Catholic Children's Society (BCCS) and relevant diocesan support.
- Christus Catholic Trust and Essex Local Authority services, including educational psychology where appropriate.
- Recognised bereavement charities and specialist services, selected in consultation with the family.

Current contact details and referral routes should be checked by the school before being shared with families.

Approval and review record

Approved by	Governing Body
Date approved	November 2026
Next review date	November 2027
Policy lead	Headteacher