



Bereavement Policy

Date of Review: June 2026

Date of Next Review: June 2027

Approved by Board of Governors: 11th June 2026

Signature:



Bereavement Policy

1. Aims & Ethos

Mount Lourdes Grammar School is committed to the emotional health and well-being of its staff and students. We wish to work towards this in all aspects of school life, and to provide an ethos, environment and curriculum that support and prepare students for coping with difficult experiences. Our school will endeavour to help young people to explore and develop an awareness and understanding of death as well as to support those who are personally affected by it.

2. Rationale

- 1 in 29 students aged five to sixteen- years old has been bereaved of a parent or sibling.
- Many more are affected by the death of someone close to them, including friends, siblings, grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins or other significant person.

Within our school community, there will almost always be a number of students or staff who are struggling with bereavement. Sometimes, the entire school community is impacted by the death of a member of staff or a student. As a school that is committed to the emotional wellbeing of students and staff, we believe that it is important to be able to respond to such issues in a proactive rather than reactive way. This policy is in place to enable us to help everyone act empathetically and appropriately if this issue arises.

3. Objectives

- A framework for all staff to give guidance in how to deal sensitively and compassionately with the bereavement.
- To support students and/ or members of staff before (where applicable), during and after bereavement.
- To enhance effective communication and clarify the pathway of support between members of staff, pupils, the family/ guardians and the community.
- To identify key staff within school and the Board of Governors.
- To have clear expectations about the way school will respond to a death, and provide a nurturing, safe and supportive environment for all.

When using this policy, it is important to remember that this is a guidance document and every situation, student, and staff member is different. We must always use our discretion and tailor the information laid out in this policy accordingly; for example, some students will need little support, but others may need much more in-depth support.

We also recognise that helping students and staff in these situations can affect the person helping. Should this be the case, it is important to seek support from others in the school or use the signposts in this policy.

The objectives of this policy will work in conjunction with the objectives of the school's Critical Incident Policy.

4. Roles and Responsibilities

4.1 Board of Governors

- Monitoring the implementation and effectiveness of this policy by providing reports at full governing body meetings. The Chairperson and Governor for Child Protection and Safeguarding should be associated with pastoral support and in conversations with the Principal.
- Support the Principal to manage contact from, and with, the media.
- In the absence of the Principal, support the deputy or other designated staff member to implement this policy.
- Ensure the wellbeing of the Principal and other Senior Leaders in connection with matters relating to this policy.

4.2 Principal

The Principal (or in their absence the Vice-Principal) is responsible for the implementation of this policy including:

- Ensuring that all staff are supported and receive appropriate and up to date training.
- Being the first point of contact for the family of any student who dies whilst on roll or any student or staff member who is affected by a bereavement.
- Ensuring that the school has the family's permission to share information on the bereavement with the school community. This will include confirmation of what information the family want shared and via what school communication systems it will be shared.
- Ensuring that the news of a member of the school community is shared with staff appropriately depending on when the death occurs, e.g. staff meeting, via telephone 'pyramid', staff text messaging system etc. Information shared should be correct, factual and conveyed as soon as is reasonably possible.
- Ensuring that staff who may need additional support are informed in an appropriate way.
- Ensuring that pupils are informed of the news in small groups with a familiar adult.
- Identifying the most vulnerable students (along with the relevant Senior Teacher and the Learning Support Team) and ensuring they are given the support they might need.
- Ensuring that approaches to all aspects of bereavement are always respectful of religious and cultural beliefs and values.
- Ensuring that the most appropriate member of staff for an individual student is assigned to speak with any bereaved student for example, Designated Teacher i/c Child Protection, Senior Teachers, Head of Year, Form Teacher.
- Ensuring appropriate planning is in place for re-integration of students or staff when they return to school.
- Being the central point for receipt of information relating to any death within the school community and monitoring the effectiveness of the support given to those impacted by bereavement.
- Speaking to students and staff about a bereavement within the school community or ensuring that the appropriate member of staff does so.
- Where appropriate, being the central point for decisions such as necessary timetable revisions, leave, and memorial activity.
- Contacting the Education Authority Critical Incident Management Team in the case of a sudden or unexpected death.
- Ensuring the Board of Governors are informed.
- Being the first point of contact for any media enquires or media releases.
- Together with the Chairperson of the Board of Governors and relevant staff members, taking decisions and managing any social media interactions or strategies.

- Preparing a message / letter for parents / guardians which will be shared via the school parent app. Communication to parents / guardians will also include guidance to parents on supporting a bereaved young person.

4.3 Senior Leadership Team

The SLT should:

- Be appropriately trained to deal with issues relating to bereavement and ensure that relevant information and training is available for all staff.
- Ensure day-to-day support for bereaved students, including co-ordinating support from the most appropriate member of staff for the particular student.
- Provide support to other members of staff who are actively supporting the bereaved student.
- Ensure that external support is provided, where considered necessary, for example, where there has been a sudden death of a student or a number of students, outside support from external agencies might be valuable.
- Ensure a co-ordination of any acts of remembrance - for example, organising an assembly, memorial etc.
- Make sure that there are safe places for students to be whilst in school if they feel the need to leave a classroom situation.
- Arrange support for a student at a funeral or other remembrance activity (where this is considered appropriate).
- Provide monitoring and support for a student whose progress in school ceases or regresses due to the impact of bereavement or loss on their emotional wellbeing and engagement with learning.
- Pastoral support should also maintain a calendar of significant dates for the student and ensure appropriate support is in place at difficult times, including when a student changes school or in the time coming up to a holiday period.

4.5 All Staff (Including Head of Year & Form Teachers)

- All staff should be aware of this policy and ensure that they are ready to support a student if asked to do so.
- All staff should inform the principal as early as possible when they know about a death affecting anyone in the school.
- If you are concerned about a change in behaviour or a loss of learning as a result of a bereavement, you must speak with the pastoral team or appropriate member of staff to access support for the student.
- All staff should be aware of how to share information in a sensitive way so that trust is maintained. When dealing with any issues relating to this policy, staff should keep information they share to a minimum to keep the student or fellow staff member safe.
- Sensitive information will only be disclosed with careful thought as to the needs of those involved and in line with all data regulations.
- If there is an issue which relates to safeguarding, staff should follow the safeguarding procedures including with reference to sharing and recording of information.

5. Procedures

5.1 Pre-bereavement

Pre-bereavement support may be needed in situations where someone has not died yet, but is going to die, for example, a long-term illness.

In this situation, the school will:

- Stay in contact with the family through a designated member of staff, as appropriate, so that the school is fully aware of all of the circumstances.

- Ensure that only relevant and agreed information is shared.
- Consider whether or not professional support might be useful and, if so, either signpost to that support, or arrange for it to be given.
- Where appropriate, involve local clergy.
- Ascertain how those involved wish for the wider school to be involved (if at all).

5.2 Accurate Information

In the immediate aftermath of any tragedy where bereavement is an issue, it is important to find out as much information as possible. This is important to prevent the spread of rumour and misinformation. The Principal will make efforts to gather facts and ascertain how those connected to the bereavement would prefer information to be disseminated. This will include consideration of any religious or cultural requirements. This information might come from the family of a student who has died: what do they want to be shared and how do they wish the rest of the school or wider community to be told.

*School Procedure: Speak to the family and offer condolences.
Obtain factual information to avoid unnecessary speculation
Clarify information and the wishes of family*

If it is not possible to contact the family, the Principal - together with SLT will decide what is most appropriate in terms of content of information, when to share it, and how. Support from the Chair of Governors will be sought if needed.

5.3 Disseminating information

The Principal and Senior Leadership Team will decide the most appropriate method of communicating for each audience. This may be different in each case, but at the outset it should be agreed who, what, and how staff, students, parents or carers, and the wider community (if appropriate) will be informed.

This dissemination of information can be complicated where there is information being shared on social media. Further information can be found at Section 8 of this policy about interactions with both the media and social media.

5.4 Sharing with the whole school and/or wider community

Circumstances where the whole school and the wider community needs to be informed are, for example, where there is a sudden death, or where the school suffers a tragedy such as bus crash. In these circumstances, the principal together with the Senior Leadership Team will decide whether it is best, in all the individual circumstances, to inform students and staff in smaller groups or all together. This group will also, in advance of any conversation, agree what information will be shared.

5.5 Sharing bad news with individuals

The principal will break news of a death to an individual student or member of staff. Often, it will be best to have this conversation immediately but there may be circumstances when a slight delay is appropriate, if for example you are waiting for a particular member of staff to convey the information or where the family have asked the school to delay.

6.0 Short-term actions

Signposting to external support

Initial external support and signposting is as follows:

- If there is a sudden death in the school community, the school may signpost students and staff to support from local support groups / agencies.

- If the death is violent or linked to alleged criminal offence(s) the school will seek support from outside statutory agencies such as the police or the Education Authority Critical Incident Management Team
- Where there is a tragedy involving multiple students or staff members, the school will give immediate thought as to the merits of engaging emergency support from counsellors or psychologists.

6.1 Short term support measures in school

In the few days following a bereavement a school can, and should, be a safe place for a student or staff member. We will use the following strategies as ways of helping people involved in a bereavement to feel safe and supported:

- Adjusting timetables to build in quiet time or letting those affected by the bereavement know that it is acceptable to need time or space alone. Leaving lessons (in a managed and non-disruptive way) will be allowed if necessary, for some students.
- Making a designated area in the school environment for those affected to access. For example, a quiet classroom (preferably near to teaching staff who can help if needed) or pastoral room will be available. Suitable places in our school include, Room 27.
- In the case of a death of a student or staff member, we will set up a safe, quiet but supervised space for a tribute. This is most likely to include a book of condolence which, if appropriate, we will invite any family members to be involved in, or we will share the images of the tribute with them at a later stage. We will consult with students and staff before removing the tribute.
- A special assembly may be organised for a student or staff member who has died, to allow a time for the affected members of the school to come together and remember the person who has died. This size and content of the assembly will be carefully considered and organised by the SLT in collaboration with the affected teachers, with student led sections such as readings or prayers, as appropriate.
- A member of staff will be available for direct support for the student(s).
- The school counselling team (Familyworks) will be informed.
- Letting students and staff know that the Principal is checking about funeral arrangements and keeping relevant people informed.
- Ensuring that staff members are aware of the school's arrangements for compassionate leave.

6.2 Funerals

- The Principal will consult with the family if students and staff are welcome to attend a funeral and carry out a guard of honour.
- The appropriate member of staff should ensure that any staff absence is covered and all relevant staff members must be made aware that a student won't be attending school on the particular day.
- The school will in the event of the death of a student or staff member,
 - Offer support to the family in the arrangements for the funeral such as music, readings etc. The Music Department, Religion Department and School Liturgy Coordinator will be involved if necessary.
 - Send a tribute to the funeral such as flowers.
 - Offer refreshments to be sent to the family home.

The principal should ensure that this is handled appropriately

In the event of the death of a student or member of staff the school will seek to maintain normal school routines for the majority of students and staff.

The school will endeavour to remain open to ensure support and normal routine can be provided for all students and staff. The decision will be made following consultation with the School Leadership and relevant agencies by the Board of Governors.

As a mark of respect the following will take place

- The Principal will consult with the family if students and staff are welcome to attend the funeral and provide a guard of honour.
- If so, the form class will attend the funeral / provide guard of honour.
- The school will determine if there are any other students in the given year group in the first instance and then from any other year group who request to attend the funeral.
- The Principal, a member of SLT, the Head of Year and Form Teacher will attend. In the event of the death of a staff member - department members will attend.
- Staff will be given an opportunity to put their name forward to attend the funeral. The school management will endeavour to accommodate this request if appropriate supervision can be put in place.
- On the morning of the funeral a special assembly will be held for the whole school community (via Teams). This assembly will be organised by the School Liturgy Co-ordinator.
- A minute of silent reflection will be held by the school community at the time of the funeral.
- The school pastoral team will support student s/ staff on the day of the funeral.
- Refreshments to be served in school canteen for those who attend the funeral.

6.3 Student return to school

Although there is no set time for when it is best for a student to return to school, being absent for a long period of time can cause difficulty in settling back and increase anxiety. Our school recommends a return to school as soon as possible in order to reduce disruption for the student, though this recommendation is flexible depending on the individual circumstances of death and the wishes of the child and family.

Where a student is returning to school following an absence due to a personal bereavement, the school will offer a reintegration meeting. This will be undertaken by the Principal or the most appropriate member of staff for that student. The meeting will support the student's return to school and will review:

- (a) whether or not the student is ready to return to the classroom;
- (b) listen to their concerns and wishes about returning to school;
- (c) find out how they want to share the news (if at all);
- (d) consider how to open communications with the student and parents to raise any concerns and/or offer on-going support and
- (e) consider what, if any, additional support that student might require for a successful return to the classroom.
- (f) identify an individual link person to support the student when necessary.

This additional support to discuss includes:

- To find a timeout space and ensure staff know that the student may leave their lesson to access "time-out".
- To consider whether the student can be supported well through their peer group or by older students; if this is thought to be the case the school will help the supporting students to undertake this role.
- To consider giving the student a way of diverting to other activities such as arts or reading time or creating some way for remembering the person they have lost.

6.4 Staff return to school

- Where a staff member is returning to work after a bereavement, the Principal will hold a meeting with the member of staff to see if they are ready to return to work and how they can best be supported.
- This meeting should cover what they want their students to know (if anything) and assess whether or not they are ready to return to work.
- The staff member should also be encouraged to share any concerns they have. It may be that this meeting would be best attended together with a friend of the person returning to work.

- The school will also ensure that the staff member and the school have a clear method of communicating any concerns to each other and ascertain whether or not the member of staff might benefit from outside support such as grief counselling.

7.0 Longer term actions

7.1 Permanent Memorials

A permanent memorial can be a good way of a school coming together to remember the loss of those associated with the school. When considering a memorial, the family should be consulted before making a decision. The Principal should speak to the family and ensure that their views are considered when making a final decision.

In the event of the death of a current student of the school, a picture / photograph of the student will be placed on the school memorial wall.

7.2 Longer-term pupil support

Consideration must be given to the longer term needs of any pupils affected by a bereavement.

The school:

- Recognises that some students will grieve for the rest of their lives and some days may be more significant than others such as anniversaries, Mother's/ Father's Day, exam series etc. The Head of Year will keep a record of significant dates and ensure that extra support is available at these times.
- Head of Year will be responsible for passing on details of the bereavement at transition points.
- Recognises that bereavement can adversely affect learning and achievement for some students, whereas other students can put extra pressure on themselves to achieve. Both of these can be detrimental to the student. All staff should be alert to this and discuss any such concerns with an appropriate member of staff – form teacher, head of year or pastoral support.
- If the student is vulnerable, further support or one to one support might be appropriate.

8.0 Sudden Death

Dealing with sudden death can present a different set of needs, including being a potential trigger for further suicides. The school recognises that dissemination of information shortly after the event (where possible within two days) is paramount to the wellbeing of our students.

The information we share will:

- Include a clear set of facts and no information will be based on rumour or speculation.
- Not glorify death and will not include any details of any suicide note.
- Take the utmost care with our choice of language: we will always, for example, use the terms "died by suicide" or "ended her life by suicide" rather than "committed suicide". Similarly, we will not use the term "unsuccessful" or "failed" suicide but rather we will use "attempted to end his or her life".
- Ensure that the students are fully aware that death is permanent.
- Ensure that students are aware that there are a wide range of reactions to sudden death including both anger and guilt. We will also make sure that our students are aware that fleeting thoughts of sudden death are not unusual and with support people can, and do, cope.

9.0 Death, Grief and Bereavement in the Curriculum

Teaching the topic of death, grief and bereavement will help pupils to understand feelings of grief and prepare them for the future. Parents/Guardians will be informed in advance will help to gather information about previous bereavements so that vulnerable pupils can be prepared for the lesson. Recently bereaved pupils may find it helpful if they are given the option to work elsewhere or step outside, if they think it would be too painful to attend.

10.0 Inclusion and Equality

Our school recognises that there is a range of cultural and religious customs and procedures concerning death and that there may be different expectations of the bereaved pupil and family. We will try to present a balance of different approaches to death and loss. Pupils and staff will be made aware that there are a range of different responses to bereavement and that we need to value and respect each one of these.

11.0 Responding to the Media

The school has a clear media protocol when dealing with issues that relate to a death that the media may be interested in:

- The principal will be the single point of contact for any, and all, media enquiries.
- If appropriate and in agreement with the bereaved family a written media statement will be prepared and posted on the school's own social media channels.
- The Principal will be supported by the Critical Incident Team.
- All staff and everyone in the school community will be instructed not to speak to the media

12.0 Staff Support and Training

The school will seek the support of the Education Authority Critical Incident Management Team in the event of a student or staff member death.

Resources will be shared with staff and training accessed where necessary.

An information session to enable parents to support young people will also be accessed where necessary.

All staff will be reminded that they have access to support from LENA.

13.0 Links to Other Policies

- Critical Incident Policy
- Child Protection Policy
- Policy statement on Health and Safety
- Attendance Policy
- Positive Behaviour Management Policy
- Equality and Inclusion Policy

14.0 Monitoring and Review

The policy will be reviewed annually and the amendments made (where necessary) will be informed by consultation with all members of the school community. Consideration will be given to any developments and will take into account the learning from ongoing practice and experience. Any changes made will be shared with the staff and presented to the Board of Governors.

Appendix 1

Training and resources

Appendix 2

Being prepared when delivering bad news will help to make these conversations easier. These are the steps that Child Bereavement UK suggest using when deciding how to deliver news about any death. This can be used in any situation and with any audience:

- Start by acknowledging you have some sad news to give.
- Be honest. Give the news stating simple facts. Use the words dead/died.
- If known, and with the family's permission, explain briefly where and when the death occurred.
- If not known, say so, and that you will endeavour to find out. If rumours are rife, say which of these are definitely not correct, if known. Where appropriate, remind pupils of their responsibilities and the impact when posting on social media.
- Talk briefly and positively about the person who died without eulogising them.
- Mention any arrangements already in place, including for those needing support.
- Acknowledge that not everyone will be feeling sad and that is OK.
- Allow a break in the timetable for pupils to process the news and take a little time-out.

