

# PORTFIELD SCHOOL & SATELLITE CENTRES



## **POLICY DOCUMENT FOR BEREAVEMENT**

### **Review of Policy**

This policy will be reviewed on a biennial basis in consultation with staff, parents and governors.

Adopted by the Headteacher and Chair of Governors on 05/06/2019

This policy will be reviewed by: June 2021

### MISSION STATEMENT

Working together    Learning together    Achieving together

At Portfield School we strive to

- Create a happy, safe, supportive and stimulating learning environment
- Value everyone
- Develop everyone's personal, social, emotional health and wellbeing
- Promote relevant academic and vocational skills
- Meet individual needs through an imaginative and flexible approach
- Enable all learners to achieve their full potential

UNCRC United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

- Portfield School places the values and principles of the UNCRC at the heart all policies and practices
- Portfield School is a Rights Respecting School

## **Portfield School Bereavement Policy**

### **Rationale**

This policy has been prepared for use by all school staff in an attempt to provide a framework of support for students in the school in the event of a bereavement.

Everyone's reaction to bereavement will be unique, and dependent upon their levels of awareness, understanding and intellectual development, as well as their relationship with the deceased. It is not designed to make us all experts in the complex field of bereavement support, but rather to address the many issues that may arise in a positive and practical way, and offer guidelines on how best we may support our students and ourselves during a very traumatic time.

### **Background**

It seems sensible to reflect on how the school should respond to a situation before the event, and have strategies to deal with such an event if and when it occurs.

When home circumstances are changed as a result of a death in the family, the school aims to be a place of support to the individual student. If the death is of a student or staff member, the whole school community will work together to support each other. It is also important to remember that other parents may also need support. Many of our students have been with the same peer group for many years, and their parents may have formed close relationships with each other over this period too.

## **How children grieve**

Given the complex and varied needs of our students, it is difficult to gauge how the loss will affect them as individuals. However, the developmental age of a child does have a direct impact on their level of understanding, and it is useful to have some knowledge of what death means to children at various stages in their development.

### **Under 2 years old**

At this stage of development children are not able to understand about death, but will experience the loss as a separation from someone that they may have an attachment to. Due to limited ability to communicate verbally, children may express this loss in other ways eg. Becoming withdrawn, crying etc. The emotional state of people around them may also have an adverse effect, and normality and routine are very important.

### **2-5 years old**

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 old**

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 old**

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.

## **Adolescents**

At this stage of development, young people are developing their own ideas about who they are and what is important to them in their lives. They are more aware of their future. Death may cause them to reflect on the meaning and purpose of life, or they may not want to reflect, and hide their feelings. As adults our job is to let them know that we are there if they need to talk, or that we can find someone else to help if necessary. Although the grieving process at this age is much like an adults, teenagers are still developing emotionally, and need support.

## **How we can support our students whatever the circumstances of the death**

The extent of the impact of the loss could be missed because of the students' limited ability to express feelings, but it is most important that all staff use their knowledge of individual students to support them in the most appropriate way.

**S** – Be sensitive and supportive. Try to maintain the normality and Security of the school environment but be there if they need to talk

**H** – Be honest with yourself, and with the student at their level of Understanding. Answer questions clearly and honestly. Don't be Afraid of saying 'I don't know'

**A** – Be aware and acknowledge emotions. Share feelings openly.

**R** – Respect the individual and their wishes.

**E** – Empathy

## **Procedures**

### **When a member of the student's family dies**

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.

If requested or appropriate pupils can be referred to

1. Sandy Bears Agency for professional support following bereavement.
2. School Counsellor - Parents can refer pupil to the service . Self-referral is available to SLD older pupils.

## **When a member of staff or a student 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 students 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 students in school
- Parents will be informed 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
- Representatives to attend the funeral as appropriate
- 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/student.
- Contact Ty Hafan to provide support to staff as appropriate – Sandy Bear- EP
- Make arrangements for a memorial service in school. Invite parents and outside agencies who have known the student if appropriate.
- Family made aware of school memory garden if they wish to plant in memory of bereaved
- Family made aware of school memory book
- Ongoing support to staff and children as appropriate

## **Books which can be used with children and young adults with special needs**

### **When mum died, When dad died**

**Author: Sheila Hollins and Lester Sireling**

**Publisher: Gaskell ( Royal College of Psychiatrists)**

Simple pictures. They adopt a more direct approach to death which may be more suitable for SEN students.

Guidance is given on how to answer any questions plus information on other resources available.

### **Let's talk about death**

**Author: Karen Watchman**

**Publisher: Scottish Down's Association**

Simple text and photographs to support. Social Story style would also be useful for use with students on the Autistic Spectrum.

### **When someone very special dies**

**Author: Marge Heegaard**

**Publisher: Woodland Press**

A simple workbook. I have adapted most of this into symbol supported text.

### **Granpa**

**Author: J Burningham**

**Publisher: Puffin**

A simple picture book which can elicit discussion with students about how they feel etc.

### **Always and forever**

**Author: A Durant**

**Publisher: 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.

### **Badger's Parting Gifts**

**Author: Susan Varley**

**Publisher: Anderson Press**

Badgers friends learn to come to terms with his death, the book reinforces a celebration of the life and gifts given by a loved one.

## **Grandpa's Slide Show**

**Author: G Gould**

**Publisher: Puffin**

A useful book to use when a grandparent dies.

## **Grandma's shoes**

**Author: L Hathorn**

**Publisher: Viking**

A book about the healing process after a bereavement.

## **Fred**

**Author: P Simonds**

**Publisher: Penguin**

Dealing with the death of a pet.

## **Badger's Parting Gifts**

**Author: S. Varley**

**Publisher: Julia McRae**

A lovely book to illustrate death and the legacy of friendship

## **I'll always love you**

**Author: H Wilhelm**

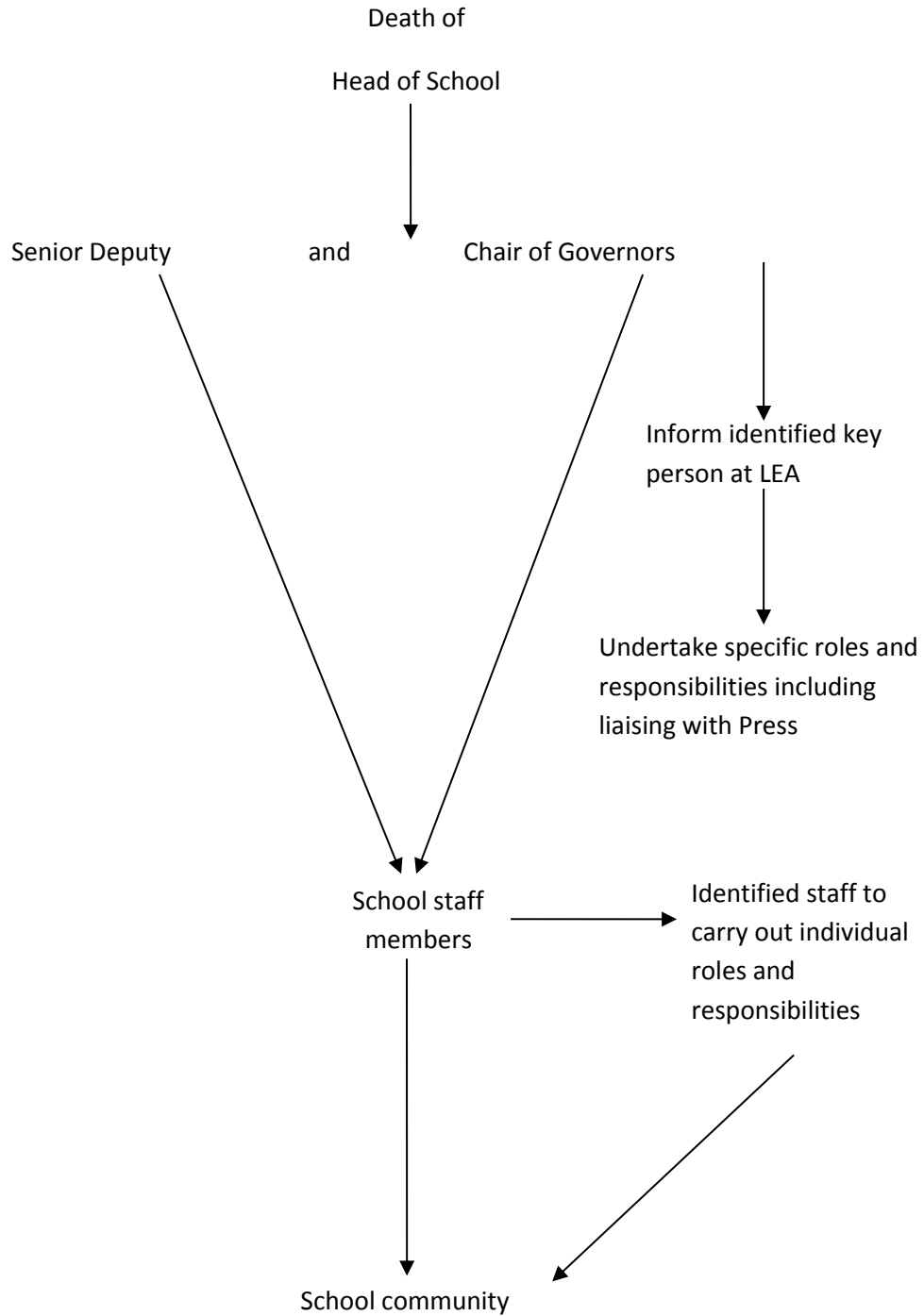
**Publisher: Hodder and Stoughton**

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

## **Conclusion**

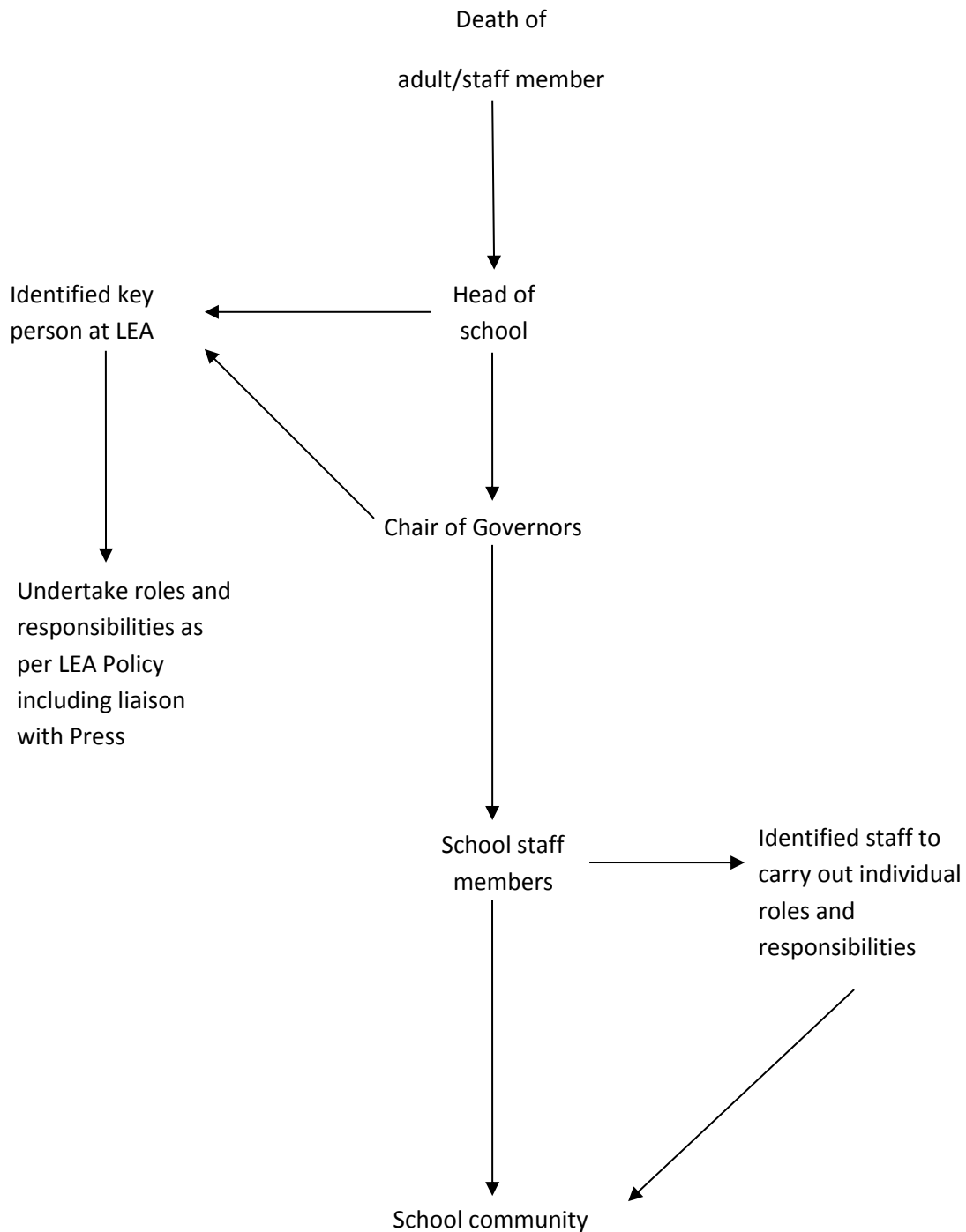
Bereavement affects everyone in different ways and for different periods of time. The same is true for people with learning difficulties. To some it may mean the physical loss of the one person who really understood their needs, for others the loss of their support system. Whatever the level of understanding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

**Information Sharing Pathway**  
**following death of Head of School**

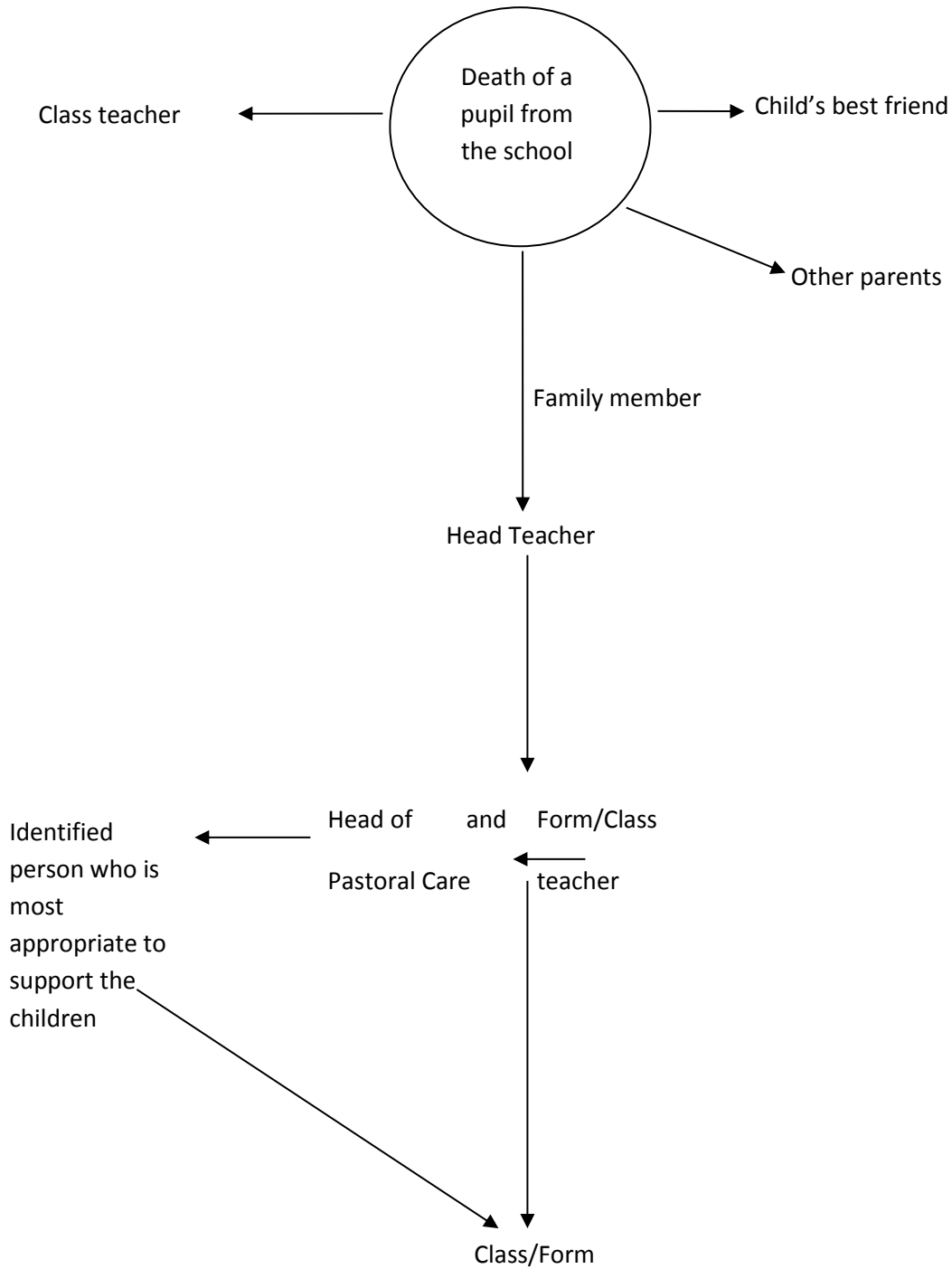




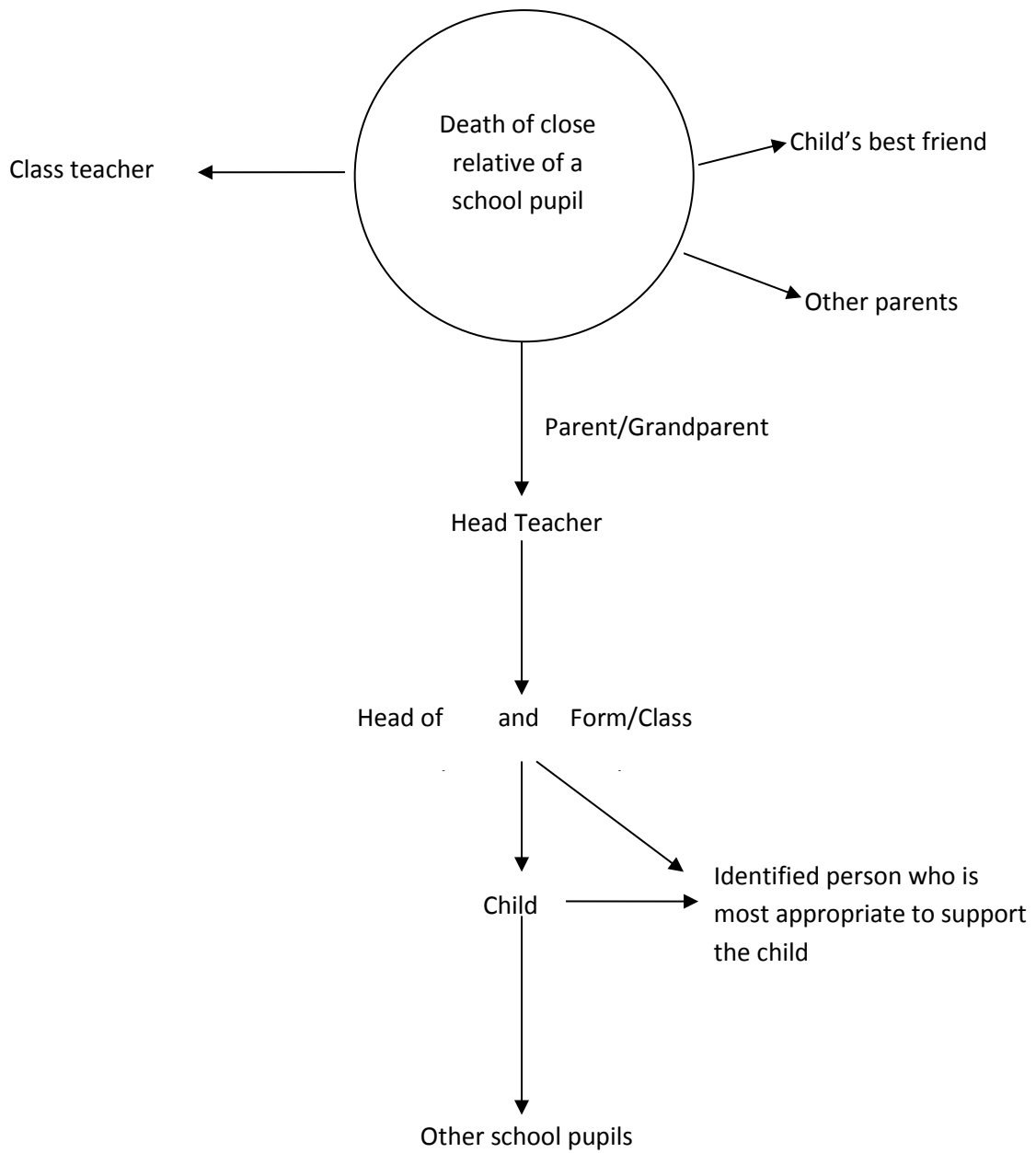
**Information Sharing Pathway**  
**following death of a staff member**



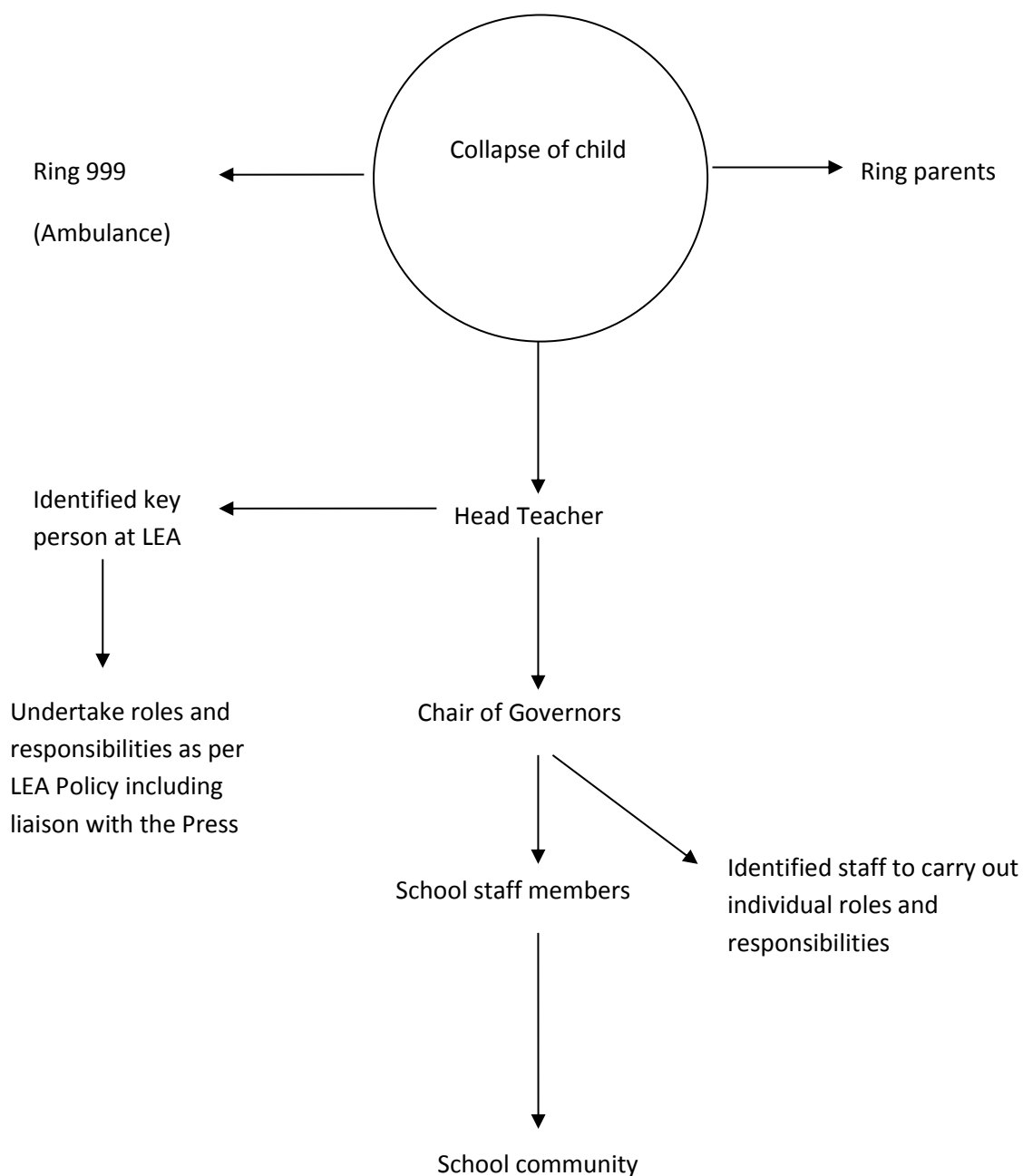
**Information Sharing Pathway**  
**following death of pupil**



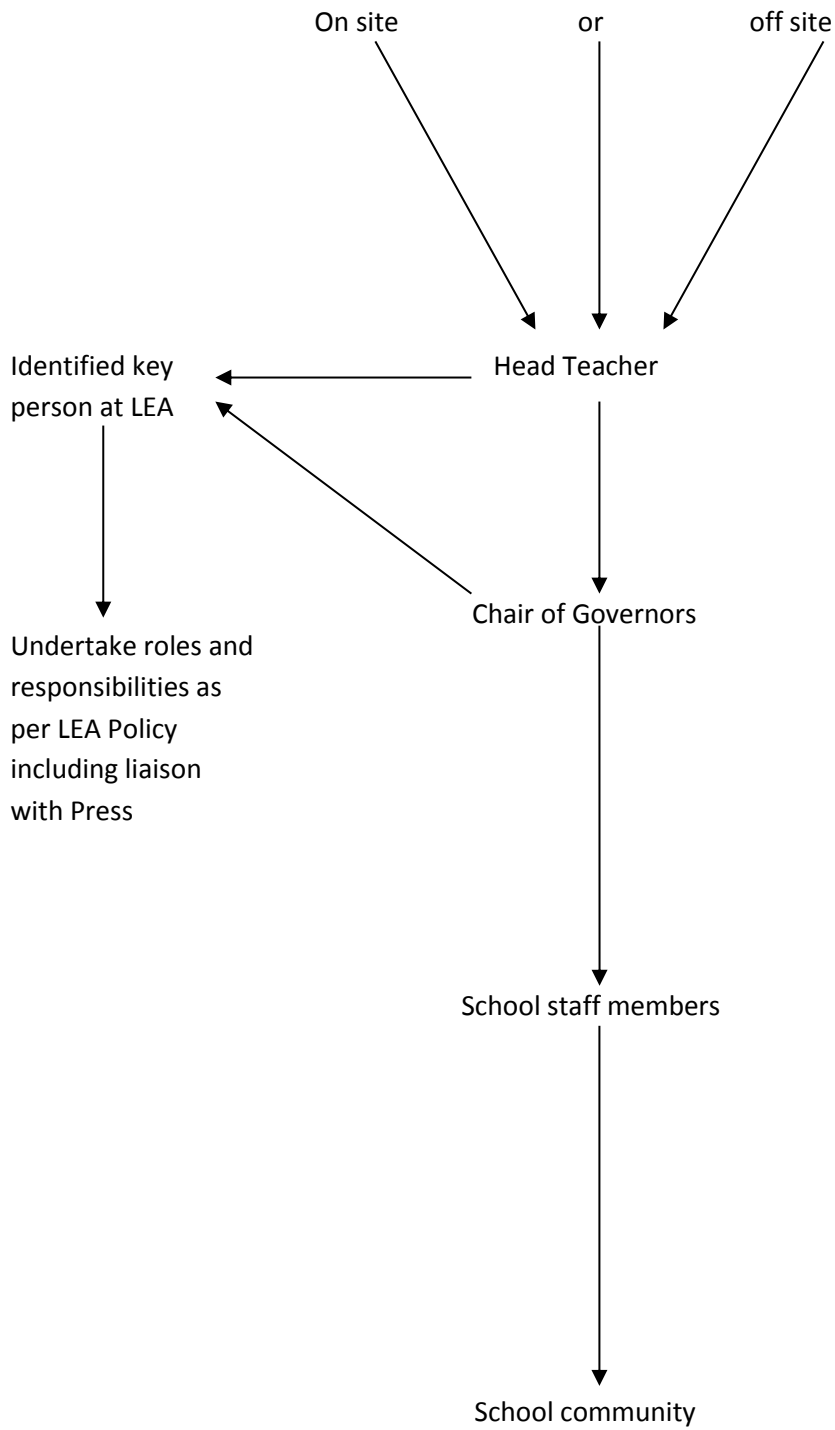
**Information Sharing Pathway**  
**following death of close family member**  
**of school pupil**



**Information Sharing Pathway**  
**following death of child in school**



**Information Sharing Pathway**  
**following major incidents**



## HOW WE CAN SUPPORT PUPILS DEALING WITH LOSS OR ATTACHMENT

Some pupils who do not live with their birth family may experience feelings of loss or develop attachment issues as they struggle to cope with moving home and with new people caring for them.

All staff in school are trained in Emotion Coaching and attachment.

All classes complete daily 'check ins' with pupils to help support any emotional needs. We use agreed emotions cards across the school to help pupils learn to label their emotions correctly and a range of problem solving strategies to help pupils cope better in the future, these include social stories, comic strip conversations and problem solving sheets.

We have 4 trained Emotional Literacy Support Assistants (ELSAs) who work with pupils on a 1-1 basis at times of need. The school councillor also supports pupils on request.