

## **Bereavement Policy**

### **for use within Schools**

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.

In addition to these individual pupils, schools may also experience the death of a child at the school or a staff member.

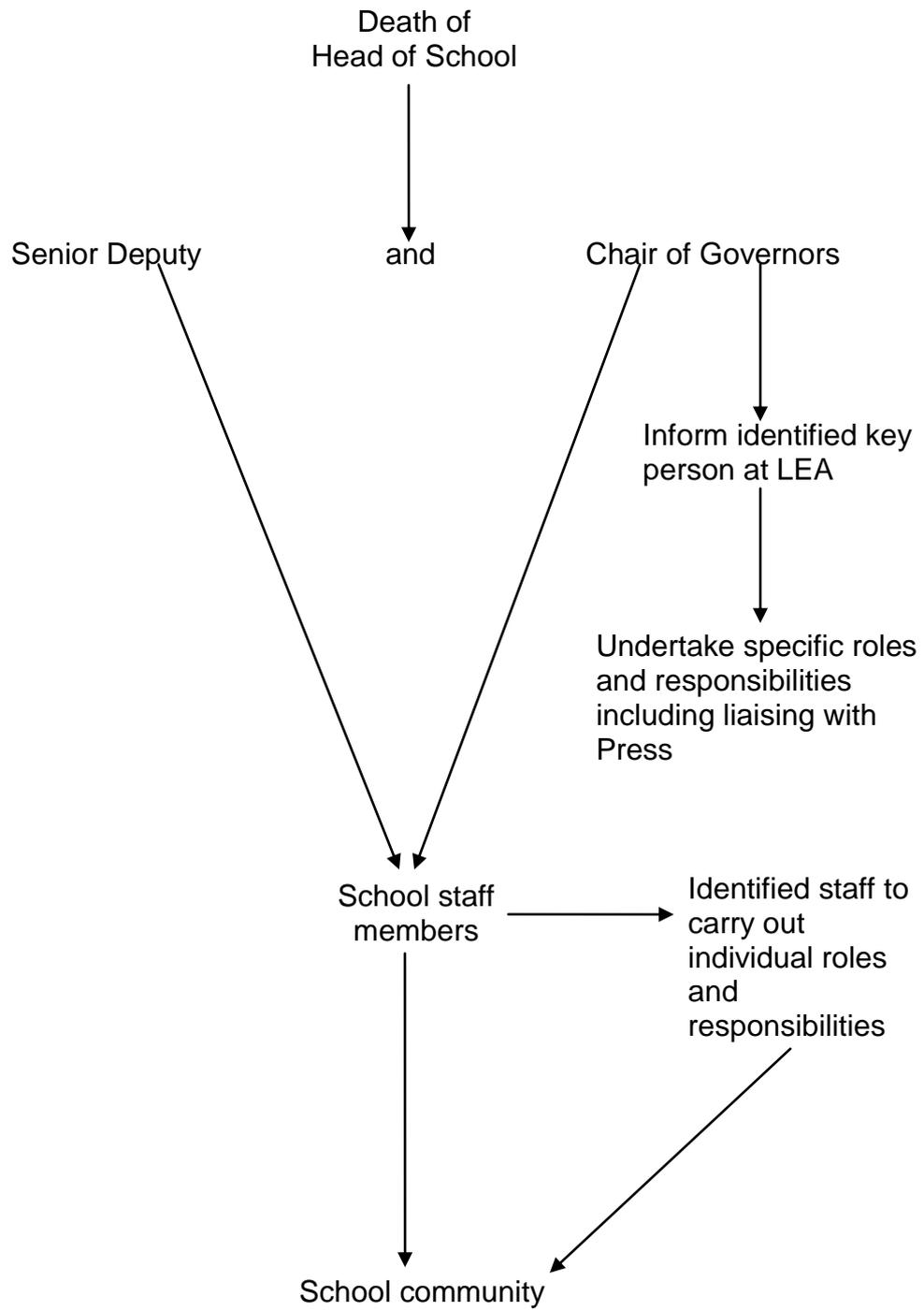
It is almost inevitable therefore, that at some time all schools will have to deal with a death that affects the school community.

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.

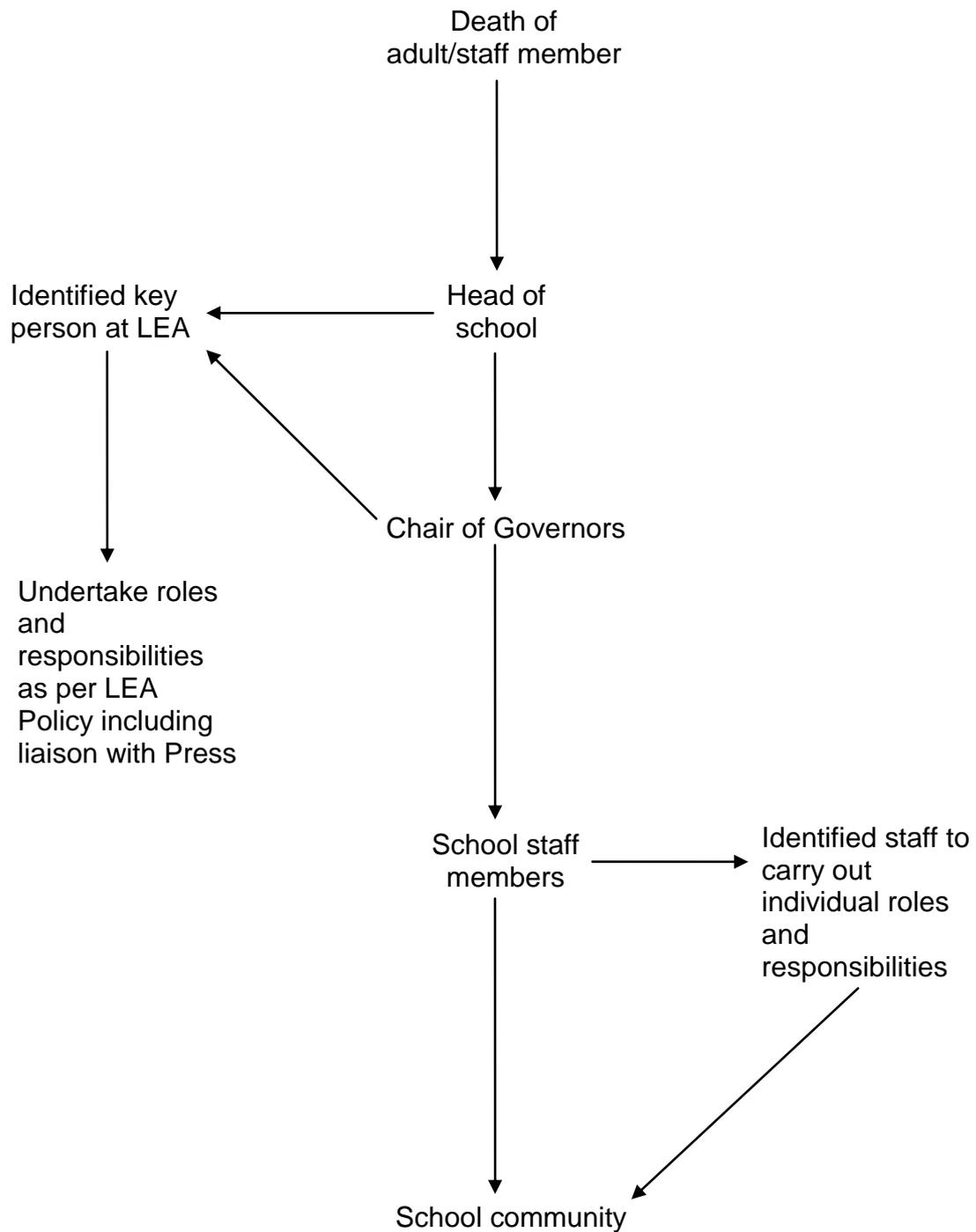
Death is something that most people choose not to think about so when faced with it we often find ourselves ill prepared.

The purpose of the 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.

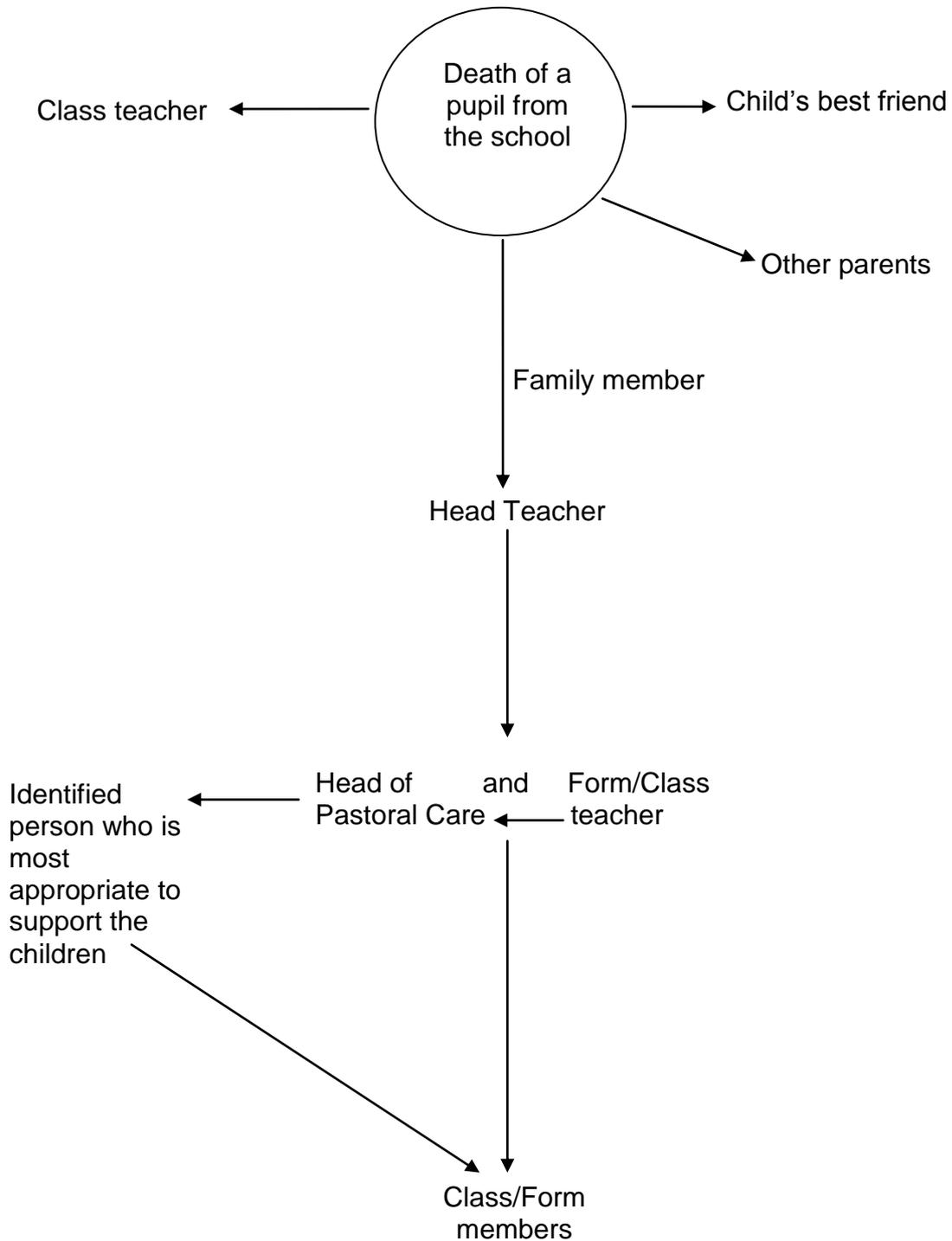
# Information Sharing Pathway following death of Head of School



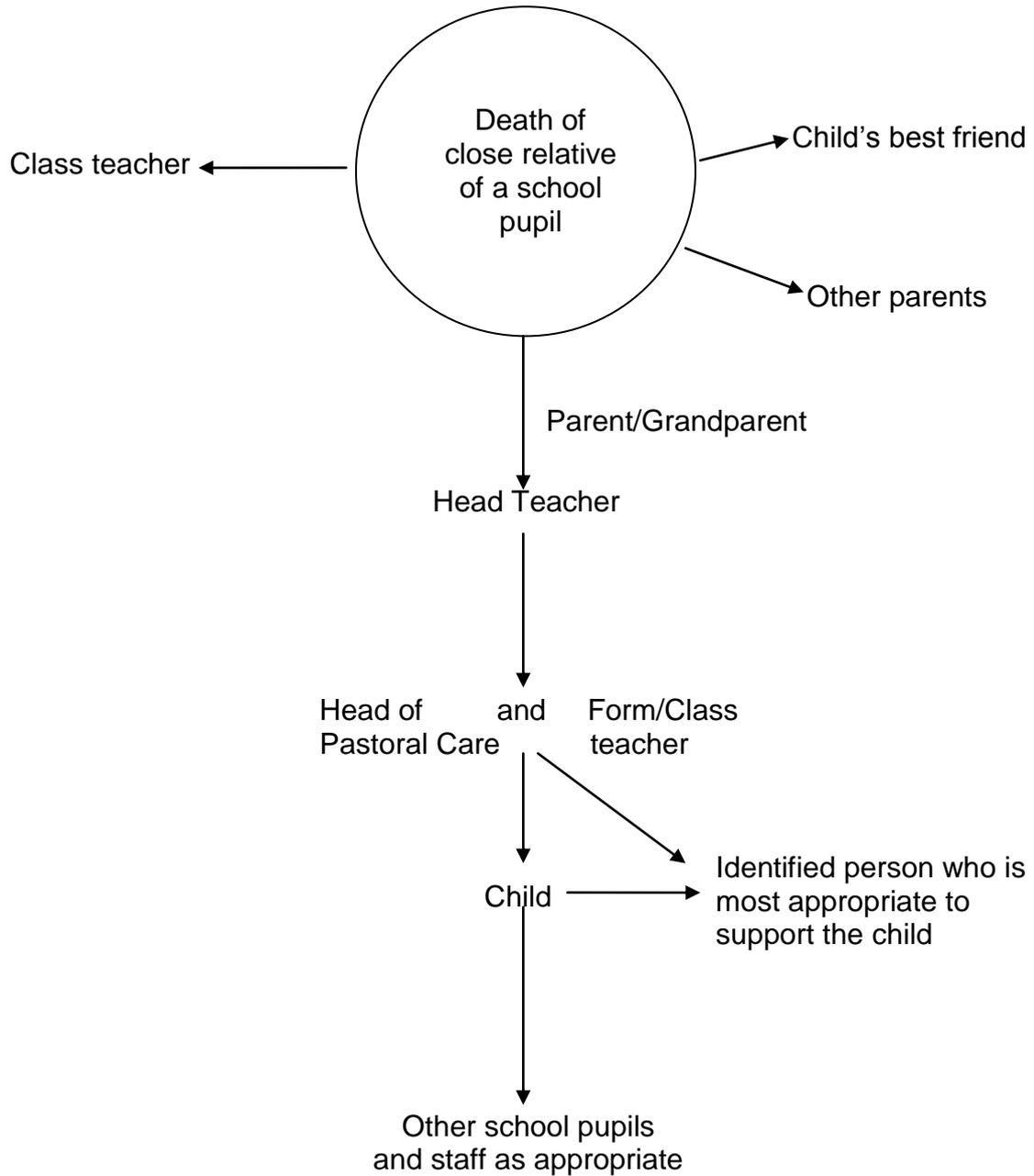
## Information Sharing Pathway following death of a staff member



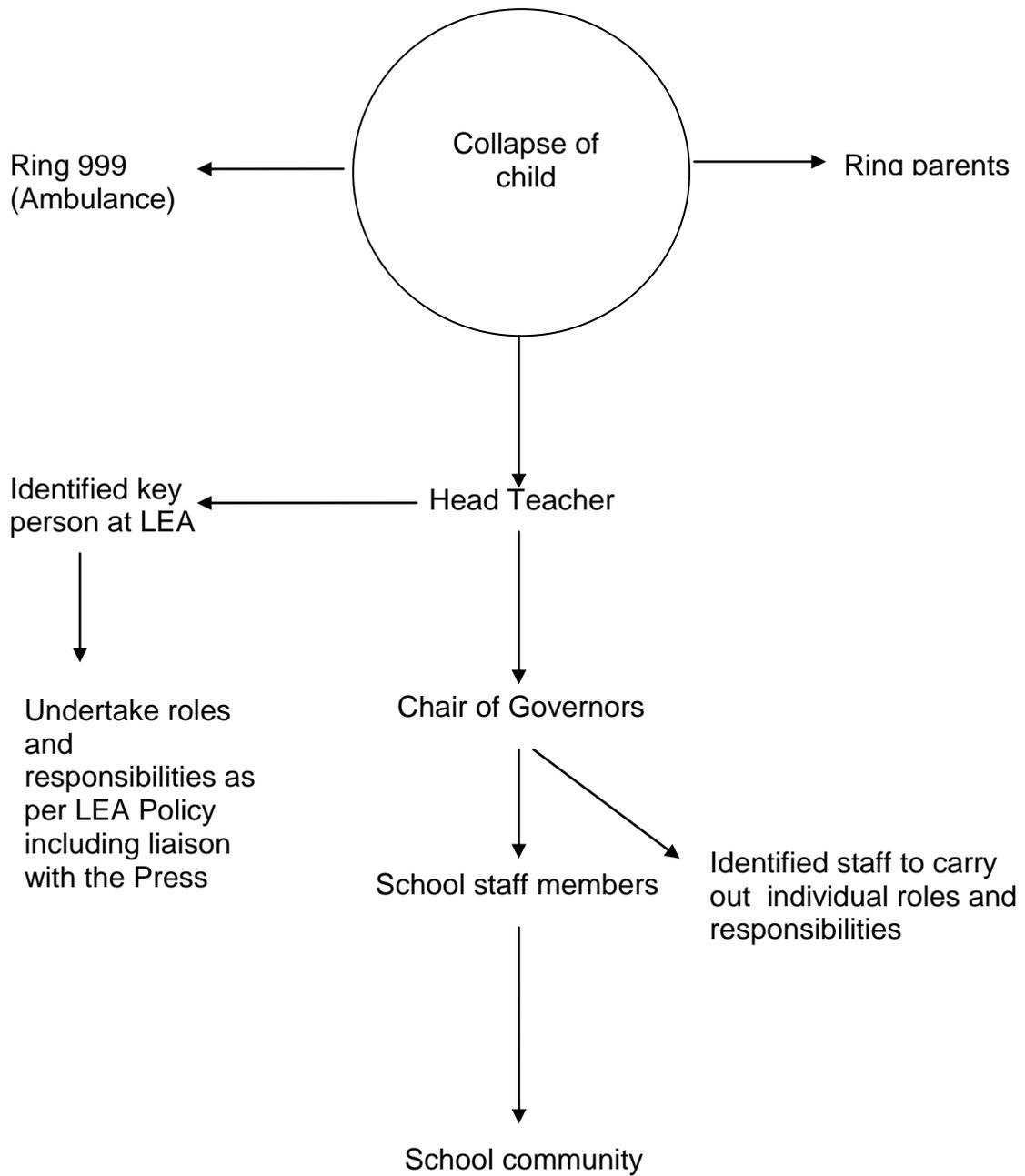
**Information Sharing Pathway**  
**following death of pupil**



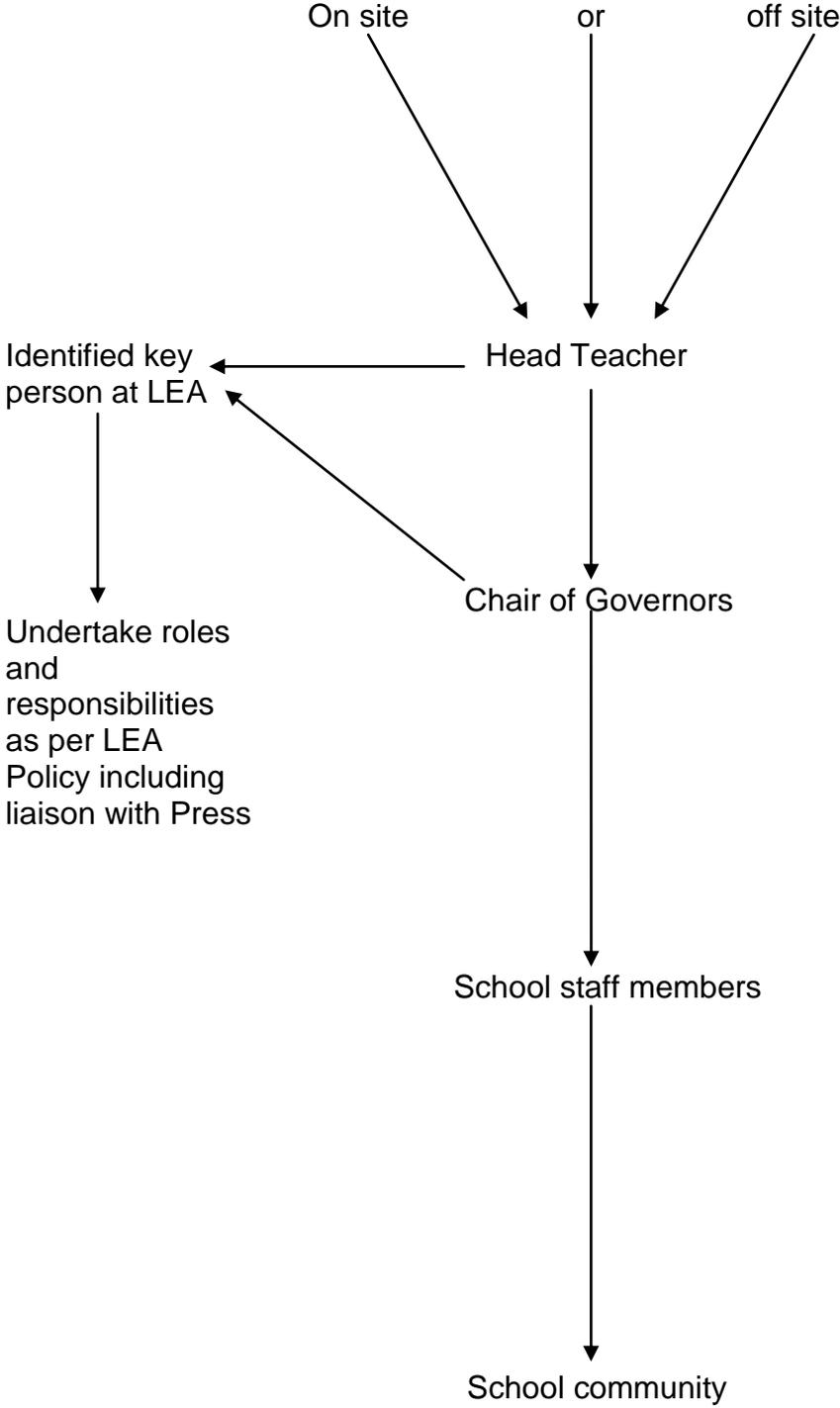
**Information Sharing Pathway**  
**following death of close family member**  
**of school pupil**



# Information Sharing Pathway following death of child in school



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



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

<Address>

<Date>

Dear Parents

Your child's class teacher/form tutor/head of year 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/form tutor/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

## 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 cognisant 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, by telephone, text or e-mail etc.
- 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 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/young people

- Inform the children/young people as soon as possible about the death.
- Where possible, the pupils should be informed in small groups i.e. class or tutor 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/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.
- Be honest about your own feelings and talk about your relationship with the person.
- Avoid using euphemisms.
- Those children/young people 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/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.
- 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/young person who needs additional help and support.
- Refer to the bereavement toolkit for further guidance.

## **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 secretaries/administrative staff who are taking telephone calls, dealing with parents etc.
- Through the nominated staff member 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:-

- Putting an obituary in the paper, 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.

## **Bereavement Toolkit**

The Bereavement in School Toolkit is a resource to be used in schools offering guidance, examples and possible solutions to problems encountered on a day to day basis when trying to help bereaved children. It also includes a list of resources and useful contact details when looking for help and support.

The Toolkit will be piloted in September 2007 and, following evaluation, will be rolled out to any schools who wish to use it.

Reference to the Toolkit could be made in the Bereavement Policy if it is successfully evaluated.