## Sanday Community School

The heart, soul and future of our island community.

A Bereavement Policy

###### The Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 aims to ensure that the welfare of the child is paramount. **Getting it right for every child (GIRFEC) means that schools work to support the emotional well-being of children, young people and their families by supporting them through bereavement.**

Approved by ……………………………………………….

Reviewed by: K Muir, April 2022

**Policy Statement**

Sanday Community School is “the heart, soul and future of our island community”.

We are committed to being openly inclusive and welcoming all children from the community to a caring and happy environment where children are encouraged to learn and achieve to the very best of their abilities and to develop their individual strengths and creativity.

We are fully committed to supporting all those affected by loss and death in a supportive and caring environment in which everyone can respond appropriately to individual circumstances.

Our school is a vital part of Sanday’s close-knit community. We are committed to the emotional health and wellbeing of our children, young people and staff. We are passionate about providing an ethos, environment and curriculum that can provide support and comfort during difficult times, including a time of bereavement.

**Rationale**

Every 22 minutes in the UK a parent of dependent children dies, leaving about 41,000 bereaved children each year. Many more are bereaved of a grandparent, sibling, friend or other significant person, and, sadly, around 12,000 children die in the UK each year. Within our school community there may be some recently bereaved children who are struggling with their own situation – or sometimes the entire school community is impacted by the death of a member of staff or a pupil. We would hope to not encounter such circumstances, but the statistical inevitability of such an occurrence implies the necessity of having a Bereavement Policy in place in order that we might be proactive, rather than reactive, when responding to these sensitive situations. Empathic understanding in the familiar and secure surroundings of school may be all the bereavement support some children – or staff – require, though referral to more specialist support should be a consideration where the impact of grief is more complex. Additional information and resources can be accessed at [www.childbereavement.org.uk](http://www.childbereavement.org.uk)

**Objectives**

The core intentions of the policy are:

• To support pupils and/or staff before (where applicable), during, and after bereavement

• To enhance effective communication and clarify the pathway of support between school, family and community.

• To identify key staff within school and local authority, and clarify the pathway of support.

**The Role of the Head Teacher**

* To be first point of contact for family/child concerned. (on occasion, this may be the class teacher who is contacted first or another member of staff. They then should contact the Head Teacher as soon as possible).
* To monitor progress and liaise with external agencies.
* To provide access to bereavement support training for staff members (in Sanday School, this is the Head Teacher and Support for Learning Teacher).
* To inform local authority, if appropriate.
* To respond to media enquiries, in line with policy and guidance from local authority.
* To keep the parent council fully informed.

Head teacher: Stewart McPhail

(If the Head teacher is not on island then the role will be deputised by the PT who will keep the Head teacher fully informed with ongoing telephone and email communication).

**The Role of the Parent Council**

• To approve policy and ensure its implementation, to be reviewed in three years.

**The Role of the Local Authority**

* To advise and support staff.
* Consult on referral pathways and identification of complex grief.

**The Role of Pastoral Staff**

**•** To have bereavement support training and cascade learning to other staff.

**Procedures**

1. Contact with the deceased’s family should be established by the Head teacher and their wishes respected in communicating with others. Factual information is essential to avoid rumour and confusion, whilst being sensitive to cultural and religious considerations.

2. Staff should be informed before pupils and be prepared (through prior training) to share information in age-appropriate ways, as agreed for each individual circumstance.

3. Pupils who are affected should be informed, preferably in small groups, by someone known to them. The person informing the children should feel comfortable doing so. Support will be offered to adults whilst they are sharing the information.

4. Staff should be aware of the social media aspect – news may be broadcast via Facebook or community forums, or between pupils.

5. A letter to all school families affected should be composed at the earliest opportunity and a decision made as to whom, and how, it should be distributed.

6. The school should be aware that the school timetable may need a degree of flexibility to accommodate the needs and wellbeing of children affected by the situation. However, minimal disruption to the timetable also offers a sense of security and familiarity.

7. Staff affected by the death will be offered ongoing support as appropriate.

8. In consultation with the bereaved family, arrangements for funeral attendance may be clarified, with the consideration of full or partial school closure in some circumstances.

9. Where necessary a press statement should be prepared by the Head Teacher

10. School should be aware that the impact of bereavement follows a child throughout their school life so information should be recorded and shared with relevant people, particularly at transition points.

**Staff Support**

It is important that all staff feel confident in delivering support for pupils and mutual support for each other as well as implementing this policy. Bereavement awareness training will be made available for all staff. We will ensure that members of staff are regularly consulted as to their training needs and training is provided as appropriate to keep up to date with developments.

**Breaking News to Staff, Pupils and Families**

This is usually done when a pupil or staff member has died.

* Speak to the family, offer them condolences and support before ascertaining what they would like to happen. Ensure they have the school number and let them know they can contact the school at any time.
* Obtaining factual information should be made a priority, especially because we are a small community.
* It is essential that all staff are informed straight away, ideally before pupils.
* Decisions need to be made about where pupils will be told, if this is necessary. Identify the most vulnerable pupils and what support they might need.
* Pupils should be told as soon as possible. This is best done in familiar groups by someone they know (form tutor/class teacher). Support for staff delivering the news should be offered. A large school assembly is not ideal.
* Staff may need guidance on words to use and the approach to take.
* If necessary, send a letter to families on the same day if possible.
* Consider including guidelines for parents on supporting bereaved children with the letter.
* Map out the first few days after an incident. It is usually best to have a minimum disruption to the timetable, but some flexibility may be required.
* Consider what the school approach will be if pupils or staff are too upset to attend lessons.
* If it is a teacher who has died, what will happen to his/her class?

**Return to School**

* Be aware that not all pupils will have time off following a bereavement, even after the loss of a parent or sibling.
* Consider a home visit prior to the pupil returning to school.
* Ensure that the appropriate staff are aware and prepared.
* Inform their peers and prepare them on how to support their class peer.
* Plan a quiet place where the pupil can go if necessary, alone or with a companion. The Support Base is set up as a cosy safe place with cushions and lighting and toys and pens and pencils and books.

**Funeral**

Establish whether the family would welcome involvement of members of the school community or if they wish to keep it private. Keep in mind cultural and religious beliefs.

Identify which members of staff and/or pupils may want to attend and the practicalities of issue such as staff cover and transport. It may be necessary to close the school for half a day/whole day.

Decide whether to send flowers and/or make a collection.

If necessary talk to the child regarding expectations of the funeral. Speak to the child’s family about arrangements before discussing with the child.

**SUPPORT**

**Support for the Bereaved Pupil:**

***Not all children will need the support of specialist practitioners; they will need support from familiar people who care.***

* Keep a routine, providing a sense of normality.
* Offer a safe place, away from an emotional intense atmosphere (Support Base is ideal for this).
* Offer a neutral space and give people time to share their feelings without the worry of upsetting a loved one (i.e. a surviving parent).
* Time to be themselves without feeling guilty (being with friends, time to play in a safe space outside the home environment).
* Regular correspondence with home, providing assurance about behaviours and general wellbeing, will ensure the child is managing their grief.
* Access to appropriate resources.
* A suitable place in school for pupils who needs some space if too upset to stay in the classroom and people to whom they can go for support.

**Monitoring/Supporting Pupils:**

* Support may need to be offered to other vulnerable pupils.
* Supporting bereaved pupils can be very stressful for staff who may already be struggling with their own reactions and emotions. Ensure that staff know where to access information, guidance and support should they require it.
* Awareness of available resources and time to become familiar with what is available.

**Support for Parents:**

* Communicate with the family straight away and offer support.
* Send a letter/card of condolence from the school if appropriate.
* Depending on the wishes of the family, give out information to appropriate people.
* Give the parents and/or family the opportunity to collect any personal belongings of the person who died.
* Send a representative to the funeral if appropriate after talking to the family.
* Hold a collection or send flowers, as appropriate.
* Invite parents/family to any commemorative events held by the school, both at the time and in subsequent years.
* If memorial work has been completed, for example a remembrance book, this should be returned to the parents at an appropriate time and the pupils informed where it has gone.

**Transition:**

It is vitally important to ensure that if a child has experienced bereavement that this information is passed on to the relevant persons when thy move on to a new class or school. Children can experience “re-grief” during periods of transition, particularly from primary to secondary classes/schools.

**Suggested Templates for Letter to Parents**

*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.*

***Sample letter on death of a pupil:***

Dear Parents and Carers

Your child’s class teacher had the sad task of informing the children of the death of <pupil name> a pupil in Primary/Secondary <class>.

<Name of pupil> 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

Stewart McPhail

Head Teacher

***Sample letter on death of pupil’s parent:***

Dear Parents and Carers

One of our pupils <Name> in <Class> suffered a very sudden bereavement this week when his/her <family member> unexpectedly passed away. As he/she is part of our school family we felt it was important that his/her friends and peers were told. Under guidance from Bereavement UK the children were all told by their class teacher or me this morning and given the opportunity to speak about it should they need or want to. The children have been told that we are here to support them in any way they need. If you feel your child/children need any additional support please get in touch and we can guide you to avenues of support.

Our thoughts are with the family at this very sad time.

Yours sincerely

Stewart McPhail

Head Teacher

***Sample letter to bereaved parents:***

Dear

We are so very sorry to hear of <Name’s> death. There are no words to express the sadness of losing a child and we can only begin to imagine the anguish you must be going through.

Clearly, as a school community, we will miss him/her very much and we are doing our best to offer comfort and support to his/her friends and classmates. He/She was a much loved member of our school family.

If we can do anything to help as you plan <Name’s> funeral service or other memorial opportunities, please let us know. In time, we will also ensure that anything of <Name’s> that remains in school is returned to you, including photographs we may have on the school system.

Be assured that you are in our thoughts at this very sad time and do not hesitate to contact us if we can be of support in any way.

With sympathy,

Stewart McPhail

Head Teacher

***Sample letter on death of a staff member:***

Dear Parents and Carers

I am sorry to have to tell you that a much-loved member of our staff [name] has died. The children were told today and many will have been quite distressed at the news. No-one wants to see children sad, but we are very aware that factual information and emotional support are the best means of helping children deal with bereavement. I am sure there will be many parents who are also saddened by the news. Children respond in different ways so may dip in and out of sadness, and questions, whilst alternately playing or participating in their usual activities. This is normal and healthy. You may find your child has questions to ask which we will answer in an age appropriate way in school, but if you feel you would like more support and advice yourself, please do not hesitate to contact the school office. You may also find some very useful advice and resources online at [www.childbereavement.org.uk](http://www.childbereavement.org.uk)

We will share details of the funeral as soon as they are known. Children who wish to attend will be welcome to do so, though it will not be compulsory. It is likely that school will be closed on the morning or afternoon of the funeral as staff will, of course, wish to pay their respects to a very popular colleague. I am sorry to be the bearer of sad news, but I appreciate an occurrence like this impacts the whole school community. I am so grateful for the thriving partnership we have with parents and trust that we, together, will be able to guide and support the children through what may be, for many, a very new experience in their lives.

Yours

Stewart McPhail

Head Teacher