St Patrick's Academy, Dungannon

BEREAVEMENT SUPPORT AND GRIEF EDUCATION POLICY FOR PUPILS

'Achieving Excellence Together'

June 2026

Introduction

Rationale

St Patrick's Academy is committed to the development and growth of the whole person. In our pastoral care work, we seek to create a community that develops self-respect in our pupils, leading to a respect for others.

Bereavement Support

St Patrick's Academy is committed to providing compassionate and effective support for pupils who are bereaved, recognising that grief can have a profound impact on a child's emotional well-being, academic progress, and social development. We understand that each pupil's experience of loss is unique, and we strive to create a nurturing environment where they feel safe, valued, and supported. By offering a range of emotional, pastoral, and practical support, we aim to help pupils navigate their grief while maintaining stability in their education. We will also be mindful of the needs of all pupils, including those with an additional need, and we will work collaboratively with the SENCO to best support each pupil. Our commitment extends to staff training, grief education, and collaboration with families and external support services to ensure a holistic approach. Supporting bereaved pupils is essential to their well-being, resilience, and ability to engage positively in school life, reinforcing our dedication to fostering a caring and inclusive community.

Grief Education

St Patrick's Academy also acknowledges the importance of grief education in schools. Such education helps pupils to understand and navigate the complex emotions associated with loss. By teaching students about grief, we aim to foster a compassionate and supportive environment where our pupils feel safe to express their feelings and seek help when needed. It will also help to reduce stigma and misconceptions surrounding bereavement, encouraging empathy among peers and promoting open discussions about emotions. Educating pupils on grief equips them with the knowledge and skills to support themselves and others during difficult times, ultimately contributing to improved emotional well-being and resilience. Additionally, grief education ensures that bereaved pupils receive the appropriate support, helping them to cope with their loss while maintaining their academic and social development.

Staff Training

St Patrick's Academy recognises that the provision of staff training on grief education and bereavement support is crucial to ensuring that school staff feel confident and equipped to support bereaved pupils effectively. Training helps staff understand the emotional and psychological impact of grief, enabling them to respond with sensitivity and compassion. It also ensures a consistent and informed approach across the school, reducing the risk of pupils feeling isolated or misunderstood. Staff training can provide practical strategies for recognising signs of distress, offering appropriate support, and facilitating conversations about loss. Additionally, it empowers staff to create a safe and inclusive environment where pupils feel comfortable seeking help. Through the provision of bereavement training, the school demonstrates a commitment to pupil well-being, fostering resilience and emotional development in both students and staff.

Aims

In St Patrick's Academy we will:

- provide emotional support by ensuring that pupils who are experiencing bereavement receive appropriate care and support;
- provide practical assistance by offering academic and pastoral accommodations for grieving pupils, such as flexible deadlines, access to the school's counselling services, or time out from lessons if needed;
- foster a compassionate school environment by promoting a caring and understanding atmosphere where grief is acknowledged, and pupils feel safe to express their emotions.
- support transitions and long-term well-being by recognising that grief is an ongoing process and provide continued support as needed;
- establish procedures by outlining the steps the school will take to support bereaved pupils, including communication with families, staff, and peers;
- establish effective and supportive communication links between the school, family, and relevant external agencies, if necessary;
- ensure inclusivity and sensitivity by respecting the cultural, religious and personal beliefs, as well as the wishes of bereaved pupils and their families when providing support;
- promote awareness and understanding of grief and bereavement through the education of pupils, in order to encourage empathy and reduce stigma;
- train staff in bereavement support, in order to equip teachers and school staff with the necessary skills to support grieving pupils effectively;
- use the school's pastoral system to identify key staff who are best placed to support those experiencing bereavement;
- appoint a teacher in charge of pupil health and well-being who will oversee the development of a bereavement register and policy. In addition, this person will facilitate staff training and develop a grief education and bereavement programme to be delivered within the PD programme;
- encourage peer-to-peer support opportunities for pupils, while ensuring that no one feels pressured to discuss their grief.

School response to news of a bereavement

- On receipt of news of a death that may impact on a pupil or pupils, the Principal or a Vice-Principal should be informed immediately.
- The Principal or Vice-Principal will confirm the information with the pupil's family, or a reliable source, before taking further steps.
- The pupil and/or their family will direct what information they wish to share with staff and peers. Confidentiality will be respected.
- Sensitivity will be a foremost consideration when handling the news.
- Relevant staff will be briefed about the bereavement.
- If appropriate, and with the family's consent, pupils will be informed in a sensitive and age-appropriate manner.
- If the bereavement affects a wider group (e.g., loss of a school member), a whole-school approach, such as an assembly or letter to parents, may be considered.
- The Principal will provide information on arrangements for the wake, if appropriate.
- The school will acknowledge the death of a pupil by placing a notice in a newspaper, where appropriate.

- The school's Pastoral Team and school counsellor will provide emotional support for peers affected by a pupil's bereavement, and to other vulnerable pupils. Support may include, for example, a special assembly/prayer service or emotional support on an individual basis.
- The school's 'Critical Incident Policy' will be used for dealing with a sudden death on the premises.

School representation at Wakes and Funerals

- Respect for the cultural, religious, and personal beliefs, as well as the wishes of bereaved pupils and their families, will be taken into account when considering school representation at the wake and/or funeral.
- The school will endeavour to be represented at all funerals of a pupil or parent.
- The normal representation at a funeral will include a senior member of staff, the pupil's form tutor and four students either from the prefect team or from the student's form class (permission to sought, in advance from parents/carers, for pupils attending– see Appendix 1).
- The Principal and relevant Vice-Principal will work with the Pastoral Team, Mrs McIlvanna, Mrs Guilfoyle, Mr Slater and the member staff responsible for bereavement support, to organise the school's representation.
- The form tutor will usually be required to play a role in the school's response to a bereavement by assisting with the selection and organisation of pupils.
- In the event of a bereavement when the school is closed, every effort will be made to adhere to the above.
- These arrangements will be overseen by the Principal who may decide to exercise further discretion.
- The Principal will consider exceptional arrangements in, for example, the death of someone connected to a Looked-After Child or to a child with estranged parents;
- If attendance at a funeral is not possible, the Principal will send a letter of condolence and/or mass card to the family.

Managing the pupil's return to school and provision of ongoing support

- School staff will:
    - work collaboratively to support the pupil settle back into the school routine;
    - allow the pupil to talk about their feelings if they wish, while respecting their need for privacy;
    - be aware of potential emotional triggers, such as anniversaries, school events or topics discussed in class;
    - be aware that grief may impact behaviour, concentration, and emotional well-being over time, and understand that the pupil may require additional support from staff;
    - be aware that important dates such as anniversaries or birthdays may be particularly difficult for the pupil and that they may need additional support around these times.

- In certain circumstances, e.g. when a pupil is bereaved by the death of an immediate family member or peer, the school:

    - will communicate with the family to discuss their return to school. Should they wish, a meeting can be arranged prior to, or on their return, to discuss immediate needs;
    - will assign a staff member as a key contact;
    - may offer the opportunity to avail of counselling sessions with the school counsellor;
    - may agree a phased return or flexible timetable for an agreed period of time;
    - may provide a reduced workload, and extra time for assignments, if required;

- may arrange catch-up sessions for work missed;
- will allow breaks, and access to a quiet, safe space during lessons if the pupil feels overwhelmed or needs some time to themselves;
- maintain regular communication with family to assess ongoing needs;
- may give the pupil's peers guidance as to how best to support the pupil on their return, taking into consideration confidentiality and family wishes.

- In certain circumstances, e.g. if the pupil is finding it difficult to cope with their grief, the school may:
  - offer the pupil the opportunity to avail of counselling session with the school counsellor;
  - liaise with external support agencies.

- The Co-ordinator responsible for Bereavement Support will:
  - provide emotional support for students when requested;
  - provide training for staff on bereavement awareness and offer guidance on how to support grieving students;
  - communicate with bereaved families and offer school support when requested.
  - coordinate with external grief support organisations;
  - develop and update a Pupil Bereavement Support and Grief Education Policy for Pupils;
  - integrate bereavement education into the school's Personal Development Programme;
  - develop and keep an up-to-date record of pupils' bereavements;
  - establish, encourage, and facilitate the development of peer support groups where pupils can talk about grief with others who have had similar experiences.

Memorials and commemorations

The school will:

- take into account the wishes of the bereaved family before holding commemorations or memorials;
- remove photos, Books of Condolences and any other mementos as soon as is appropriate after the funeral, normally within a week. These will be placed somewhere private or given to the family;
- consider any commemorative prizes after an appropriate period of time. The school will be guided by its 'Policy on Memorials';
- try to ensure that all forms of commemorations organised by the school are appropriate, agreed, respectful and in accordance with good practice on trauma and bereavement. Actions will be designed to assist with the progression of the healing and grieving process and to avoid retriggering trauma.

Provision of Grief Education

In St Patrick's Academy grief education will be provided by:

- delivering a workshop on grief and bereavement to pupils during Key Stage 3;
- the inclusion of age-appropriate discussions on loss and bereavement in subjects such as, but not exclusively, PD (Personal Development), Religious Studies, or English literature;
- the creation of safe spaces for pupils to ask questions and share their feelings about grief;
- encouraging teachers to approach the topic sensitively in lessons, normalising grief as a natural part of life;
- acknowledging remembrance events (e.g., Grief Awareness Week), and related religious observances, to promote understanding.

Staff Training

All staff will be provided with opportunities to avail of training in grief education and/or bereavement support in so that they:

- will develop the knowledge and confidence to handle sensitive conversations;
- will be equipped with strategies to recognise and respond to pupils experiencing grief.

Staff were provided with the opportunities to avail of training from CRUSE in March 2026

Review

The school will carry out a review of the Bereavement Support and Grief Education Policy bi-annually.

Linked Documents

Critical Incident Policy
Pastoral Care Policy
Policy on Memorials
Safeguarding/Child Protection Policies

Agreed: June 2026
To be reviewed: June 2028

Appendix 1

11 December 2025

Permission to attend a funeral

Dear Parent/Carer,

Your son/daughter has expressed an interest in attending X's funeral tomorrow. Please find details below:

Date:

Venue:

Time: Pupils will leave school at X and return around Xpm.

Arrangements: Pupils will be accompanied by the principal and other key staff. **Please bring an umbrella/coat in case of rain.**

Please complete the reply slip below and ask your son/daughter to return it to X, Head of Year X, during registration on.

Thank you for your support.

Yours sincerely,

Mr C Holmes
Principal

REPLY SLIP

Funeral on X at Xam

I give permission for my son/daughter: **Name**_____ **Class** _____
to attend the funeral.

I agree to the conditions outlined in this letter and that my son/daughter will follow all instructions given by supervisory staff.

Mobile phone number for emergency contact: _____

Signed: _____Parent/Carer Date: _____