

Bereavement in Schools Policy

Ffederasiwn Ysgolion **Llanidloes** Schools Federation



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Policy Author	Daniel Owen / Elen Chennetier
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Introduction and context

Every year 20,000 children under the age of 16 will be bereaved of a parent and many more will experience the death of someone else special in their life. In addition, schools may experience the death of a pupil or member of staff. It is almost inevitable that at some time all schools will have to deal with a death that affects the school community.

Bereaved children will often see school as a safe haven away from the turmoil of emotions at home as they spend the majority of their time in school. Staff members will be a primary source of care and support.

Many people choose not to think about death and are often ill prepared when faced with it.

Purpose:

- to help everyone involved at a time when there may be shock, upset and confusion;
- to ensure that there is as little disruption as possible;
- to have effective communication;
- to support all members of the school community at a difficult time.

The Local Authority has a 'Sudden Bereavement as a Critical Incident' policy which also has bereavement guidelines. The first point of contact is the Head of the Schools Service.

Guidelines for breaking news of the death to children and young people

- Inform the children and young people as soon as possible about the death;
- Where possible inform in small groups, for example, class or tutor groups;
- Identify those children who have had long term or close relationships so they can be told separately, group and/or one to one sharing should be available;
- Allow children and young people to ask questions and answer them honestly and factually in terms they will understand;
- Allow feelings to be verbalised;
- Allow the situation to be discussed and experiences of death to be shared;
- Be honest about your own feelings and talk about your relationship with the person;
- Avoid euphemisms;
- Ensure that children and young people understand that the death is nothing to do with anything they have said or done. It is not their fault;
- Reassure that not all people who are ill or have accidents will die and that many people get better;
- Put a time limit on discussion. It is preferable to resume normal activities as soon as possible to ensure minimal disruption;

- Conclude the discussion with a prayer or special poem to remember the person who has died and their family;
- Be available to any child/young person who needs additional help and support.

Guidelines for breaking news about a death to staff and governors

- Arrange a staff meeting as soon as possible;
- Impart factual information, never make assumptions or repeat rumour;
- Give news sensitively and empathetically, be aware that people react in different ways, be aware of staff relationships with the person;
- Ensure that someone is responsible for telling people who are unable to attend the meeting i.e. part time, peripatetic, lunch time supervisors. What is the best way, home visit, telephone, text or email;
- Identify suitable individual members of staff who feel able to:
 - a) Support members of staff
 - b) Support groups of children;
- Identify a member of staff to liaise with the individual's family, to deal with staff condolences and any funeral arrangements;
- Identify a member of staff to take and direct phone calls as appropriate. Note that telephone line providers may provide an additional line if the situation requires one;
- Identify a member of staff who will provide a letter for parents which should be sent the same day (see exemplars);
- Arrange a staff meeting at the end of the day to ensure that staff are coping;
- Identify any unresolved problems or issues;
- Ensure that staff living alone have contact numbers of friends in case of need;
- Identify sources of advice and support.

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 that nominated staff for supporting others are available to do so (temporary staff cover may be required);
- Identify a quiet/time out place where people can go if necessary;
- Timetables may require a little flexibility;
- Try to engender awareness of when people need help and support;
- Ascertain, through nominated staff, any wishes about the school's involvement in the funeral, if any.

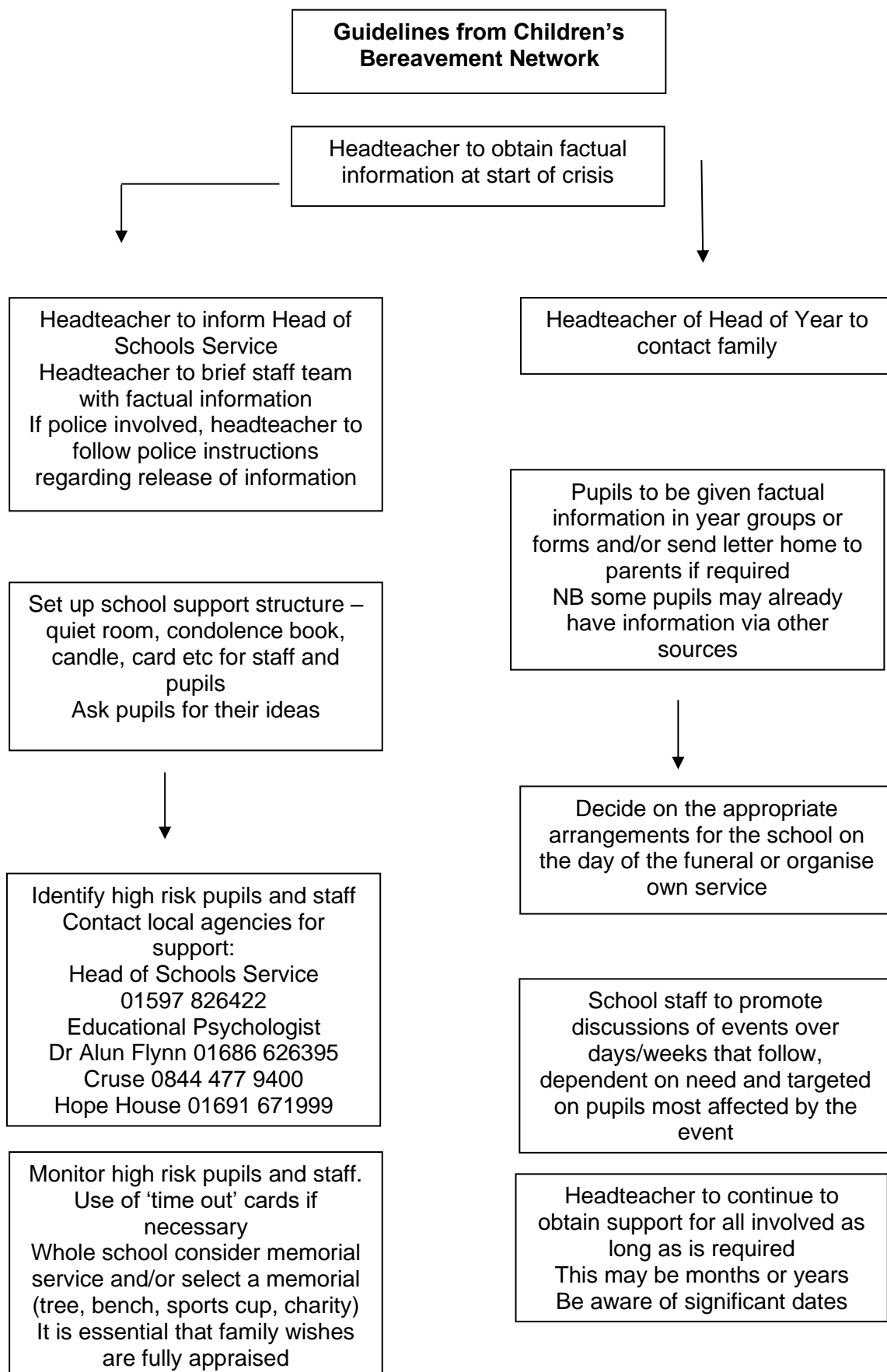
Practical considerations

- Obituary, flowers. Making a collection;
- Who will attend funeral;
- Cover for staff attending;

- Transport to and from funeral;
- Informing parents of those involved;
- Possible closure of school (tell everyone if this is the case).

Support and resources

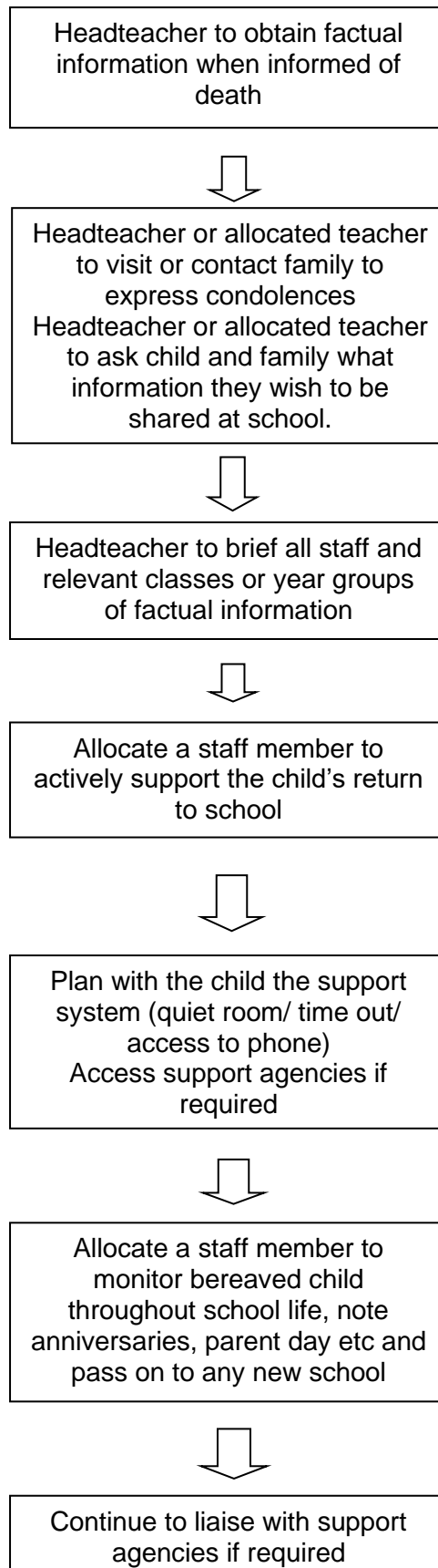
- <http://childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk/haadteachers.htm>;
- <http://www.cruse.org.uk/Powys-area>;
- <http://www.winstonswish.org.uk/>;
- Martin Jones 01686 610220, Cruse in Powys;
- Questions Children Ask – Miriam Stoppard;
- A Child’s Parent Dies – Edna Furman;
- Helping Children Cope with Grief – Rosemary Wells;
- Badger’s Parting Gift – Susan Varley;
- I’ll Always Love You – Hans Wilhelm;
- The Huge Bag of Worries – Virginia Ironside.



Coping with the sudden death of pupil(s) or staff

1. Headteacher to obtain factual information at start of crisis
2. Headteacher or SLT inform Head of Schools Service and follow police instructions if involved
3. Headteacher to brief staff team and give factual information
4. Headteacher or Head of Year (or other member of staff close to family) to contact family
5. Pupils given factual information in year groups or forms
6. Send letter to parents (if required)
7. Set up school support structure (quiet place, condolence book etc) Ask pupils for their ideas
8. Identify high risk staff and pupils, contact local agencies for support
9. Decide appropriate arrangements for the school on the day of the funeral(s) or organise own memorial event (consult with family and staff)
10. School staff to promote discussion of events over the following days and weeks
Monitor high risk staff and pupils
Support may be required over a long period of time
Consider anniversaries

Supporting a bereaved pupil in school



Supporting a bereaved pupil in school

1. Headteacher to obtain factual information when informed of death
2. Headteacher or allocated teacher to visit or contact family to express condolences
3. Headteacher or allocated teacher to ask child or family what information they wish to be shared with the school
4. Headteacher to brief all staff and relevant classes or year groups of factual information
5. Allocate a staff member to actively support child's return to school
6. Plan with the child the support system
i.e time out/quiet room, access to phone
7. Access support agencies if required
8. Allocate a staff member to monitor and work with bereaved child throughout school life, note occasions etc and pass this information to any new school
9. Continue to liaise with support agencies (even months/years) following the death if required

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

On school headed paper:

Dear parents

Your child's class teacher had the sad task of informing the children of the tragic death of **name** who has been a teacher/member of staff 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 their 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, confusion and children are likely to ask questions about 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 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

Headteacher

Template of a letter informing parents of the death of a pupil

***Note: before sending a letter home to parents about the death of a pupil, permission must be gained from the child's parents
The contents and distribution list must be agreed by the parents and school***

On school headed paper

Dear parents

Your child's class teacher has the sad task of informing the children of the death of **name in Year x**.

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 popular member of the class and will be missed by everyone who knew **him/her**.

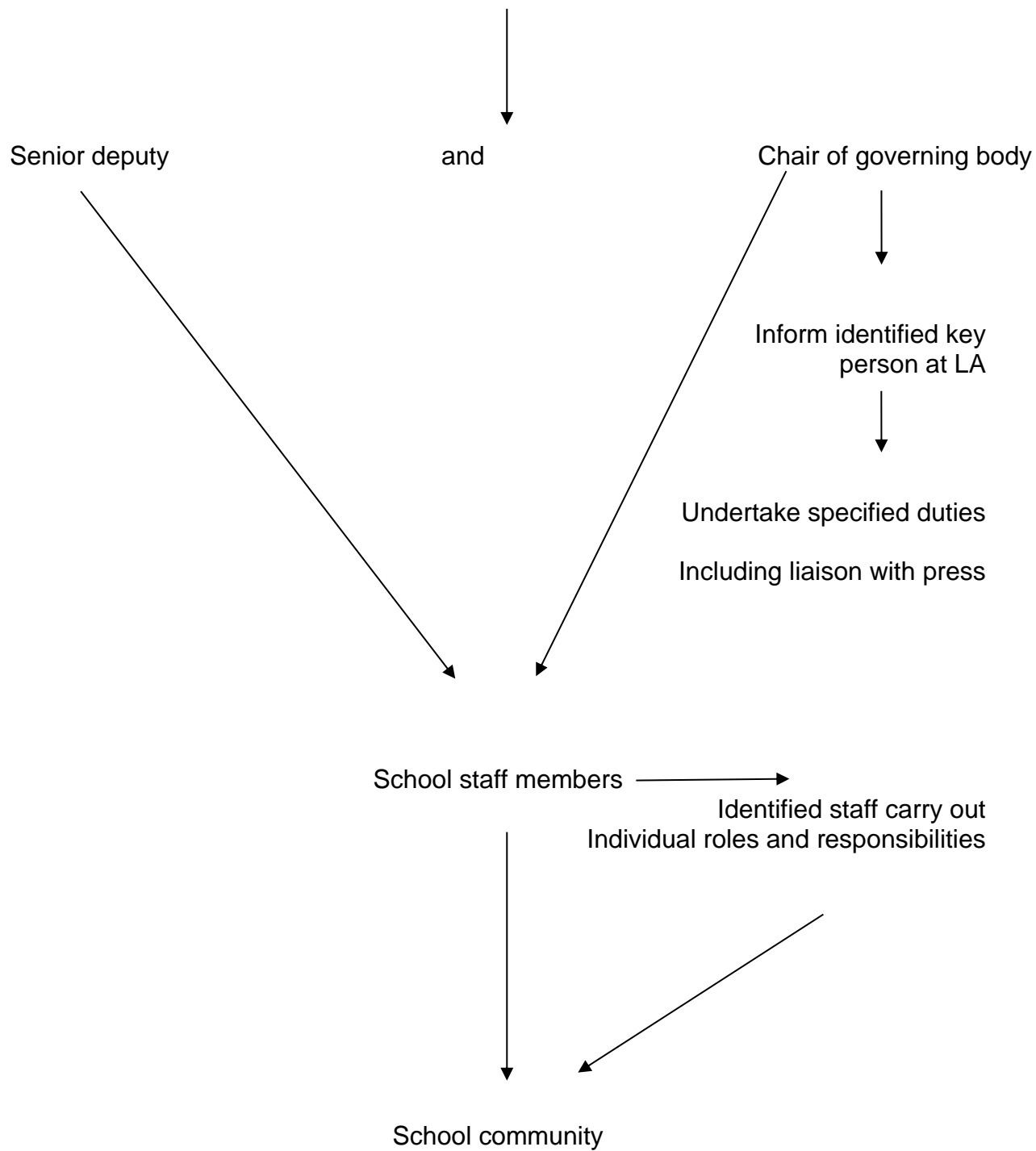
When someone dies it is normal for their friends and family to experience lots of different feelings like sadness, anger and confusion. The children have been told that their teachers are willing to try and answer their questions at school but if there is anything more that you or your child needs to know, please do not hesitate to ring the school office and we will be more than happy to help you.

We will be arranging a memorial service/event in school in the next few months as a means of celebrating **name's** life.

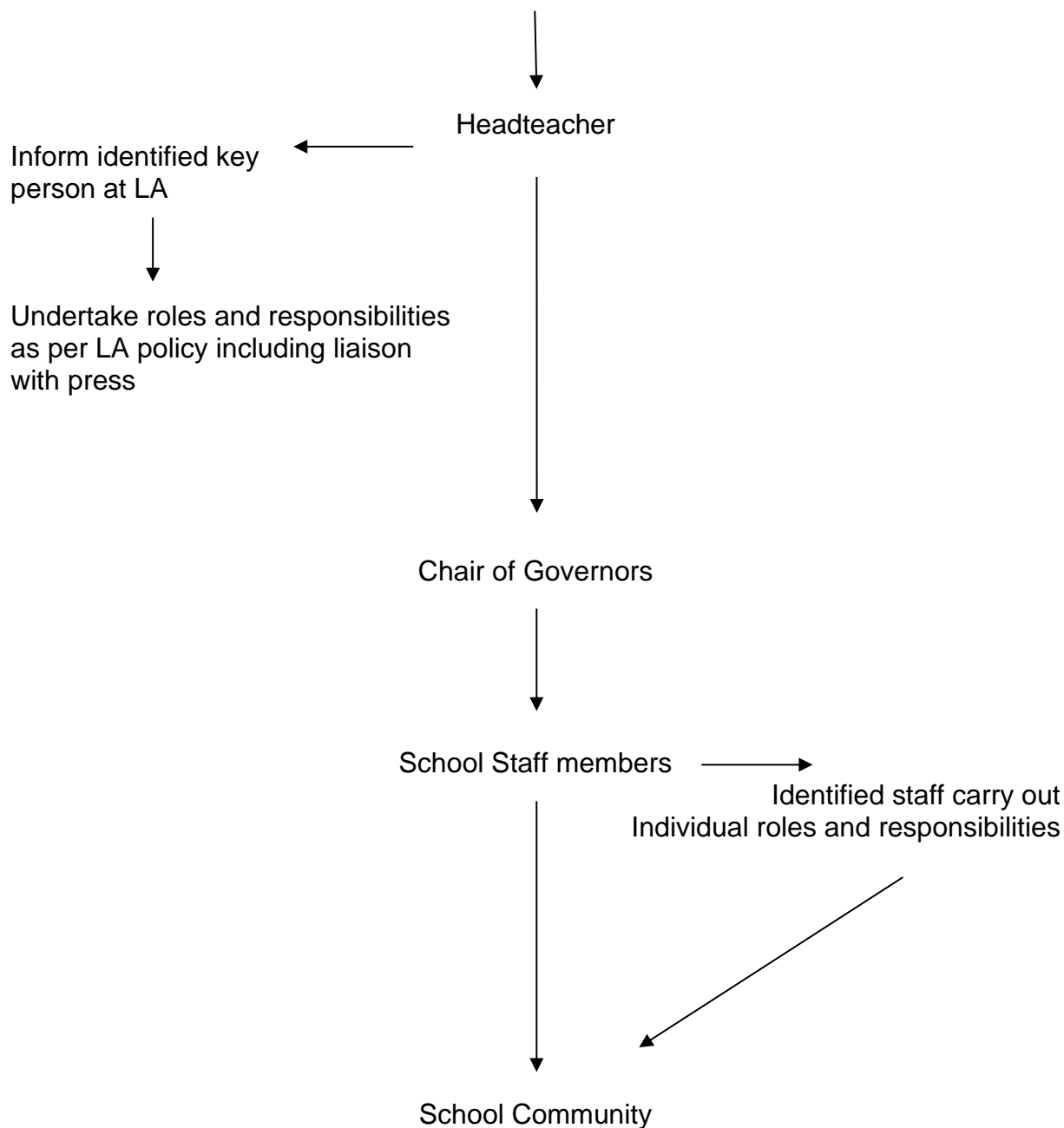
Yours sincerely

Headteacher

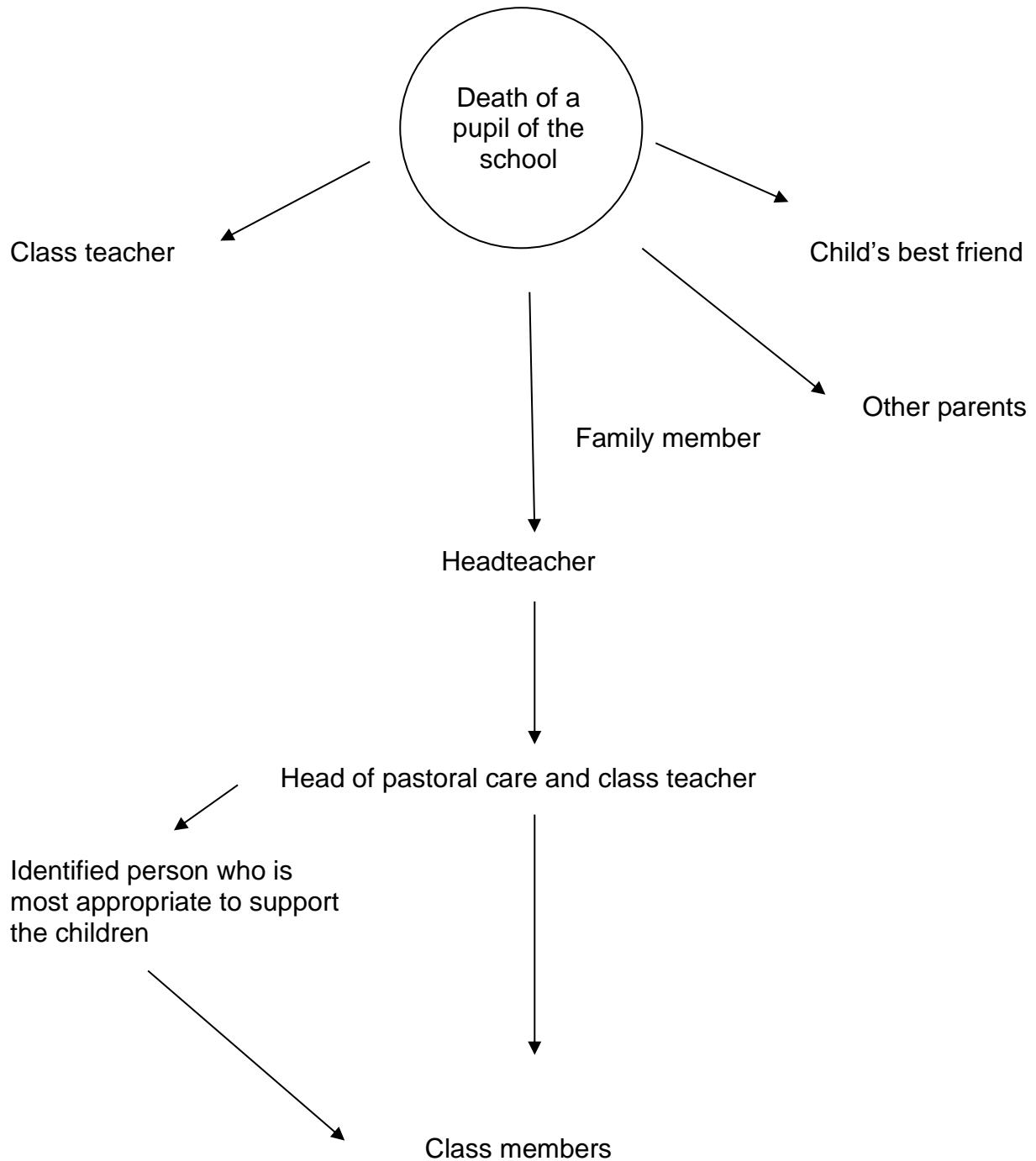
Information sharing pathway following death of a head of school



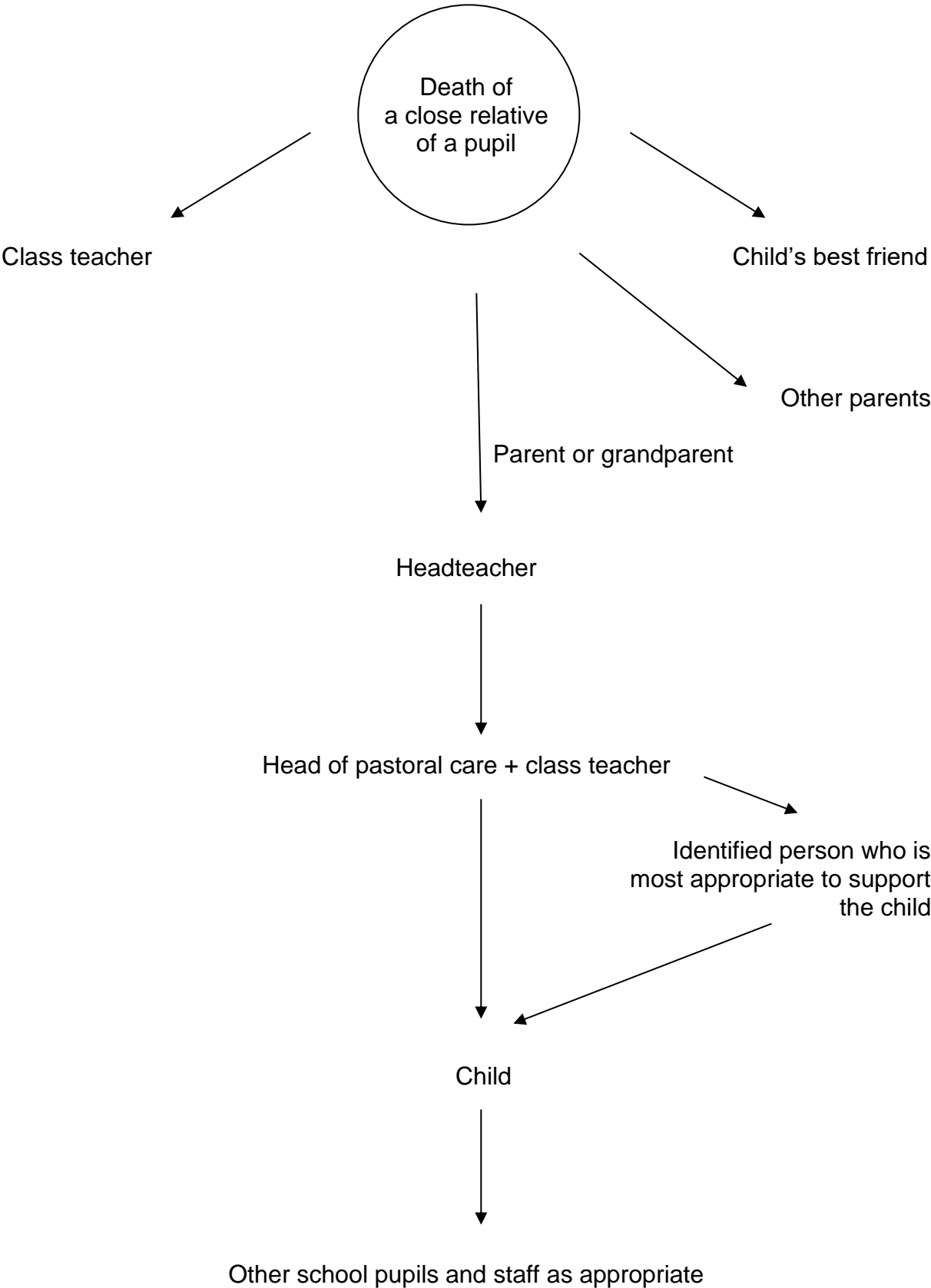
Information sharing pathway following death of a staff member



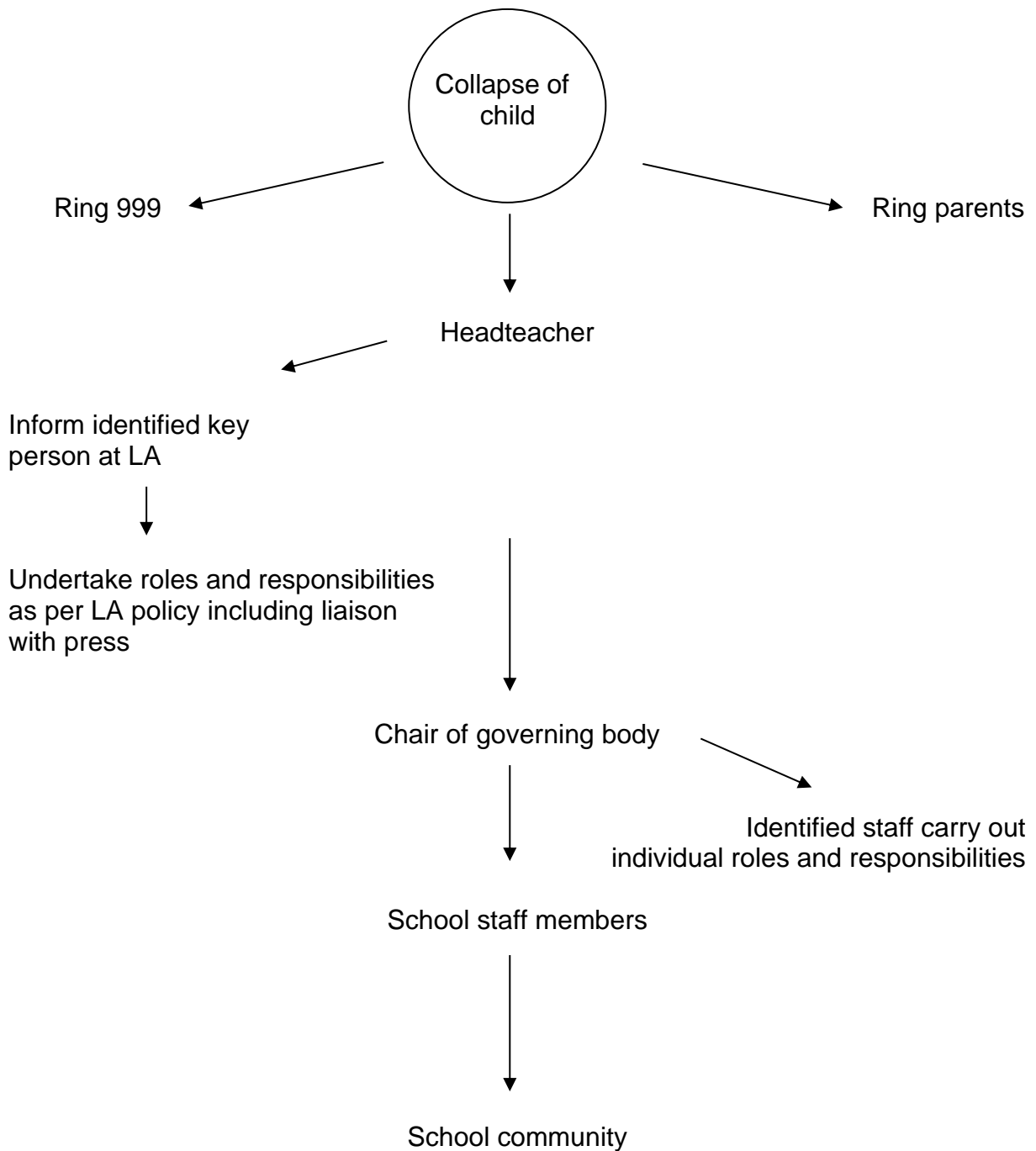
Information sharing pathway following the death of a pupil



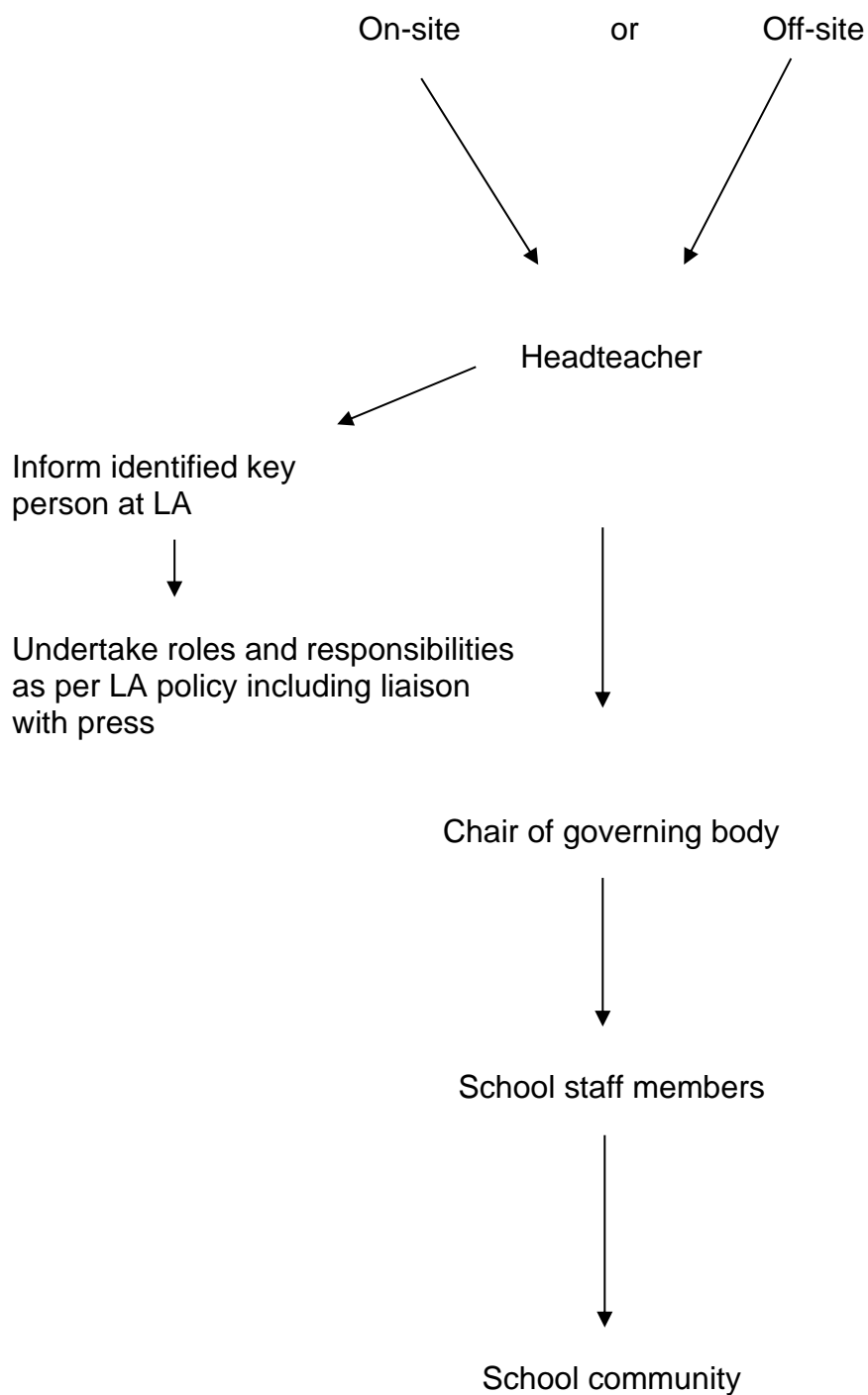
Information sharing pathway following the death of a close family member



Information sharing pathway following death of a pupil in school



**Information sharing pathway following an out of school incident major incident
(see LA policy on critical incident)**



Every bereavement situation is complex and will affect schools differently. Schools should utilise the Local Authority, local contacts, websites and resources (as listed previously) and experienced professionals.

Schools should also be aware of the speed of rumour on social media and the difficulties if a death occurs over a weekend and the need to react to support the pupils and staff.

It is also expected that where terminal illnesses occur that there is more time to prepare for the death and specialist services should be engaged before death occurs.