

Childhood Bereavement Network response to *Better Inspection for All*

1. This response has been prepared by the Childhood Bereavement Network, the hub for organisations and individuals supporting bereaved children and young people in the UK
2. Our members provide a range of 1:1 support and group opportunities to young people. Many also provide consultation, training and support for local schools, including helping staff prepare for or respond to a death in the school community, and develop the PSHE curriculum.
3. This response has been written by Alison Penny, CBN Coordinator. For more details about this response or CBN's work, please contact apenny@ncb.org.uk | 020 7843 6054
4. Our comments relate specifically to the proposal in paragraph 12, outlining that under the framework there will be an increase emphasis on '*preparation for life and work in Britain today, including in relation to personal development, behaviour and welfare*'.

Background

5. 1 in 29 5-16 year olds have been bereaved of a parent or sibling. 1 in 20 will have been bereaved of a parent by the time they leave school, and the majority will have experienced the death of someone close by this age. Preparation for life should also include preparation for bereavement. This helps children to deal with transition in their own lives, as well as support their peers.
6. The death of someone close has a significant and enduring impact on children and young people, both during their childhood and into adulthood. Data on the impact of bereavement on children's attendance and attainment is complex, but for many, bereavement is highly disruptive to their education.
 - Abdelnoor and Hollins (2004, UK) found that parentally bereaved young people's **GCSE scores** were an average of half a grade lower than their non-bereaved peers. Girls bereaved of a sibling scored almost a full grade below their controls.
 - After controlling for other factors, the death of a parent by the age of 16 is associated with women **failing to gain any sort of qualification** (Parsons, 2011, UK).
 - After controlling for other factors, bereavement by the age of 16 is associated with both men and women being **unemployed at the age of 30**. (Parsons, 2011, UK).
7. Tackling death and bereavement in school is not just a matter of pastoral support: it also includes opportunities to learn about life and death in the curriculum. Bereaved children and young people could also benefit indirectly from the general provision of education about loss and bereavement, through greater understanding among their peers. Young people who have been bereaved believe that learning about coping with bereavement could help their peers to be more empathetic.

Then people will understand what I am going through.

I feel children need to know more about bereavement not only in case it happens to them but also so it will help them to deal with someone else's bereavement.

How bereavement impacts on the 'personal development, behaviour and welfare' judgements

8. Prompt and regular attendance at sessions or work

Children and young people who are involved in caring for a dying relative may face particular challenges in attending school. They may need to take time off to prepare for and attend a funeral. Those bereaved of a parent often find it hard to be separated from the other parent during the school day, for fear that they will die too. Schools need to be sensitive to ways of making it possible for children and young people to stay in school.

9. Following of any guidelines for behaviour and conduct, including management of their own feelings and behaviour, and around bullying, and how they relate to others

Pupils report good pastoral support from some staff, but also examples of teachers and others expecting them to 'get over' their grief quickly, failing to understand the ongoing impact which a significant bereavement can have.

A proactive and flexible pastoral support system should include a system for managing and communicating important information about bereavement. This would mean that teachers were more aware of which pupils in their class had been bereaved, and therefore more able to check with them about the delivery of particular lessons on these topics.

While many bereaved young people report their friends not knowing what to say or do to help, some have also experienced painful bullying as a direct result of their bereavement.

Friends could be more supportive because I got teased when my dad died. They shouldn't tease you. (Childhood Bereavement Network, 2003)

My cousin hung himself and they keep telling me they can see things dangling from the trees (Childline, 2002)

10. Personal, social, moral, cultural and spiritual development, including through access to cultural experiences and work experience so that they are well prepared to respect others and contribute to wider society and life in Britain today

Evidence suggests that the majority of children and young people think about death and dying and that '*children have a greater awareness of death than most adults would believe*' (Bowie 2000 p24 in Ribbens McCarthy with Jessop 2005). 9-10 year old pupils rank 'Death and loss: this would be about the feelings people have when someone they love dies, and what can be done to help them' 11th out of 43 topics for inclusion in the primary curriculum (Ward, 1985). 75% of adults respondents to a CBN survey in 2007 said they wished their school had taught them about coping with bereavement.

Because of the anxieties around including death and bereavement in the curriculum, many schools do not address it (Ribbens McCarthy with Jessop 2005). Children and young people are entitled to an education on this topic.

11. Knowledge of how to keep themselves healthy, including through exercising and healthy eating

Many bereaved young people report having no-one to talk to about their experiences (Ribbens McCarthy with Jessop, 2005). Reasons can include being worried about upsetting family members who are grieving themselves, experiencing unhelpful reactions when they do talk (eg Worden 1996), or not knowing about the support that is available, even in areas where there are well-established child bereavement services (Brown 2002 in Ribbens McCarthy with Jessop 2005). Learning about sources of support could help young people both to seek it for themselves and to encourage bereaved peers to get help when they need it.

12. Self-confidence, self-assurance and knowledge of their potential to be a successful learner

Many bereaved children – and their parents – report a dip in confidence around bereavement. Bereaved young people have significantly lower self-esteem and lower beliefs that they are in control of their own life and destiny. This can be related to difficulties in concentrating when faced with matters of life and death

13. Choices about the next stage of their education, employment, self-employment or training, where relevant, from independent careers advice and guidance

Bereaved young people may need extra support around choices and career routes, if the person who died played a key role in supporting them and advising them.

How the inspection framework can make judgements about schools' support for bereavement and death education

14. A number of elements can be observed in schools which are likely to indicate a supportive response to bereaved pupils, as well as adequate teaching and learning about bereavement and loss. These include:

- A lead person with responsibility for ensuring that pastoral support is proactive and flexible
- Checking with individual bereaved children, young people and families how they would like to be supported
- A system for managing a system for managing and communicating important information about a bereavement, including across transitions from one class or school to another
- Bereavement being included in relevant plans and policies
- Staff training and support to increase their awareness and confidence in providing day-to-day support to a bereaved child
- Staff training and support in delivering lessons on loss, change and bereavement as part of the PSHE curriculum

- Swift and easy referral to a range of provision including local child bereavement service, national helplines and websites
 - Partnerships with childhood bereavement services. For a directory, see www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk
15. Several organisations offer ready-made lesson plans to cover topics of death and bereavement both in the PSHE and in the wider curriculum. See www.winstonswish.org.uk and www.childbereavementuk.org
16. Responses to death and bereavement vary between cultures, faiths, families and individuals. Families may be anxious about whether this diversity will be acknowledged, both in the support offered to individual bereaved pupils, and in the teaching and learning about these issues generally. They may also be concerned about their children learning about a topic which is sensitive and to some extent still a taboo. Actively engaging parents and pupils in curriculum planning can help to manage some of these anxieties. Schools may not know about significant bereavements which occurred in a child's past, and so both pupils and parents should be given advance warning that the topic will be discussed, along with a named contact with whom they can discuss any anxieties or share information about past bereavements.