

The issue

Changing schools can be challenging for children at any time. For bereaved children – and for those facing a death in the family – there can be particular difficulties associated with moving schools. This paper sets out the reasons why school choice matters particularly for bereaved children and young people, and how parents and pupils can appeal if they do not get into their school of choice.

Background

Bereaved children face many challenges as they adjust to life without the person who has died. For some, the death of a parent can mean that the family has to make other changes. For example, a move closer to grandparents to help manage childcare might also mean a change of school and out of school activities.

Standard or universal transitions from infant to junior, junior to secondary, and secondary to college, university or the workplace bring a range of challenges to all children. These can be particularly heightened for those who have been bereaved or who are anticipating the death of a parent or sibling. This is particularly true of the transition from primary to secondary school which, in most parts of the country, will involve choices about which school to apply to, anxiety over selection, entrance examinations and so on. Many pupils are not allocated their first choices of schools and this can be a source of stress and difficulty for the whole family. Some parents then choose to appeal the decision.

Appealing a school's decision

What follows is the situation in England, as set out by the Department for Education. Responsibility for education in the other three nations is devolved, although very similar procedures apply.

Basic advice for parents is set out on the Government's [website](#), including the timetable and deadlines for appealing a school's decision.

At this stage, parents can submit evidence on why a particular school is preferred for their child. There is no official guidance that bereavement or serious illness in the family should merit special consideration for granting preference but, on a case by case basis, it may be taken into consideration. It is likely to be one of the very few exceptions where an appeal can be made twice (i.e. if a parent or sibling had died or been diagnosed with a terminal illness after the first appeal had been made). You can read more about this in paragraph 5.1 of the [School Admission Appeals Code](#).

Key points that can be used in an appeal

- Children and young people need as much continuity as possible following the death of a parent or sibling. Stressful changes and disruptions which accompany or follow a death (such as moving house or school, changed household routines and childcare arrangements) are associated with worse mental health (Haine et al 2008).
 - this is also true when children and young people are facing the anticipated death of a parent or sibling
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- ➔ the longer these changes persist, the greater the detrimental effect on children and young people's behaviour (Worden, 1996)
- ➔ the importance of access to friends who know what has happened or is happening and can continue to provide support and understanding in the future. It can be hard, if not impossible, to explain to new groups of people how one's parent or sibling died (especially if, for example, the death was by suicide), or about a terminal illness or why particular days or memories can trigger emotional responses
- ➔ children who are bereaved or facing the death of someone close may face educational challenges and require high quality education and pastoral support at a school with a 'good' or 'outstanding' OFSTED report
- ➔ parents may face overwhelming challenges if they have a partner or child requiring end of life care or if they need to return to work following the death of a partner and the allocated school is not convenient to their workplace or to out-of-school arrangements for the child.

There may be additional points based on individual circumstances for example

- ➔ a child may want to attend the same school as the parent/sibling who died or is ill
- ➔ or they may specifically want to avoid the same school as the parent/sibling who died or is ill
- ➔ they may wish to pursue a subject that links them to their parent/sibling that is only offered at a particular school
- ➔ there may be a particular link between a parent/sibling and a specific school (e.g. if the parent had been a teacher there).

Getting further help

The Coram Children's Legal Centre's [Child Law Advice Service](#) may be able to help with information and guidance on admissions and appeals.

Local childhood bereavement services who have supported individual children and young people have sometimes written statements in support of that child attending a specific school. The points made above could be used in any such application.

What CBN is doing in this area

We responded to the last opportunity to influence the School Admissions Code, arguing that it should be amended to take into account the needs of children and young people who have been bereaved of a parent or sibling, or who are anticipating the death of a parent or sibling during their time at the school. We will continue to raise this as an issue affecting bereaved children and young people.