



Education

Responding to Student Suicide

Support Guidelines for Schools

November 2016

Acknowledgments and disclaimers

This document was developed in consultation with Primary Principals' Association, NSW Secondary Principals' Council, NSW Health and headspace School Support.

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Section one

Introduction

Foreword

1. A school student's suicide is a traumatic event for their family and friends, other students, school staff and the broader school community.
2. These guidelines supplement existing initiatives to support the mental health and wellbeing of school students in New South Wales.
3. A planned and coordinated response is essential to achieving the best outcomes for everybody.

The Legal Context

4. The Department of Education (the Department) has legal obligations to its students under the common law duty of care, child protection and education laws. For example the Department and its employees must:
 - a. take reasonable steps to protect a student from foreseeable risk of harm;
 - b. report to Community Services if in the course of their employment they have reasonable grounds to suspect that a child or young person is at risk of significant harm (this is discharged by contacting the [Child Protection Helpline](#) on 132 111); and
 - c. enforce compulsory schooling requirements.
5. The Department also has legal obligations to its staff and students under discrimination, privacy and work health and safety laws. For example the Department and its employees are, amongst other things, required to:
 - a. consider making reasonable adjustments for students with disability including students with mental health issues;
 - b. comply with any legal limitations imposed on the way the Department collects, uses, discloses and secures personal and health information; and
 - c. do what is reasonably practicable to ensure the safety of students and staff.
6. It is essential to have regard to the Department's legal obligations when developing strategies to respond to the death of a student by suicide.

Preventative Strategies to Discharge Legal Obligations

7. It is important to proactively plan to reduce the potential of, or appropriately respond to incidents that may take place at school or affect the operations of the school. In the context of preparing to respond to a student's suicide this may include:
 - a. implementing strategies to build resilience and improve the mental health and wellbeing of students generally through a range of measures including the PDHPE curriculum and whole of school programs;
 - b. building the competency of staff to identify and respond to students who are at risk of suicide and/or have mental health needs;
 - c. building a school environment which values help seeking behaviour and encourages other students to advise the school if they or a friend expresses suicidal thoughts;
 - d. reminding parents of the need to provide information to the school about new and changed health care concerns relating to their children, including those relating to mental health;
 - e. building partnerships at the local level with key stakeholders including the local [Child and Adolescent Mental Health team](#) and [School-Link Coordinator](#);
 - f. incorporating the potential need to respond to a student's suicide or attempted suicide into the school's proactive planning for an emergency response. This could include:
 - planning for an emergency response to be provided for a student who attempts suicide or kills himself or herself on the school site (including who will assist emergency services personnel who enter the site, [if this is required] who will provide emergency services personnel with health care information about the student, who will supervise any students in the vicinity and who will make any necessary notifications);
 - identifying which staff will play what role in planning and implementing support plans for students and staff after a student has died;
 - establishing a process for effectively communicating concerns to those who are developing, implementing and reviewing support plans for students and staff;
 - developing a communication protocol for exchanging information with other schools in the local area (including non-government schools) about the student's death (including proactively obtaining and recording a contact name and number for each school);
 - identifying and responding to staff training needs in anticipation of a need to identify mental health issues for students or provide support to students after a student's death; and

- identifying, developing and maintaining relationships with key contacts within the Department and in potential partner agencies such as the local Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) director or School-Link Coordinator). A template contact information sheet is found at [Appendix 14 to the guidelines](#); and
- preparing staff to respond to the needs of students after a student's suicide.

Responsive Strategies to Discharge Legal Obligations

8. How the Department's legal obligations are discharged after a student's suicide will vary depending on the circumstances.
9. Regard must be had to the needs of individual students and staff and the relevant school context when developing a response to the news of a student's death. Steps to discharge a school's legal duties may include:
 - a. identifying students¹ who may be at risk after they become aware of the student's death, assessing risks that are identified and implementing strategies in response to those risks in consultation with the affected students' parents, and where practicable, the student². It is important to monitor the effectiveness of these strategies and identify and respond to new and changed risks which may emerge;
 - b. identifying staff³ who may be at risk after they become aware of the student's death, assessing risks that are identified and implementing appropriate strategies in response to identified risks in consultation with affected staff⁴;
 - c. considering making or modifying reasonable adjustments for students with disability who have been affected by the student's death in consultation with those students' parents and, where practicable, the student;
 - d. considering whether any child wellbeing issues arise and responding to those issues in accordance with legal and policy requirements. The [Mandatory Reporter Guide and in particular the decision tree - child/young person is a danger to self and/or others](#) can provide assistance to staff in discharging this responsibility;
 - e. engaging with other agencies including making appropriate referrals, working with those agencies to support a vulnerable student and his/

1 This includes the school most recently attended by the student who has died and potentially those attending other schools where it is known that students are likely to be affected

2 Where required other departmental staff such as a District Guidance Officer and employees of external agencies such as headspace school support may assist in the process

3 This includes staff of the school most recently attended by the student who has died and staff of other schools where it is reasonably foreseeable that staff are likely to be affected

4 Where required other departmental staff such as a WHS Consultant and employees of external agencies such as an EAPs provider may assist in the process

- her family and engaging support to supplement school based strategies;
- f. holding regular case conferences with staff both inside and outside of the school so that the effectiveness of existing strategies can be evaluated and new strategies developed to respond to newly identified or changed risks;
 - g. responding to the needs of staff including providing staff members with counselling support, arranging relief from face to face teaching obligations and empowering them to deal with issues raised by students by providing them with relevant information;
 - h. providing information and support to parents about how to identify and respond to potential risk to their children as a consequence of the student's death; and
 - i. monitoring the situation for new or changed risks and responding to those risks. (For example what impact could attending the student's funeral or media reporting of the student's death have on a student or staff member? Is a vulnerable student participating in programs or activities outside of the school such as an excursion, work experience, work placement or TVET currently/in the near future and what does that mean for their support? Is a potentially vulnerable student suspended or is their attendance poor? Is there a need to make a mandatory notification? The [Mandatory Reporter Guide and in particular the decision tree - child/young person is a danger to self and/or others](#) can provide assistance to staff in discharging this responsibility).

Section two

The Immediate Response

Immediate response when the student dies at school

10. If a student has died by suicide at school the following action should be taken: (If the student has not died on the school site proceed to paragraph 14). Please note a number of these steps should be implemented simultaneously:
 - a. Check no staff, students or visitors are in danger.
 - b. **Determine and implement any emergency response** to the student. (This could include attempts at CPR).
 - c. **Contact emergency services.**
 - d. **Isolate the site until Police arrive.** To the extent it is possible take steps to prevent other people from viewing the scene without disturbing the scene itself. **(The need to provide an emergency response to the student overrides any obligation to isolate the site until Police arrive).**
 - e. **Contact the Director, Public Schools NSW.**
 - f. **Contact parents of affected students** (this includes the parents of the student concerned and any student witnesses) unless making contact with a parent would place a student at risk. **Where a student's death is witnessed by other students an attempt must be made to contact the student's parents by telephone unless it is believed on reasonable grounds it would place the student at increased risk to do so (for example where a Court has restricted the parent's right to information about the student).**
 - A template letter to parents of students who have witnessed an *attempted suicide* is at [Appendix 1a](#).
 - A template letter to parents of students who have witnessed a student's *suicide* is at [Appendix 1b](#).
 - g. If staff or students have witnessed an incident arrange for assistance to cope with their likely initial reaction.
 - [Report the incident to the Health and Safety Directorate on 1800 811 523 \(option 1\)](#).
 - h. **Contact the Department's Media Unit on 9561 8501** to obtain advice and for referral of media inquiries. The Media Unit will manage responses to media while the school concentrates on students and staff.

Could providing an emergency response to a student interfere with any subsequent police investigation?

11. The priority is for staff to immediately take all reasonable steps to preserve the student’s life. First aid should be provided to the student while other staff take reasonable steps to prevent students or other persons from viewing the scene.
12. Action can be taken by staff to preserve the scene once emergency services personnel have assumed responsibility for the emergency response. The emergency response has priority however. No action should be taken by school staff which may interfere with emergency services personnel in the course of their duty.
13. Staff who provide an emergency response to a student should be asked to make a brief record of the action they took and why it was taken. This will generally assist police with their investigation.

Immediate response when a report of the student's death has been received

14. Contact the Director Public Schools NSW.
15. If a report has been made that a student has died by suicide the following action should be taken:
 - a. **Validate the report.** Sometimes news of a student’s death may be reported on social media or by someone unconnected with the family. It is important to follow these reports up and validate them. (This is not necessary if the report is made to the school by the police or the Health and Safety Directorate’s Incident Support Unit).

In most circumstances it is likely that the report can be validated by **contacting the Health and Safety Directorate’s Incident Support Unit on 1800 811 523**. Liaise with Director Public Schools NSW, who may also hold information.
 - b. **If the report is not validated by the police or Health and Safety Directorate’s Incident Support Unit:**
 - **Search** the school if the student was last seen there and the report is made before the end of the school day.
 - **Contact the Police** if the student has not been seen at school or cannot be located.
 - If the student is found safe in the school but has engaged in self-harming behaviour or has expressed suicidal thoughts **make**

urgent arrangements for the student to be assessed by the school counsellor and any necessary subsequent action taken.

The action taken will vary from student to student but could include referring the student to an external mental health professional such as the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service or making a mandatory notification to Community Services. The [Mandatory Reporter Guide and in particular the decision tree - child/young person is a danger to self and/or others](#) may be of assistance in determining what reporting requirements need to be discharged.

If the school counsellor is not at the school for any reason the principal is to make immediate contact with the Director Public Schools NSW or Director Educational Services who is to arrange for necessary counselling support to be provided to the school.

- At least one of the student’s parents must be promptly notified of the school’s concerns about the student unless it is believed on reasonable grounds it would place the student at increased risk to do so (for example where a Court has restricted the parent's right to information about the student).

Urgent action once the student's death has been validated - contacting the family and the school community

16. **Early contact should be made with the deceased student’s family** once the report has been validated. Ordinarily this will be done by the school principal. Some tips for this conversation including a template script has been provided by *headspace School Support*. It is found at [Appendix 4](#).

17. When doing this:

a. **Remember each family is different.**

Their reaction to the student’s death will vary according to their individual circumstances including any relevant cultural factors. It will be necessary for any response from the school to recognise and respect each family’s individual difference.

b. **It is crucial to support staff that are in contact with the family.**

Making contact with a family who has lost a child is likely to be a highly emotional experience for the staff member concerned.

As they are likely to be in contact with the family because of an existing relationship it is probable they will be coping with their own emotional response to the student’s death in addition to providing support to the family.

It is important that any staff member who is liaising with the student's family is supported and their health and safety monitored. Consideration should be given to discussing the support needs of this staff member with the Health and Safety Directorate. **A staff member should not be asked to undertake this role if he or she does not feel able to do so.**

Where the principal is undertaking this role, consideration should be given to the Director Public Schools NSW contacting the Secondary Principals' Council or the Primary Principals' Association.

Often a staff member will visit the family of the deceased student at their home. Staff should confirm with the family that they can visit the family at home before doing so.

At least two departmental staff should visit the family home. Where the principal attends the home this could include the Director Public Schools NSW or the Year Advisor. **No staff member should attend the family home unaccompanied.**

- c. **Attempt to identify a point of contact within the family of the deceased student and advise them of their contact point within the school.**

Ongoing communication with the deceased student's family is essential. This is usually most effectively achieved when an identified contact point within the school deals with the one point of contact within the family. The contact point within the family can be a friend or neighbour if the family prefer.

- d. **Decide what the school community should be told about the student's death – including whether it should be disclosed that it is believed the student has died by suicide.**

Seek the family's views about what the school community should be told about the student's death.

While all reasonable attempts should be made to comply with the family's wishes there may be occasions where the duty of care to other students overrides a family's request for privacy.

For example it may already be well known within the school community that a student has taken his or her life (e.g. due to posts on social media or conventional media reports).

It will be important to be honest and transparent with students when discussing the student's death to keep them engaged in strategies designed to lessen the potential for contagion (This is where one suicide may increase the risk that others will kill or attempt to kill themselves). For more information about suicide contagion see - <http://headspace.org.au/assets/School-Support/Suicide-contagion-web.pdf>

It will be equally important to provide the parents of other students with accurate information that will most effectively assist them to support their children.

While it may prove necessary to inform parents that a student has taken their own life it is not necessary to identify that student by name when writing to parents unless the family has consented to this occurring.

- e. **If the exercise of the duty of care (or another legal obligation) to other students means the school cannot act in accordance with the family's wishes for privacy it is important to sensitively and respectfully explain why.**

It may help the family to understand why the school is disclosing information about their child's death if the reason why (e.g. so that other parents can support their children) is explained to them.

- f. **Information requests from the family.**

It is possible that the deceased student's family may seek information from the school at the point contact is made with the family or at later date. These requests should be directed to the principal.

Requests for information are to be handled respectfully however there may be limits to the information that can be provided. (For example the information could relate to other students).

Advice should be sought from Legal Services on telephone 9561 8538 if a principal is unsure whether the information sought can be provided by the school.

Section three

Response during the first 24-48 “school” hours after the student’s death

Introduction and Checklists

18. The response taken by the school in the 24/48 hours following the student’s death is vitally important. Both the principal and Director Public Schools NSW are likely to play a crucial role during this period.
19. Depending on the circumstances action may also need to be taken by other areas of the Department. Checklists for action by those areas are found at [Appendix 12](#).
20. It is important to be clear about who should take what action during this period. In order to minimise the potential for overlap the following checklists have been prepared for action during the first 24/48 hours following a student’s death:
 - a. A checklist for principal’s actions is at [Appendix 2](#).
 - b. A checklist for the Director Public Schools NSW’s actions is at [Appendix 3](#).

Notifying key staff and beginning to plan support

21. **Key staff must be notified of the student’s death so that planning for school support can begin.** While the staff who need to be notified will vary this will commonly include:
 - a. Principal (if they have not been notified of the student’s death);
 - b. Deputy/Assistant Principals;
 - c. Head Teacher (Welfare);
 - d. Learning and Support Teacher/Team;
 - e. School Counsellor/District Guidance Officer;
 - f. Cultural support personnel (where appropriate);
 - g. School Chaplain;
 - h. Year Advisors (where a student in high school has died); and
 - i. Classroom teacher (if the student who has died is in primary school).

22. This group should discuss plans for:
- a. briefing of the school community (depending on what is occurring in the school at that time the need to brief staff may require the cancellation of planned professional learning staff/stage/faculty meetings and their replacement with the staff briefing session); (see [paragraphs 25-55](#) for further details).
 - b. assessment and management of risks to students and staff (this includes potentially vulnerable students who currently participating in any programs or activities outside of the school such as excursions, TVET, work experience or work placement. Consideration must also be given to the support of potentially vulnerable students who have been suspended or whose attendance is poor); (see [paragraphs 74-101](#) for further details).
 - c. who will be the contact point for exchange of information with other staff, students and parents and how any information received will be communicated to those who need to know;
 - d. who will monitor the school’s website and any of the school’s social media accounts (such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, Pinterest etc.) for posting of concerning content; and arrange for its removal and any necessary follow up action;
 - e. how action taken will be documented; and
 - f. necessary administrative action following the student’s death. (see [paragraphs 102](#) for further details).

The Importance of Not Disclosing the Way the Student Took Their Life

23. **When speaking about the student’s death no information should be provided about the method the student used to take his or her life.** This is not only respectful to the student and their family but can also assist in lessening the potential for contagion (the possibility for one suicide to increase the likelihood that others will attempt suicide or kill themselves).

For more information about suicide contagion see - <http://headspace.org.au/assets/School-Support/Suicide-contagion-web.pdf>

24. The exception to this is where:
- a. a report is being made to the police or other emergency services personnel; or
 - b. the information is being used or disclosed by counsellors or other health care professionals for the purposes of postvention planning; or
 - c. it is necessary to use or disclose this information to prevent or lessen a serious and imminent threat to the life or health of any person.

In all other circumstances legal advice should be sought before this information is used or disclosed to any person.

Initial Briefing of Staff about the Student's Death

25. All staff should be briefed about the student's death including School Administrative and Support Service staff. While each principal will want to do this in the way that best suits their staff a sample script for this briefing is at [Appendix 5a](#). An information sheet to hand out to staff about potential sources of support is at [Appendix 5b](#).
26. To the extent that it is practicable, plan to include staff who are on leave and regular casual employees as they may have a connection to the student even if they are not currently at the school. Usually this contact will be made by the principal or his/her nominee calling the person and telling them of the student's death. **If the staff member is on leave because he or she has had a recent bereavement or has a psychological illness please see [paragraph 32](#).**
27. It is important to recognise that news of this kind can be very upsetting. Staff will react to the student's death in different ways. It should not be assumed someone is not affected by the student's death because they do not visibly react when told the news. A reaction can also be triggered by a later event such as the student's funeral.
28. Consider whether it is necessary/practicable to arrange for a psychologist to attend the staff meeting through the [Employee Assistance Program](#) critical incident support model. Ongoing support should be made available as required.
29. Consider the potential impact on staff of news of the student's death when planning for the first briefing. **Tell staff they can leave the meeting if they need to and make arrangements for a member of the executive who has already been briefed to check they are okay if they do leave.**
30. It is foreseeable that staff who have worked closely with the student (for example a Year Advisor, Head Teacher (Welfare), the School Counsellor, classroom teachers, Learning and Support Teacher or School Learning and Support Officer) may be more significantly affected than other staff.
31. Consider advising these staff of the student's death prior to any general staff meeting. These staff should be given the opportunity of not attending the general staff meeting if they would prefer not to do so. If they do not attend the staff meeting the EAPS psychologist can be asked to attend the school to be available to speak with them.
32. When a staff member is on leave and may be especially vulnerable (for example due to a recent bereavement in their family or a psychological illness) **the Health and Safety Directorate should be contacted on telephone 1800 811 523 to discuss whether contact should be made and how this issue should be approached.**
33. Staff may be told the name of the student who has died and that it is believed the student has taken their own life irrespective of any wish the family has expressed for confidentiality. They should be:

- a. given an opportunity to debrief about the student’s death with their colleagues if they wish;
 - b. advised of the contact point for staff/student/parent inquiries/ information and asked to advise that person if any concerns are raised by other staff, students or parents;
 - c. reminded they can access the [Employee Assistance Program](#) (intranet only). They should also be advised of additional external community support (such as [Lifeline](#) or the State Mental Health Telephone Access Line. A draft information sheet for staff is found at [Appendix 5b](#));
 - d. advised that contact has been made with the family, of any wishes the family have expressed for confidentiality (if known) and the approach that the school is taking to communicating with the school community. **A copy of the letter the school intends to send to parents should be provided to staff if available;**
 - e. reminded of the importance of continuing to behave professionally (including ensuring conversations about the student do not take place within the earshot of students or other community members and that they should not discuss the student’s death on social media sites);
 - f. invited to identify students who may be particularly affected by news of the student’s death and asked to suggest strategies to support them. Staff should also be asked to identify students who are currently participating in activities outside of the school such as excursions, TVET, work experience or work placement;
 - g. School Administrative Support Staff can be the first point of inquiry for telephone and other inquiries. A sample script for staff answering the telephones is at [Appendix 7](#). It is important to remind SASS staff answering phones and other staff who may be approached by the media for comment that media inquiries must be directed to the Media Unit; and
 - h. provided with the headspace School Support fact sheet - [How to Talk about Suicide with Young People](#) to support them in any conversations they may have with other student’s about the student’s death. **Where staff work in a primary school it may be necessary to eliminate this step. Advice should be sought from the counselling service about how to talk to young children about the student's death.**
34. A further staff briefing should ordinarily be held on the next working day after the student’s death. Further briefings should continue as required.

Initial Briefing of Students about the Student’s Death

35. **Advice can be sought from the school counselling service about how best to brief students about the student's death. When briefing primary school students it may be necessary to depart from the guidelines and implement different strategies to brief the students in view of their age and maturity.**

Outside agencies such as headspace School Support may also be able to assist the school with this process.

36. The local Learning and Engagement Coordinator may be able to assist the School Counsellor and/or District Guidance Officer in arranging for additional counselling support for the school where required.
37. When considering briefing students **it is important to consider students who are participating in activities outside of the school including but not restricted to sporting events, excursions, TVET, work experience and work placements. Other students may have been suspended from school or be otherwise absent (e.g. because of poor attendance).**
38. **While the strategies that may be implemented to support these students will vary depending on the circumstances it is important to consider how these students can best be supported.**
39. **It may be necessary to advise students of the student’s death while they are at school irrespective of the wishes of the deceased student’s family.** This requires careful planning as some students (for example close friends or students with whom the deceased student has been in conflict) are likely to be more seriously affected than other students. **The student can be identified by name to their close friends.**
40. It should not be assumed that a student has not been affected by the student’s death because they do not visibly react when told the news.
41. It is usually preferable, where practicable, to avoid telling other students about the student’s death in large groups. Instead the news should be separately conveyed to the student’s friends, any students who are known to have been in conflict with the deceased student, classmates, and students in the same year. Students can then be told in class or year group, depending on circumstances. The way students are briefed will depend on the needs of the actual school community. **A template for briefing students is at Appendix 6a and sample information sheet to provide students is at Appendix 6b.**
42. **Friends of the student may be asked to identify students in other schools (including other school systems) who may be affected by the student’s death so that those students can be supported.** This could include children and young people who interacted with the student on social media sites or were on the same sporting teams or social activities outside of the school.
43. This information should be provided to the relevant contact person in that school as soon as practicable. If an appropriate contact has not been identified with that school the principal should be advised. **If the school the student attends is unknown or if the person may have left school the information should be provided to the police.**
44. It can be helpful to set aside a place for students to go to if they become upset during the school day. It is important to check that there is someone there who the students can talk to if this is done.

45. A list of students who access that place should be maintained and the whereabouts of students who access the place should be regularly monitored. **The school should notify parents when concerns are formed about a student’s wellbeing unless it is believed on reasonable grounds it would place the student at increased risk to do so (for example where a Court has restricted the parent's right to information about the student).**
46. **Students should be encouraged to advise a nominated staff member if they need additional support or are concerned about a friend.** Ideally this staff member should not be the school counsellor as it is likely that he or she will be directly engaged with vulnerable students who have already been identified as needing support.
47. If students choose to tell another staff member about their concerns that person should listen to the student and notify the nominated staff contact point as soon as practicable about any concerns.
48. In the event the media is at the school students should be advised they do not have to answer a reporter’s questions and that they should remember at all times be respectful of the deceased student and their family.

Initial Briefing of Parents about the Student’s Death

49. **Parents should be advised of a student’s death so that they are able to support their children.** The content of the letter will vary according to the circumstances. For example:
 - a. a template letter for issue when it is publically acknowledged the student is believed to have taken their own life is at [Appendix 8](#).
 - b. a template letter for issue when the manner of death is uncertain or being kept confidential is at [Appendix 9](#).
50. If these letters are being sent out by email or by using an automated system **it is important to ensure that the family of the student who has died is not sent this letter automatically.** Instead a copy of the letter should be provided to them with a covering note.
51. While these letters can be customised by schools to suit the needs of their own communities **all letters must include references to the school counselling team, the State Mental Health Telephone Access Line, the Kids Helpline and headspace.**
52. It is possible that rumours in the community, letters to parents or reports in the media or on social media may result in telephone contact being made with the school. Staff answering the telephone should be provided with a script for dealing with calls about the student’s death. **A template script for staff answering the telephone is at [Appendix 7](#).**
53. The Media Unit will manage contact with the media on the school’s behalf.

Initial Briefing of Staff of Onsite Out of School Hours child care facility (OSHC) or similar facility

54. Students at the school may attend an OSHC or similar facility. The management of the OSHC or similar facility should be provided with the same information as provided to parents.
55. They should also be asked to advise a nominated contact point within the school if they develop any concerns about students attending their service.

Informing Persons Outside of the School Community about the Student's Death

Who is responsible for making these notifications?

56. **The notifications listed in paragraphs 59 to 73 should be made by the Director Public Schools NSW or delegate unless otherwise indicated to allow the principal to focus on their school community.**
57. **Prompt action is necessary. Notifications should be made during the first working day following the student's death.**
58. **No information should be provided about the means by which the student's suicide occurred unless it is in accordance with the process set out in paragraphs 23 and 24.**

Informing other schools that may have a connection to the student or their family

59. Sometimes the student may attend school under “shared enrolment” arrangements. This can result in a student attending a mainstream school for part of the week and a placement in a special setting for the remainder of the week. Staff who have worked with the deceased student under these arrangements should be advised of the student's death.
60. If it is possible other schools may have a connection to the student (for example the student has attended that school within the last 3 years). Where the identity of that school is known the principal of that school should be notified of the student's death. Where this is a government school that school's principal will be responsible for the development of strategies to support students and staff at their school consistent with this guideline.
61. Where known the principals of schools attended by the student's siblings, friends or extended family should also be notified of the student's death.
62. This includes non-government schools the student may have attended. The

principals of those schools can be provided with information about the student's death under Chapter 16A of the *Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998*.

Informing Departmental staff external to the school who have worked with the student or their family

63. Identify if any other Educational Services staff or other staff have been involved with the student and/or the family such as a Home School Liaison Officer, Aboriginal Student Liaison Officer or Distance Education staff (where the student although enrolled in a mainstream school was also studying a subject through Distance Education).
64. If the student was in receipt of Assisted School Travel that unit should also be advised of the student's death.

Informing the Executive Director

65. The Director Public Schools NSW will also notify their Executive Director of the student's death. The Executive Director will arrange for the Secretary or nominated delegate to be advised that the student of a specified school is believed to have died by suicide.

Informing persons involved with the deceased student outside of the school such as current TVET teachers or current work experience and work placement supervisors

66. On occasions the deceased student may be undertaking TAFE delivered vocational education and training (TVET). It is important that the TAFE teacher delivering the training is advised of the student's death. That teacher's supervisor should also be advised of the student's death so that any necessary support for the TAFE teacher can be arranged.
67. Ordinarily work experience or work placement supervisors working with the student at the time of his or her death need only be told that the student has died.

Informing Community Services of the student's death

68. Where the school is aware that Community Services has been working with the student or their family, the relevant Community Services worker should be notified of the student's death by the Director Public Schools NSW.

Informing the local Child and Adolescent Mental Health director and School-Link Coordinator about the student's death

69. The Director Educational Services will arrange for the local Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service director and School-Link Coordinator to be advised of the student's death.

Informing the President of Primary Principals' Association or the Secondary Principals' Council of the student's death

70. Any school principal who is required to take action after the student's death should be supported.
71. This includes the principal of the school the deceased student attended and any other school affected (for example the primary school recently attended by the deceased student or currently attended by a sibling)
72. All school principals should be supported throughout this process. Sources of support both within and external to the Department should be considered.
73. Where appropriate either the Secondary Principals' Council or Primary Principals' Association should be notified that a student at an identified school has died so that they can support the principal.

Identifying Key Partners to Support the School

74. News of the student's death is likely to have an impact on other students and staff. Some will be more seriously affected than others.
75. **Sometimes the reaction may be delayed or triggered by subsequent events such as the deceased student's funeral or any event they may have participated in such as a grand final or school debate.** Assess the potential ongoing risk posed by this student's death to other students and staff, develop strategies to minimise risk and inform staff of those strategies.
76. Consideration must be given to seeking assistance and support within and outside of the Department when developing these plans. This could include:
 - a. the local Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service director;
 - b. the School-Link Coordinator;
 - c. headspace School Support;
 - d. Secondary Principals' Council or Primary Principals' Association;
 - e. Community members such as Aboriginal elders.
77. These services supplement existing services within the school.

Assessing and Responding to Potential Risks to Staff

78. The ability of staff to support each other and students following a student's suicide will be enhanced by the school having already developed and

implemented a procedure to follow in the event a student kills themselves. **See paragraph 7 (f) for further details about this planning process.**

79. The assessment of risk to staff should start within the first 24/48 hours of news of the student's death though it may take longer to develop strategies to respond to that risk. It is also necessary to continue to monitor staff health and safety so that new or changed risks can be identified and responded to.
80. Any potential support needs of staff working with students on school related programs such as a TVET should be considered. It is important to check the person's workplace supervisor is aware that one of the teacher's students has died so the teacher can receive support.

Staff Likely to be Affected by the Student's Death

81. It is likely all staff will be affected to some extent by news of the student's death but some staff will be more affected by others. Depending on the nature and extent of their previous involvement with the student this may include:
 - a. the school principal;
 - b. members of the school executive;
 - c. classroom teachers or the learning and support teacher;
 - d. school learning and support officer working with the student;
 - e. the school counsellor; and the
 - f. relevant year advisor.

New/Inexperienced Staff

82. **Other staff may be new to the school or inexperienced in their role** (whether because they are newly appointed to the position or are relieving in a position because the usual occupant is absent).
83. Though potentially not as affected by the news of student's death because they have had less contact with him or her they may be subjected to increased stressors because of their unfamiliarity with the role or the school. **The principal and Director Public Schools NSW should identify such staff and discuss their support needs.**
84. It is important for the Director Public Schools NSW to identify that a principal may need support and develop strategies to support him or her. This could include identifying a mentor for the principal in consultation with the principal concerned. The role the mentor plays should be agreed between the two principals and could include the mentor attending the school.

Additional support for Schools

85. Depending on the circumstances it may also be necessary to provide the school with extra funding to respond to emerging risks (for example to fund the school to appoint an identified staff member to focus on a postvention plan for the school).

Ongoing support for Staff

86. Certain staff such as the school counsellor, year advisor or district guidance officer can be called upon to play a significant role in the school's response to news of the student's death. It is important to have regard to their need for support during this period. Strategies that can be implemented to support the staff member vary and could include being provided with a mentor or additional staffing resources (such as extra counsellors) being allocated to the school.
87. The potential risk posed by the news of the student's death to all staff must be assessed and strategies implemented to minimise or eliminate that risk.

EAPS support

88. Consideration should be given to arranging for Employee Assistance Program Support for staff at the school. This can be more effective than providing a telephone contact number as staff may be more likely to talk to someone who is in the staff common room. **The Health and Safety Directorate can be contacted about how to obtain this support on telephone 1800 811 523.**

PPA/SPC support

89. Other sources of support, such as the Secondary Principals' Council or Primary Principals' Association and the welfare areas of employee associations can also provide support to staff in this situation.

Developing Support Plans for Students

90. It is crucial to identify students who may be affected by the news of the student's death, assess the risks posed to those students and implement strategies to support them.
91. The assessment of risk to students should start within the first 24/48 hours of news of the student's death though it may take longer to develop strategies to respond to that risk. Continue to monitor student welfare so that new or changed risks can be identified and responded to. It is important to consider whether any mandatory reporting requirements have

arisen -The [Mandatory Reporter Guide](#) and in particular the [decision tree - child/young person is a danger to self and/or others](#) can provide assistance to staff in discharging this responsibility.

Siblings and the Extended Family

92. Some students are likely to be more affected than others by news of the student's death. Siblings and in some cultures particularly the extended family are likely to fall into this group. A template risk assessment and management plan for students who are identified as being at high risk is found at [Appendix 11](#).

Other students

93. While not all students will be at high risk it is possible that a number of students will be distressed by the news that the student has died. These students may require assistance and support in managing their distress.
94. District guidance officers and school counsellors can provide advice to students about how to manage their distress. They can also provide advice to school staff about how to support students who are distressed by news of the student's death.
95. Follow up with the principals of any schools known to be attended by any siblings - this includes non-government schools to let them know about the incident and allow them to plan for and implement any necessary support. This role will ordinarily be undertaken by the Director Public Schools NSW.
96. Depending on the circumstances it may also be necessary to **contact the principals of schools in the same friendship group, class or sports or other team or association where known. It can also include students in a previous school and those who are known to have been in conflict with the student who has died. Students who are known to have existing vulnerabilities are also likely to fall into this group.**
97. All students are owed a duty of care by the school in these circumstances.

Students absent from the school when news of the student's death is received

98. As part of this process **consideration should be given to how to support any students who are absent from the school on an excursion or because they are participating in a program such as TVET, work placement or work experience. The potential support needs of students who are on suspension or who have a poor record of attendance must also be considered.**

Potential strategies to support students

99. Potential strategies will vary to meet each individual circumstances but may include:
- a. notifying the teachers of vulnerable students of the potential warning signs that a student’s resilience may be low and providing them with strategies to respond to possibly non-compliant behaviour;
 - b. providing the student with counselling support;
 - c. establishing and maintaining contact with organisations that are providing a school related program the student is participating in such as TVET;
 - d. requiring staff to immediately report an unexpected absence;
 - e. providing staff with training – for example where the school community has been seriously impacted over the long term either refresher training or training to meet the specific need should be considered. The local School-Link Coordinator and/or Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service director can provide information about available training;
 - f. regular communication with the family where practicable; and
 - g. referring students to the Child and Adolescent Mental Health service or some other external provider
100. The situation must be regularly monitored for new or changed situations of risk with any necessary modifications made to the risk management process. Continuing consideration should be given to whether any mandatory reporting requirements have arisen - The [Mandatory Reporter Guide and in particular the decision tree - child/young person is a danger to self and/or others](#) can provide assistance to staff in discharging this responsibility.
101. Staff, including new staff and casual employees must be advised of these strategies. It will be of critical importance that staff know which students are at risk, how to support them and how to effectively report any concerns.

Necessary Administrative Action

102. Some administrative steps need to be taken by the school in the first 48 hours following the student’s death. The person undertaking these tasks should be nominated by the principal. The administrative tasks that need to be undertaken may include:
- a. Printing off a copy of the student’s contact details and student timetable;
 - b. Disengaging any automatic attendance system (e.g. using SMS to notify parents of an absence) and other parent communication system (e.g. an automatic email system) that is in place to communicate with parents;
 - c. Notifying the library not to follow up on books loaned to the student or

- their siblings;
- d. Securing the student’s locker and any personal possessions they may have at school;
 - e. Checking that any TVET teacher or person performing a similar role in a program associated with the school are notified of the student’s death;
 - f. Asking teachers to identify work that the student may have been undertaking (for example art work) and return that work to the nominated staff contact; and
 - g. Securing the student’s laptop (where one has been provided by the school) if it has been left at school. If the laptop is returned by the parents it should be secured and the police advised it has been returned.

Media Issues

- 103. The Media Unit should have been advised of the student’s death. Any media inquiries must be directed to the appropriate contact in the Media Unit.
- 104. It is important to involve the Media Unit in any communication strategies with parents or others. Sometimes it will be necessary for a principal to implement communication strategies without making prior contact with the Media Unit. In such circumstances the Media Unit should be provided with a sample of any correspondence being provided to parents or other community members.
- 105. If the student’s death has been widely reported in the media, a representative of the Media Unit can be requested to attend the school and outline the media strategy that has been put in place.
- 106. Discuss strategies with the Media Unit if local media is waiting for students outside of the school at the bus stop/rail way station.

Social media

- 107. School staff should consult with the school counsellor and District Guidance Officer and should seek advice from Legal Services before posting any information about the deceased student on social media.
- 108. Students and others may discuss the student’s death on social media. It is important for the school to nominate a staff member to check and continue to monitor the school’s website and its social media accounts (such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, Pinterest etc.) for concerning content and remove the content after printing a copy and take any necessary additional action.
- 109. Parents should be asked to advise the school if they become aware of concerning content on social media. **The template letters to parents at Appendices 1a, 1b, 8, 9 and 13** reflect this requirement.

110. Staff who become aware of concerning content on social media sites should notify the staff contact point as soon as practicable about the site. **Health and Safety Directorate should also be notified about the site by the principal on 1800 811 523 (option 1).**
111. Once the school is aware concerning content is posted by or about students prompt contact must be made with the student's parents where the student's identity is known unless it is believed on reasonable grounds it would place the student at increased risk to do so (for example where a Court has restricted the parent's right to information about the student).
112. If the student is at school he or she should be referred to the school counsellor for assessment. If the student is not at school contact should be made with an appropriate authority such as NSW Police. Continuing consideration should be given to whether any mandatory reporting requirements have arisen - The [Mandatory Reporter Guide and in particular the decision tree - child/young person is a danger to self and/or others](#) can provide assistance to staff in discharging this responsibility.
113. If suicidal content on Facebook is reported to the school, it can be reported to Facebook on <https://www.facebook.com/help/contact/305410456169423>

What if the student's death takes place during the school holidays?

114. If school staff become aware that a student has died during the school holidays contact is to be made with the Director Public Schools NSW. He or she will arrange for a meeting of available key staff to be held (including where practicable those from external agencies such as the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service or headspace School Support) so that reasonably practicable strategies can be developed to respond to the needs of the school community.

What if the student's death takes place immediately before, after or during the Higher School Certificate examinations?

115. This can be a time of significant stress for students and their families. Most of the same processes outlined previously will be followed. It should be recognised that even if students are no longer required to attend school each day they may wish to come to the school to access counselling or support from staff and to talk with their friends. Some students may wish to apply for special consideration for the HSC. A template letter advising parents of a student's death and of the support services available is at [Appendix 13](#).

The Importance of Documentation

116. It is crucially important that any action taken by the school is documented.

Section four

The next 48 – 72 hours

Ongoing importance of liaising with the student’s family, briefing staff and assessing and responding to new and changed risk

117. Maintain contact with the family of the student who has died. The nature and frequency of the contact will be determined by the family's wishes.
118. Staff briefings should continue as required and parents should be kept informed of any relevant new developments (for example concerning posts on social media).
119. Monitor the situation for new and emerging risks to students and staff. An example of one potentially emerging risk could be the student’s funeral or memorial service. Continuing consideration should be given to whether any mandatory reporting requirements have arisen - The [Mandatory Reporter Guide and in particular the decision tree - child/young person is a danger to self and/or others](#) can provide assistance to staff in discharging this responsibility.
120. It is possible staff who are directly engaged in providing students with support such as the school counsellor, Year Advisor or Head Teacher (Welfare) may need continuing support from an experienced colleague or relief from other duties to enable him or her to focus on the needs of students. The continuing welfare of staff performing these roles should be closely monitored and any necessary action taken.

Funerals and Memorial Services

121. The student’s family should be consulted about the extent to which they welcome the participation of members of the school community at the student’s funeral or memorial service.
122. If requested by the family schools can contact other students’ parents and advise them of the arrangements that have been made for the student’s funeral or memorial service.
123. If a student wishes to attend the funeral or memorial service parents should be encouraged to attend the funeral or memorial service with their

children. Where the funeral or memorial service occurs during school hours students should only be permitted to attend the funeral with the written permission of their parents. A template letter to parents about a funeral or memorial service is at [Appendix 10](#).

124. **This may be the first time that some students have attended a funeral. They may not know what to wear, how to behave or what to expect. It should be noted that funeral ceremonies may vary according to the student’s cultural background.**
125. **Often parents will discuss the funeral with their children. This may not always occur. Consideration should be given to whether school staff will need to talk to students who are to attend the funeral in small groups so they can ask questions and prepare for the ceremony.**
126. Parents should be generally advised if the funeral or memorial service results in a significant disruption to school routine.
127. Counsellors should be available to support students and staff after the funeral or memorial service.
128. Sometimes parents may request that a funeral or memorial service take place on the school premises. While these requests should be sympathetically received it is important to recognise that agreeing to this request could make it difficult for students or staff to return to their normal routines and may lead them to associate the school with the student’s death. For this reason requests to have a funeral at the school site after a student’s suicide should generally be respectfully refused.

Awards and Scholarships in the student’s memory

129. Sometimes parents may ask whether they can establish a scholarship or other award in the memory of a student who has died by suicide. While it is important to be sensitive and respectful of parent’s wishes, establishing an annual award in the student’s name can negatively impact on the wellbeing of staff and students by providing a continuing reminder of the student’s death by suicide. Further as students and staff leave the school the award will lose its meaning. Consideration should be given to advising parents they are welcome to contribute to the Public Education Foundation or an established general fund for students. If parents contribute to a school based fund they can be asked to suggest the basis on which the award will be given (for example in the deceased student’s favourite subject).

Returning to the school to normal routines

130. The impact of the student’s death on the school’s routines will vary accordingly to the circumstances but it can usually be anticipated the school’s routines will be disrupted to some degree.

131. Returning the school to its normal routines usually plays an important role in the recovery of staff and students who have been affected by the student's death.
132. While each school's situation will be different and some students or staff may need long term support the school should plan to return the school to its normal routines 72 hours after the student's death.

Section five

The Longer Term

Briefing Staff, Parents and the School Community

133. The need to brief staff, parents and the school community over the long term and the content of any briefing will depend on the circumstances. This includes whether there have been other attempts at suicide by students or other members of the school community, the student's death is the subject of widespread discussion in the community, it has been reported in the media or an inquest is to be held.
134. It is important to continue to provide staff and parents with information where practicable. Consideration could be given to holding a forum for parents with the support of the local School-Link Coordinator, the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service or some other agency if parents require further information or support.
135. Where affected students attend different schools (including non-government schools) it is important for those schools to work cooperatively together to support students.

Briefing new staff (including casuals) about risk management strategies

136. Any induction of new school staff, including casuals, must include advice of existing risk management strategies for individual students and how to report concerns.

Alerting new schools to current arrangements to support vulnerable students when those students enrol in those schools

137. When a vulnerable student leaves their current school it is important that the current school inform the new school about the strategies in place to support the student. This customarily occurs during planned transition periods (for example when a student leaves Year 6 and enters Year 7).
138. When a student leaves school outside of a normal transition period (for example during Year 8) and the principal knows which NSW school the student will next be enrolling the new school is to be advised of the plans that have been developed to support the student. **This applies even if the student is intending to enrol in a non-government school.**

If the student will enrol in an interstate school their parent(s) should be asked to complete the [Interstate Student Data Transfer Note](#) so that relevant information can be provided to the new school about the student's support needs.

Briefing the local Members of Parliament

139. If the student's death has been reported in the media or is the subject of ongoing community concern consideration should be given to briefing the local member of Parliament about the strategies that have been put in place to support students at the school.

Responding to Information Requests

140. The Department will need to obtain information about the student in due course. This is likely to include his/her attendance records, reports and any student welfare or behaviour records relating to student. A copy of his or her counselling file (where one has been registered) will also be required.
141. This information is likely to be required by the Police; the Ombudsman (as part of its usual duties in facilitating inquiries on behalf of the Child Death Review Team) and possibly Legal Services in order to make an assessment of any legal risks that may arise for the Department. Gathering information in one place will be helpful in meeting ongoing communication needs.
142. Areas seeking information from the school in the longer term should contact the principal. Those areas should also advise the Director Public Schools NSW that contact has been made with the school.

Reviewing administrative action

143. In circumstances where the deceased student's siblings still attend the school any action to disable parental communication systems (for example the automatic emailing of newsletters) should be reviewed. This is so the parents can continue to receive information about the siblings.

Risk Assessment will be a continuous process

144. The assessment of risk to students and staff will be an ongoing process. It is important to consider upcoming events in the school calendar in which the deceased student may have played a role (for example a performance or sporting event) and plan ahead for the potential effect on students or staff.
145. This process must encompass events such as preparation for the anniversary of the student's death, birthdays, and times of stress for students such as the HSC and when an inquest is to be held into the student's death.

Requests from the family for a school report or other information

146. Sometimes a family may request a school report be produced after the student's death or that they be provided with other information about their child. These requests are to be dealt with sensitively. If a principal is uncertain about what information can be provided to the family contact should be made with Legal Services on 9561 8538.

Monitoring the wellbeing of staff

147. It is important to continue to monitor the wellbeing of staff who have provided significant levels of support to students such as Year Advisors, Head Teacher Welfare, the school counsellor or District Guidance Officer. After the immediate response has been provided and the school has returned to its regular routines they may require support as they begin to cope with the after-effects of the response that they have provided.

Working with the Police during a Coronial investigation

148. It is possible the Police will investigate the student's death for the Coroner. The extent of this investigation and the impact on the school will vary.
149. Generally Police will avoid interviewing students at school. However when police investigate the death of a student who is believed to have died by suicide that they are not investigating a crime. It is also important to know that a police investigation for the Coroner will not necessarily lead to an inquest. It is also important to remember that:
 - a. The Department of Education fully cooperates with the police/Coroner and recognises that the police are in control of any investigations that are to be undertaken.
 - b. It is important to identify a point of contact for police inquiries – preferably this should be someone outside of the school. Depending on the circumstances this could be the Director Public Schools NSW or a lawyer from Legal Services. This takes the pressure off the school staff and promotes consistency of approach. It would be helpful to provide Legal Services with a copy of any information that is provided to the Police.
 - c. The police may request information about system wide issues such as the broader policy context in place to address an identified issue. These inquiries should be directed at first instance to Legal Services.
 - d. If the Police wish to interview students they should be requested to identify the students who will be interviewed so that the school can put in place strategies to support the students. Advice about the strategies that can be used to support students in these circumstances can be obtained from Legal Services;

- e. If any of the students they intend to interview are known to be vulnerable it is very important that the Police are told how vulnerable those students are.
- f. Steps need to be taken by the principal to arrange for students to be offered counselling support throughout the process. Further advice about strategies that can be implemented to support students through this process can be provided by Legal Services.
- g. If staff are likely to be interviewed by the Police, Legal Services can provide advice to staff about the interview process. The Police should be advised if staff are known to be vulnerable so police can consider this when preparing to interview staff.
- h. If staff are interviewed by the police they should ask for a copy of the statement they have made

Appendices

Appendix 1a

Letter to parents - Witness to Attempted Suicide⁵

Dear parents

I am writing to inform you that today one of our students attempted to take their own life at school and that this was witnessed by your child. This student is now receiving appropriate care.

Today and over the coming weeks, you may be concerned about the reactions of your child to this event. Many students will wish to talk with their parents, so I also encourage you to let your child know that you are aware of this incident and that you will listen to their concerns at any time they wish to share them.

Staying connected and engaged with your child is one of the best ways to support them. It is important to try to include discussion about positive ways of managing problems.

Social media

Please contact the school if you become aware of any concerning content on any social media site used by your child.

Key messages for your children

An important message for all of us to promote is that everyone should seek help from others when we feel down or vulnerable. We will also reinforce this message at this school.

Please encourage your children to seek help from others if they are feeling down or vulnerable. Please also let them know they should tell an adult if they are worried about a friend.

Our school will be concentrating on supporting our students and staff over

⁵ Where a student has witnessed another students death an attempt to contact their parent should have been made in accordance with paragraph 10 of the guidelines

the next months. This means, among other things, returning the school to normal routines as soon as possible and recognising that students can be affected by this event for many months to come.

If your child is already supported by a mental health professional

If your child is already using the services of a mental health professional, you should ensure this information is passed on to that professional. If you let us know who they are we can work with them to support your son/daughter through this difficult time.

Some sources of support for you/your child

Your child will be able to see our school counsellor (INSERT NAME) if they need to talk. Some children may prefer to talk to someone they don't know about how they are feeling. Potential free, anonymous and confidential sources of support for your children include:

- **Kids Helpline** (1800 551800 or www.kidshelp.com.au)
Lifeline (131114 or www.lifeline.org.au)
headspace (1800 650 890 or www.headspace.org.au)*
- **The State Mental Health Telephone Access Line** (1800 011 511) which operates 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. It is staffed by clinicians who can provide advice, make referrals and link callers to the mental health service in their Local Health District.

Contacting the school counsellor

Please feel free to contact our school counsellor (INSERT NAME) on (INSERT NUMBER) for further information or if you have any concerns about your child.

Contacting the school with further inquiries or to raise concerns about your child or another student

If you have further inquiries or wish to raise concerns about your child or another student please contact (IDENTIFY NOMINATED STAFF MEMBER) who is the nominated contact for inquiries from parents rather than approaching other members of staff.

We ask you contact this person as it is important that you receive consistent and accurate information and any of your concerns are promptly relayed to the people who are planning for the support of you children at school.

Yours sincerely

*Delete reference to headspace if letter going to a parent of a primary school student

Appendix 1b

Letter to parents - Witness to suicide⁶

Dear parents

As discussed with you on the telephone I am writing to inform you that tragically one of our students has taken his/her own life at school and that this was witnessed by your child. OR

Recently I have unsuccessfully tried to contact you over the telephone about something that has occurred at school today. Tragically one of our students has taken his/her own life and this was witnessed by your child.

This is sad time for the student’s family and friends and for our school community.

Today and over the coming weeks, you may be concerned about the reactions of your child to this event. Many students will wish to talk with their parents, so I also encourage you to let your child know that you are aware of this incident and that you will listen to their concerns at any time they wish to share them.

Staying connected and engaged with your child is one of the best ways to support them. It is important to try to include discussion about positive ways of managing problems.

Social media

Please contact the school if you become aware of any concerning content on any social media site used by your child.

Key messages for your children

An important message for all of us to promote is that everyone should seek help from others when we feel down or vulnerable. We will also reinforce this message at this school.

Please encourage your children to seek help from others if they are feeling down or vulnerable. Please also let them know they should tell an adult if they are worried about a friend.

⁶ Where a student has witnessed another students death an attempt to contact their parent should have been made in accordance with paragraph 10 of the guidelines

Our school will be concentrating on supporting our students and staff over the next months. This means, among other things, returning the school to normal routines as soon as possible and recognising that students can be affected by this event for many months to come.

If your child is already supported by a mental health professional

If your child is already using the services of a mental health professional, you should ensure this information is passed on to that professional. If you let us know who they are we can work with them to support your son/daughter through this difficult time.

Some sources of support for you/your child

Your child will be able to see our school counsellor (INSERT NAME) if they need to talk. Some children may prefer to talk to someone they don't know about how they are feeling. Potential anonymous, confidential and free sources of support for your children include:

- **Kids Helpline** (1800 551800 or www.kidshelp.com.au)
- **Lifeline** (131114 or www.lifeline.org.au)
- **headspace** (1800 650 890 or www.headspace.org.au)*
- **The State Mental Health Telephone Access Line** (1800 011 511) which operates 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. It is staffed by clinicians who can provide advice, make referrals and link callers to the mental health service in their Local Health District.

Contacting the school counsellor

Please feel free to contact our school counsellor (INSERT NAME) on (INSERT NUMBER) for further information or if you have any concerns about your child.

Contacting the school with further inquiries or to raise concerns about your child or another student

If you have further inquiries or wish to raise concerns about your child or another student please contact (IDENTIFY NOMINATED STAFF MEMBER) who is the nominated contact for inquiries from parents rather than approaching other members of staff.

We ask you contact this person as it is important that you receive consistent and accurate information and any of your concerns are promptly relayed to the people who are planning for the support of you children at school.

Yours sincerely

*Delete reference to headspace if letter going to a parent of a primary school student

Appendix 2

Principal's Checklists

Principal – First 24/48 hours (Document All Action Taken)

1. Secure scene and provide support to affected staff/students (if on site event). [Paragraph 10](#)
2. Validate report. [Paragraph 15 \(a\) and \(b\)](#)
3. Do not disclose the way the student killed themselves (if known) – [Paragraphs 23 and 24](#)
4. Notify: [Paragraph 10, 14 and 21](#)
 - a. Director Public Schools NSW
 - b. Health and Safety (unless Health and Safety Directorate has notified the principal)
 - c. Media Unit (if the student's death is being reported in the media or on social media)
 - d. Key staff including the school executive, school counsellor and Learning and Support Team and arrange a meeting
5. At the meeting discuss:
 - a. Briefing of school community including
 - Briefing of staff including casuals and those on leave ([paragraphs 25-34](#))
 - Briefing of students including those on TVET, work experience, work placement and suspension ([paragraphs 35-48](#))
 - Briefing parents ([paragraphs 49-53](#) and [Appendices 8 and 9](#))
 - Scripts for staff answering the phones ([Appendix 7](#))
 - Briefing where relevant of on-site OSHC staff ([paragraphs 54-55](#))
 - b. If primary school students are being briefed ([paragraph 35](#))
 - c. Assessment and management of risks to staff ([paragraphs 78-89](#))
 - d. Assessment and management of risks to students ([paragraphs 90-101](#))
 - e. Need for contact with outside agencies (CAHMS or headspace School Support) ([paragraph 35](#))

- f. Who will make contact with the family ([paragraphs 16-17](#))
 - g. Who will be the contact point for staff and students who are seeking information or wish to raise concerns ([paragraph 22 \(c\)](#))
 - h. Who will monitor the school’s social media accounts and arrange for any necessary response to concerning posts ([paragraph 22\(d\)](#))
 - i. Need for additional staffing (e.g. if staff are too upset to answer the phones) ([paragraph 85](#))
 - j. Consider mandatory reporting requirements ([paragraphs 45, 91 and 113](#))
6. Contact with the family including
 - a. identifying a point of contact within the family
 - b. discussions about what the school community should be told ([paragraphs 16-17](#))
 7. Identify a place students can go if they need support. Students strongly affected by the news should not be allowed to leave the school unaccompanied unless by direct arrangement with the student’s parents ([paragraphs 44 and 45](#))
 8. Arrange/Nominate someone to arrange ([paragraph 102](#))
 - a. Any automatic attendance system to be disabled
 - b. Notify library not to follow up on books loaned to the student or their siblings
 - c. Any locker to be secured
 - d. Any laptop to be secured

Principal (next 48/72 hours) (Document all action taken)

1. Continue to liaise with family – seek wishes about funeral or memorial service ([paragraph 118](#))
2. Provide advice to school community about the funeral arrangements ([paragraph 122-129](#))
3. Brief/Monitor the wellbeing of staff ([paragraph 119 and 121](#))
4. Monitor wellbeing of students ([paragraph 120](#))
5. Consider mandatory reporting requirements ([paragraph 100 and 113](#))
6. Plan for return to normal school routines ([paragraph 130-131](#))

Principal (longer term) (Document all action taken)

1. Assess need to brief staff, parents and school community ([paragraph 133](#))
2. Consider need to work with other schools to support community ([paragraph 135](#))
3. Brief new staff (including casuals) about risk assessment strategies ([paragraph 136](#))
4. Alert new schools (where known) when vulnerable students leave ([paragraph 137-138](#))
5. Responding to Information Requests ([paragraphs 140-142](#))
6. Reviewing administrative action ([paragraphs 143](#))
7. Review risk assessments especially at time of anniversary of death and times of stress such as the HSC ([paragraph 144-145](#))
8. Consider mandatory reporting requirements ([paragraph 119](#))
9. Working with the Police during a Coronial Investigation ([paragraph 147-148](#))

Appendix 3

Director Public Schools NSW checklist

Director Public Schools NSW – First 24/48 hours (Document All Action Taken)

Notify/arrange to be notify

1. Obtain details of student's name, date of birth and school.
2. (if contacted by someone other than the principal) confirm principal notified.
3. Attend the school.
4. Notify/arrange to be notify:
 - a. Executive Director's office. The Executive Director is to arrange for the Secretary or nominated delegate to be notified of the student's death. (paragraph 65)
 - b. other schools in area and schools that are known to have a connection to the student (paragraph 59-62)
 - shared enrolment
 - schools the student previously attended
 - schools attended by the deceased student's siblings
 - schools which are known to be attended by the student's friends
 - c. other departmental staff who have worked with the student (paragraph 63)
 - d. Assisted School Transport unit (where applicable) If the deceased student accessed Assisted Student Transport service arrange for the run to be cancelled (paragraph 64)
 - e. Director Educational Services who will liaise with the district guidance officer or Learning and Engagement Coordinator to request they contact the local Child and Adolescent Mental Health unit and the School-Link Coordinator and arrange for additional counselling support (paragraph 69)
 - f. TVET teachers (and other staff) where relevant (paragraph 66-67)
 - g. Community Services (if known to be supporting the student/their family) (paragraph 68)

- h. Primary Principals Association or Secondary Principals Council
(paragraphs 73)
- 5. Assess support needs of principal/school in consultation with the principal
(paragraphs 70-71, 84)
- 6. Advise principal of potential sources of internal and external support.
(paragraph 72)
- 7. Confirm identified contact points in Child Wellbeing Unit, Legal Services, Health and Safety, Student Engagement and Interagency Partnership and Media Unit are aware of the incident and provide them with the student details.
- 8. Liaise with other areas as required.

Appendix 4

Tips for talking with a bereaved parent⁷

Things to think about when calling parents or receiving calls from the student's family

- The bereaved parent may speak with a sense of shock, disbelief, denial, anger.
- It might be helpful to use the student's name to personalise the situation.
- Contain the conversation and make it clear but brief.
- Tell the parent about how you heard of the student's death (where this has not been reported to the principal by the family).
- Allow the parent time to clearly respond to the key question of how they would like the school to manage the questions/information to the broader school community.
- Reinforce that being genuine and honest as possible with other students about their child's death will help contain and manage this very difficult time.
- Reinforce that every approach to managing and containing information and support will be as respectful as possible of the family's wishes.
- Express and use language that you are likely to use in informing others to check whether the parent is comfortable with this language.
- Explain the need for the school to respond and how this information may be shared such as by letter, small group conversations with friends etc.
- In this initial conversation try to avoid or steer the conversation away from memorials and avoid committing to anything you can't fulfil.

⁷ This document has been provided to the Department by headspace School Support and is used in these guidelines with its permission

Phone call script

Hello (INSERT NAME)

It's (INSERT YOUR OWN NAME and POSITION) from (INSERT NAME OF SCHOOL).

Do you have time to talk? I am so sorry to hear of (INSERT STUDENT'S NAME) sudden passing/death.

Our thoughts are with you and your family right now. I know this is a very difficult time for you and your family. A number of students and staff are distressed and grieving and I felt like I needed to call.

Because of the sudden nature of (INSERT STUDENT'S NAME) passing I think assumptions are being made about what happened and I want to make sure we help manage questions and contain information as much as possible.

I want to be sensitive to you and your family's needs and wishes.

I think being as genuine and honest as I can be with students and teachers about (INSERT STUDENT'S NAME) passing will help in managing their questions and dealing with their grief.

I want to ask you what information you are comfortable in sharing with me so that I can manage how that is shared with others.

Give the parent time to think and respond. Take a note of what they say.

(If there are known siblings/extended family/close friends)

We know this is going to be a difficult time for (INSERT NAME OF KNOWN SIBLINGS etc.) and we will make sure that we support them through this difficult time. We will be flexible about expectations of work and focus on their wellbeing.

Please call if you or your family need anything.

Appendix 5a

Sample Script for Initial Briefing of Staff⁸

Today I was given some very sad news that on ... one of our year ... students – INSERT NAME has died. It is believed that he/she has taken his/her own life.

All of us are thinking of his/her family and friends.

Some of you will find this news very difficult to understand and accept. It may remind some of you about another sad event in your own life. If you feel you need to leave this meeting you can.

Support for staff

It is important that you are not alone if you are feeling this way. Some sources of support are

- **Employee Assistance Program** counsellor is here at the school this morning/ is contactable on (INSERT NUMBER)
- **Lifeline** (131114 or www.lifeline.org.au)
- **headspace** (1800 650 890 or www.headspace.org.au)

Remember - we need to encourage our students to seek help when they are feeling this way and we shouldn't hesitate to do this ourselves. If you are concerned about a colleague's wellbeing please let me know.

Family's wishes

The family (INSERT DETAILS OF FAMILY'S WISHES FOR CONFIDENTIALITY IF KNOWN).

Communication Strategies

I know a number of you will want to talk with each other about what has happened. This is very natural. I know you will do this in a respectful way.

⁸ Consideration should be given to briefing teachers who may be vulnerable before the meeting. They should be encouraged to attend but given the opportunity to not do so if they feel it will be too difficult.

Please be careful not to have these conversations in any place where a student could hear you or discuss the student’s death on any social networking sites even if they have strict privacy rules.

If you are approached by the media to comment on the student’s death remember that these questions should be directed to the Media Unit.

A number of students may have questions about how (INSERT NAME) died. Again this is natural.

It is very important not to talk to them about the way the student has died if you become aware of this. Research has shown that doing this can have a very bad impact on some people’s wellbeing. This is why I am not discussing that with you now.

We all need to remind the students of the importance of dealing with problems positively and that we should all seek help from others when we feel down or vulnerable.

We also need to remind students of the importance of letting a teacher know if they are worried about anyone.

You will all be given information about our plans to support individual students who may be particularly affected by this news.

These can be difficult conversations to have and I have copies of a headspace School Support publication about [how to talk to young people about suicide](#) may help with this.

Arrangements for students support

I am making arrangements for students to be told about (INSERT NAME)’s death. I will also be writing to their parents. A copy of the letter to be provided to parents will be provided to you.

Of course we know that a number of students will be affected by this news. As you know everyone reacts differently to sad news and we need to be careful not to assume that someone isn’t affected because they don’t noticeably react when they are told.

We are currently developing plans to support our students and would like you to help us if you can.

If you are concerned about how a student may be affected by news or by some behaviour they exhibit in the classroom I have asked (INSERT NAME OF STAFF CONTACT POINT) to be your point of contact for these inquiries. Please do this as soon as you can as we can only respond to a student’s needs if we know about them.

Please also let (INSERT NAME OF STAFF CONTACT POINT) us know if any students

report that they have seen concerning content about the student’s death on any social media sites.

We will have the school counsellor to support students if they need counselling. I have also arranged extra counsellors in the school for a while.

Concluding remarks

Be sensitive to people’s feelings about (INSERT STUDENT’S NAME) death, look out for each other and let me know if you are worried about anything or anyone.

I would like you all to take a couple of minutes to read the headspace School Support material. We will then have time for questions.

We will meet again tomorrow to discuss how things are going.

Appendix 5b

Handout for staff

Sources of help if you are feeling low

1. **Insert details of Employee Assistance Program**
2. **Lifeline** (131114 or www.lifeline.org.au)
3. **headspace** (1800 650 890 or www.headspace.org.au)
4. **Beyond Blue** (1300 22 4636 or www.beyondblue.org.au)
5. **State Mental Health Telephone Access Line** – 1800 011 51 - which operates 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. It is staffed by clinicians who can provide advice, make referrals and link callers to the mental health service in their Local Health District.

You may also wish to contact the welfare area of your employee association.

Remember – tell (INSERT NAME AND CONTACT DETAILS OF STAFF CONTACT PERSON) if you have any concerns for students or anyone reports any concerning contact on social media.

We need to encourage students to seek help if they need it. Modelling this behaviour ourselves is a good first step.

Appendix 6a

Script for Initial Briefing of Students⁹

Today the school was given the very sad news that on ... one of our year ... students died. All of us are thinking of his/her family and friends.

I know you were their friend as well (where applicable).

Some of you will find this news very difficult to understand and accept. It may remind some of you about another sad event in your own life.

Sources of support

It is important that you are not alone if you are feeling this way - we have set up a place for you to go to if you would like to talk about how you are feeling.

Someone will be available there during the school day to speak with you. You need to get your teacher to fill out a movement slip if you wish to use this place.

The school counsellors will be available in the normal way to see you. We will have some extra counsellors in the school for a while.

If you would like to speak with someone anonymously some free and confidential sources of support are:

- **Kids Helpline** (1800 551800 or www.kidshelp.com.au)
- **Lifeline** (131114 or www.lifeline.org.au)
- **headspace** (1800 650 890 or www.headspace.org.au)*

If you want to speak to someone while you are at school please (insert relevant arrangements).

Informing parents

A notice is going home today to inform your parents about the death so they will understand if you want to talk with them today or sometime in the future.

Remember to use the normal signing out processes if you need to leave the school grounds, and if you are approached by anyone asking for information about this death please tell them they should speak with Ms/Mr ...

⁹ If briefing primary school students please see [paragraph 35](#)

Social media

Sometimes worrying things can be posted on-line. If you see something about (STUDENT's NAME) death that makes you feel upset or worried for someone else let (INSERT CONTACT POINT) know.

If you see something about (STUDENT's NAME) death than makes you feel upset or worried for someone else let (INSERT STAFF CONTACT POINT) know.

Asking for information

Be sensitive to people's feelings about this death, look out for each other and let a teacher or your parents know if you are worried about anything or anyone.

If you think that a student at this school or even another school may be upset by news of (STUDENT's NAME) death can you let (INSERT STAFF CONTACT POINT) know.

(If the media are in attendance at the school)

Remember that you do not have to answer any questions from reporters. If you do make a comment please remember to be respectful about the student and their family.

Does anyone have any questions?

*Do not include reference to headspace if information being given to primary school students

Appendix 6b

Handout for Students

Sources of help if you are feeling low

Your parents are being informed about (INSERT NAME's death). Please talk to them if you are upset.

If you would like to speak with a school counsellor – (INSERT NAME) will be at the school for the next few days. Arrangements have been made for additional counsellors to be available if needed.

If you need to see a school counsellor (INSERT DETAILS OF HOW ARRANGEMENTS WILL BE MADE).

Sometimes it is easier to speak to someone anonymously about how we are feeling. If you would like to do this you can call:

- **Kids Helpline** (1800 551800 or www.kidshelp.com.au)
- **Lifeline** (131114 or www.lifeline.org.au)
- **headspace** (1800 650 890 or www.headspace.org.au)*

Remember – if you or a friend needs to talk to someone about how they are feeling or you see something on line that makes you feel upset or worried for someone else – let us know.

This is important even if it involves a student at another school.

*Do not include reference to headspace if information being given to primary school student

Appendix 7

Script for staff answering the phones

Parents

It is true one of our students has died. This is a sad time and our thoughts are with that student's family and friends.

We are committed to supporting our students and staff through this difficult time.

It is important to encourage your child to talk about how they are feeling and to tell an adult if they are concerned about themselves or a friend.

The principal is writing/has written to our parents and provided them with information about how to have this conversation.

Please let the school know if you haven't received that letter or have concerns about your son or daughter.

Media

All media inquiries should be directed to (02) 9561 8501 and/or mediaunit@det.nsw.edu.au

Appendix 8

Letter to parents – student who has taken their own life

I am writing to you with some sad news about a member of our school community.

One of our Year (TO BE INSERTED) students died suddenly and tragically. It is believed that this student took his/her own life (INSERT DATE). Our thoughts and heartfelt sympathy are with the student’s family and friends.

Today and over the coming weeks, you may be concerned about the reactions of your child to this news. Many students will wish to talk with their parents, so I also encourage you to let your child know that you are aware of this incident and that you will listen to their concerns at any time they wish to share them.

Some key messages for your children

Two important messages to promote are that all of us should seek help from others when we feel down or vulnerable and that young people should tell an adult if they are worried about a friend or themselves.

Our school will be concentrating on supporting our students and staff over the next months.

This means, among other things, returning the school to normal routines as soon as possible and recognising that students can be affected by this event for many months to come.

If your child is already supported by a mental health professional

If your child is already using the services of a mental health professional, you should ensure this information is passed on to that professional. If you let us know who they are we can work with them to support your son/daughter through this difficult time.

Also include hyperlink to headspace School Support publication about [how to talk to young people about suicide](#).

Staying connected and engaged with your child is one of the best ways to support them. When talking about the issue of suicide try to include discussion about positive ways of managing problems. The enclosed information for parents may assist you with those conversations.

An important message for all of us to promote is that everyone should seek help from others when we feel down or vulnerable. We will also reinforce this message at this school.

Social media

Please contact the school if you become aware of any concerning content on any social media site used by your child.

Contacting the school counsellor

Please feel free to contact our school counsellor on (INSERT NUMBER) for further information or if you have any concerns about your child. Please also let your children know that the school counsellor is there to support them if they wish to talk.

Some additional sources of support for you and your children

Some children may prefer to talk to someone they don't know about how they are feeling. Potential sources of free, anonymous and confidential support for your children include:

- **Kids Helpline** (1800 551800 or www.kidshelp.com.au)
- **Lifeline** (131114 or www.lifeline.org.au)
- **headspace** (1800 650 890 or www.headspace.org.au)*
- You or your child may also care to contact the **State Mental Health Telephone Access Line** (1800 011 511) which operates 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. It is staffed by clinicians who can provide advice, make referrals and link callers to the mental health service in their Local Health District.

Contacting the school with further inquiries or to raise concerns about your child or another student

If you have further inquiries or wish to raise concerns about your child or another student please contact (IDENTIFY NOMINATED STAFF MEMBER) who is the nominated contact for inquiries from parents rather than approaching other members of staff.

We ask you contact this person as it is important that you receive consistent and accurate information and any of your concerns are promptly relayed to the people who are planning for the support of your children at school.

*Delete reference to headspace if letter going to a parent of a primary school student

Appendix 9

Letter to parents – sudden death

I am writing to you with some sad news about a member of our school community. One of our Year (TO BE INSERTED) students died suddenly on (INSERT DATE). Our thoughts and heartfelt sympathy are with the student's family and friends.

Today and over the coming weeks, you may be concerned about the reactions of your child to this news. Many students will wish to talk with their parents, so I also encourage you to let your child know that you are aware of this incident and that you will listen to their concerns at any time they wish to share them.

Some key messages for your children

Two important messages to promote are that all of us should seek help from others when we feel down or vulnerable and that young people should tell an adult if they are worried about a friend or themselves.

Our school will be concentrating on supporting our students and staff over the next months. This means, among other things, returning the school to normal routines as soon as possible and recognising that students can be affected by this event for many months to come.

If your child is already supported by a mental health professional

If your child is already using the services of a mental health professional, you should ensure this information is passed on to that professional. If you let us know who they are we can work with them to support your son/daughter through this difficult time.

Staying connected and engaged with your child is one of the best ways to support them. When talking about the issue of suicide try to include discussion about positive ways of managing problems. The enclosed information for parents may assist you with those conversations.

Also include hyperlink to headspace School Support publication about [how to talk to young people about suicide](#).

An important message for all of us to promote is that everyone should seek help from others when we feel down or vulnerable. We will also reinforce

this message at this school.

Social media

Please contact the school if you become aware of any concerning content on any social media site used by your child.

Contacting the school counsellor

Please feel free to contact our school counsellor on (INSERT NUMBER) for further information or if you have any concerns about your child. Please also let your children know that the school counsellor is there to support them if they wish to talk.

Some additional sources of support for you and your children

Some children may prefer to talk to someone they don't know about how they are feeling. Potential sources of free, anonymous and confidential support for your children include:

- **Kids Helpline** (1800 551800 or www.kidshelp.com.au)
- **Lifeline** (131114 or www.lifeline.org.au)
- **headspace** (1800 650 890 or www.headspace.org.au)*
- You or your child may care to contact the **State Mental Health Telephone Access Line** (1800 011 511) which operates 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. It is staffed by clinicians who can provide advice, make referrals and link callers to the mental health service in their Local Health District.

Contacting the school with further inquiries or to raise concerns about your child or another student

If you have further inquiries or wish to raise concerns about your child or another student please contact (IDENTIFY NOMINATED STAFF MEMBER) who is the nominated contact for inquiries from parents rather than approaching other members of staff.

We ask you contact this person as it is important that you receive consistent and accurate information and any of your concerns are promptly relayed to the people who are planning for the support of your children at school.

Yours sincerely

Principal

*Delete reference to headspace if letter going to a parent of a primary school student

Appendix 10

Letter about funeral

The (INSERT NAME) family have asked that I contact you to advise you about the funeral arrangements that have been made for (INSERT NAME OF STUDENT).

Our thoughts are with (INSERT NAME) family and friends at this sad and difficult time. INSERT DETAILS OF FAMILY'S REQUEST¹⁰

Should your child wish to attend the funeral they will only be able to leave school to attend the funeral with your written permission¹¹.

Attending the funeral with your children

I would like to strongly encourage you to attend the funeral with your child. It is important to do this where possible so that you can give your child emotional support through a very sad occasion. If your child is going to attend the funeral please speak with them about what they should wear, how they should behave and the funeral service itself.

It will also give you an opportunity to talk to your child about how they are feeling and remind them of the importance of dealing with problems in a positive way. It is important to remind them to seek help if they are feeling down or vulnerable.

School counsellors

Please also remind them that school counsellors are available to speak to them if they would like to talk to someone.

Some additional sources of support for you and your children

Some children may prefer to talk to someone they don't know about how they are feeling. Potential sources of free, confidential and anonymous support for your children include:

- **Kids Helpline** (1800 551800 or www.kidshelp.com.au)
- **Lifeline** (131114 or www.lifeline.org.au)
- **headspace** (1800 650 890 or www.headspace.org.au)*

¹⁰ Please seek immediate advice if the family request that the funeral/memorial service be held at school

¹¹ This is only required where the funeral is being held during school hours

- You or your child may also care to contact the **State Mental Health Telephone Access Line** (1800 011 511) which operates 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. It is staffed by clinicians who can provide advice, make referrals and link callers to the mental health service in their Local Health District.

Please contact me if you are concerned about your child or one of their friends.

(INSERT NAME - Funeral – (INSERT DATE))

Name: _____

Class: _____

I give permission for my child to attend the funeral at (Insert Location).

I will/will not be present at the funeral.

Parent signature: _____

*Delete reference to headspace if letter going to a parent of a primary school student

Appendix 11

Sample support plan for student at high risk

Name of workplace: _____ Name of workplace manager: _____

Risk assessment focus:

Location/ Activity	Hazard Identification Type/Cause	Current Controls	Risk matrix score	Elimination or Control Measures	Who	When
Travelling to school	May truant from school and engage in self-harming behaviour	N/A	1	Parent to notify school if student not attending school Student to report to Year Advisor upon arrival at school Year Advisor to report to DP if this is not done DP to check if the student is at school and follow up with parents re absences	Deputy Principal YA YA YA	Immediately Immediately Immediately
In school	May engage in self-harming behaviour	Curriculum	1	Teachers to be advised of scheduled visits to school counsellor or YA Teachers to mark attendance at the beginning of every class. If student not present report absence to DP If student requires a break they are to be escorted to established room by another student. DP to be advised this has occurred by note from teacher. Student's wellbeing is to be monitored while they are in the room. DP and YA to review workload/ pressure associated with examinations, general work, participation in other school based activities for potential increase in self-harming behaviour Consideration to be given to adjustment to discipline policy for vulnerable students Bullying behaviour by other students dealt with under the discipline policy	SC/YA All teachers All teachers DP DP and YA Executive Executive	Immediately Immediately

Responding to Student Suicide – Support Guidelines

Location/ Activity	Hazard Identification Type/Cause	Current Controls	Risk matrix score	Elimination or Control Measures	Who	When
Out of school	May engage in self- harming behaviour	N/A	1	DP to report to parents at end of day if any issues of concern and request parents to report to school any incidents of concern “out of school hours” DP to consider contacting parents during the school holidays where there have been other incidents reported of self- harming behaviour	DP	Immediately
Funeral/ Memorial	Increased risk of self-harm	N/A	1	If student elects to attend the service encourage parents to attend the service Speak to students about funeral Remind parents and students of availability of support inside and outside of the school Monitor for changed behaviour	P SC/YA	Immediately
Social media	Social media may increase the risk of self-harming behaviour	Social media toolkit for schools	1	Ask parents to report any social media concerns Respond to inappropriate posts consistent with departmental policy		
Police Investigation	Increased risk of harm	N/A	1	Advice police of vulnerable students Ask police to notify school if students are to be interviewed Provide counselling support to students Monitor students for changed behaviour	P P SC All	Immediately after death
Relevant additional information reviewed and attached: Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Plan prepared by: _____ Position: _____ Date: Prepared in consultation with: _____ Communicated to: _____						
Monitor and Review: Monitor the effectiveness of controls and change if necessary. Review the risk assessment if an incident or a significant change occurs.						

Appendix 12

State Office Checklists

Child Wellbeing Unit – First 24/48 hours

1. Obtain details of student’s name, date of birth and school.
2. Confirm identified contact points in Legal Services, Health and Safety Directorate, Student Engagement and Interagency Partnership and Media Unit are aware of the incident and provide them with the student details.
3. Assess whether child or young person or one of their siblings is “known” to Community Services and advise relevant areas as appropriate.
4. Liaise with other areas as required.

Legal Services – First 24/48 hours

1. Obtain details of student’s name, date of birth and school.
2. (if approach made by principal) – Check Director Public Schools NSW notified.
3. Confirm Child Wellbeing Unit, Legal Services, Health and Safety Directorate, Student Engagement and Interagency Partnership and Media Unit are aware of the incident and provide them with the student details.
4. Check whether Director/Principal is aware of resources developed to support schools – if not provide that documentation.
5. Identify point of contact for further legal advice (if required).
6. Liaise with other areas as required.
7. Advise Chief Legal Officer/Director Legal Services.

Media Unit – First 24/48 hours

1. Obtain details of student’s name, date of birth and school.
2. Confirm Director Public Schools NSW, Child Wellbeing Unit, Legal Services, Health and Safety Directorate, Student Engagement and Interagency Partnership is aware of the incident.
3. Provide Director Public Schools NSW with media contact.
4. Prepare a holding statement.
5. Liaise with other areas as required.

Student Engagement and Interagency Partnership – First 24/48 hours

1. Obtain details of name, date of birth and school
2. (if approach made by principal) – Check Director Public Schools NSW notified.
3. Confirm Child Wellbeing Unit, Legal Services, Health and Safety Directorate and Media Unit are aware of the incident and provide them with the student details.
4. Check whether Director/Principal is aware of resources developed to support schools – if not provide that documentation.
5. Check that Distinct Guidance Officer/other sources of external support are considered and that counselling support is available for students if required. Liaise with Learning and Engagement Coordinator or Director Educational Services.
6. Liaise with other areas as required.

Health and Safety Directorate – First 24/48 hours

1. Obtain details of name, date of birth and school.
2. (if approach made by principal) – Check Director Public Schools NSW notified.
3. Validate information with the Police.
4. Confirm Child Wellbeing Unit, Legal Services, Student Engagement and Interagency Partnership and Media Unit are aware of the incident and provide them with the student details.
5. Liaise with other areas as required.

Appendix 13

Letter to parents of Year 12 students at HSC time

Dear parents

I am aware that some students at this school may need extra support at present after the recent death of one of our (INSERT YEAR) students. I know that for some students this could be an ongoing need. I also know that being in Year 12 can make some students anxious and sad.

Some key messages for your children

Two important messages to promote are that all of us should seek help from others when we feel down or vulnerable and that young people should tell an adult if they are worried about a friend or themselves.

Our school will be concentrating on supporting our students and staff over the next months. This means, among other things, returning the school to normal routines as soon as possible and recognising that students can be affected by this event for many months to come. If your child is already using the services of a mental health professional, you should ensure this information is passed on to that professional.

Staying connected and engaged with your child is one of the best ways to support them. When talking about the issue of suicide try to include discussion about positive ways of managing problems. The enclosed information for parents may assist you with those conversations.

An important message for all of us to promote is that everyone should seek help from others when we feel down or vulnerable. We will also reinforce this message at this school.

Social media

Please contact the school if you become aware of any concerning content on any social media site used by your child.

Contacting the school counsellor

I realise that because of the proximity of the Year 12 HSC examinations your child no longer needs to come to school each day. That does not mean that they cannot speak with our school counsellor or one of the other counsellors we have arranged to be at school to help students.

Please feel free to contact our school counsellor on (INSERT NUMBER) for further information or if you have any concerns about your child. Please also let your children know that the school counsellor is there to support them if they wish to talk.

Some additional sources of support for you and your children

Some children may prefer to talk to someone they don't know about how they are feeling. Potential sources of free, anonymous and confidential support for your children include:

- **Kids Helpline** (1800 551800 or www.kidshelp.com.au)
- **Lifeline** (131114 or www.lifeline.org.au)
- **headspace** (1800 650 890 or www.headspace.org.au)
- You or your child may also care to contact the **State Mental Health Telephone Access Line** (1800 011 511) which operates 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. It is staffed by clinicians who can provide advice, make referrals and link callers to the mental health service in their Local Health District.

Concerns about the HSC

I realise that you or your children may be concerned that this news will impact on the ability of your child to perform as well as they can at the HSC. Please reassure them that if this occurs an application can be made to the Board of Studies for special consideration.

The school will support you in making this application. Please contact (INSERT NAME) if you would like further information about this process.

Contacting the school with further inquiries or to raise concerns about your child or another student

If you have further inquiries or wish to raise concerns about your child or another student please contact (IDENTIFY NOMINATED STAFF MEMBER) who is the nominated contact for inquiries from parents rather than approaching other members of staff.

We ask this as it is important to ensure that you receive consistent and accurate information and for us to be aware of all parent concerns.

Yours sincerely

Appendix 14

Principal's Contact List

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Director (input local details)

Child Wellbeing Unit

Telephone: 9269 9400

Director Public Schools NSW (input local details)

Director Educational Services (input local details)

Headspace School Support

School Support Coordinator NSW/ACT

Telephone: 4476 2556 ext. 104 | Mobile: 0400 783 505

Health and Safety Directorate

Incident Report and Support Hotline: 1800 811 523

Legal Services Directorate

Telephone: 9561 8538

Fax: 9561 8543

Email: legal@det.nsw.edu.au

Webpage: <https://detwww.det.nsw.edu.au/lists/directoratesaz/legalservices/index.htm>

Media Unit

Telephone: 9561 8501

Email: mediaunit@det.nsw.edu.au

School Link Coordinator (input local details)

Glossary

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service

The NSW Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) provide specialist clinical services for children and adolescents with moderate to severe mental health problems and their families and targeted specialist clinical early intervention programs. The emphasis is on children, adolescents and families at highest risk for current or future impairment and access for those with the greatest need for specialist expertise. Priority groups include Aboriginal children, adolescents and families; those who have been exposed to abuse, violence, neglect or other trauma; children and young people in out-of-home care; those with developmental disabilities or chronic physical health problems; those in contact with Juvenile Justice; and families with children where a parent has mental health problems.

Contagion

Suicide contagion refers to the process whereby one suicide or suicidal act within a school, community, or geographic area increases the likelihood that others will attempt or complete suicide.

Parent

Includes any person having the custody or care of a child.

School-Link

The NSW School-Link Initiative (School-Link) provides a platform for NSW Health and the Department of Education to work together to improve the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people in NSW. The NSW Ministry of Health funds Local Health Districts and Specialty Networks to employ School-Link Coordinators to implement the School-Link Initiative across NSW schools in partnership with teachers, school counsellors and specialist mental health staff. At a statewide level, the School-Link program is managed by MH-Children and Young People (MH-CYP), NSW Ministry of Health in partnership with the Department of Education.

School-Link strengthens the early identification and management of mental health issues for children and young people, provision of evidence-informed early intervention programs in schools, early access to specialist mental health services and support for the recovery journey. The Initiative equips school to more confidently identify emerging mental health issues in their students and to strengthen their understanding of where to refer young people for the help they need. School-Link helps staff to better understand what the young person and their family may be experiencing and provides support at school and referral to specialist mental health services. For more information about [School-Link](#) click here.

