



Separated Parents Policy



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Introduction

Parental separation can lead to some parents becoming estranged from their child and losing contact with school altogether. When a parent loses contact with their child, this can be traumatic for the child concerned, as they may worry about their parent's whereabouts and safety, and may blame themselves for relationship breakdown and loss of contact.

Within our school, we aim to maintain contact with both parents in the best interests of their children. Research and experience indicate that whenever separated parents make a concerted effort to work well together and in partnership with school staff to support their child in their behaviour and learning, the negative impact on children's overall well-being and academic attainment can be reduced.

This policy aims to minimise any impact and to clarify to all parties what is expected from separated parents and what can be expected from the school and its staff.

Definition of "parent"

The definition of a "parent" for school purposes is much wider than for any other situation. The Education Act 1996 defines a parent as:

- all natural parents, including those that are not married;
- any person who has parental responsibility but is not a natural parent, e.g. a legally appointed guardian acting in loco parentis or the Local Authority named in a Care Order;
- any person who has care of a child, i.e. a person with whom the child resides and who looks after the child irrespective of the relationship.

Parents, as defined above, are entitled to share in the decisions that are made about their child and to be treated equally by schools. In particular, these entitlements include:

- appealing against admission decisions;
- Ofsted and school-based questionnaires;
- participation in any exclusion procedure;
- attending Learning Consultations/school events;
- having access to school records and receiving copies of school reports, newsletters, invitations to school events, school photographs relating to their child and information about school trips.

The Governing Board recognises that while the parents of some pupils may be separated, divorced or estranged, they are still entitled to the above and this entitlement cannot be restricted without a specific court order. In particular, the school does not have the power to act on the request of one parent to restrict another.

Parental Responsibility

The information provided to the school, either from the previous school or by the parents/carers when the child was enrolled detailing which adults have parental responsibility for the child will be presumed to be correct unless a court order or original birth certificate proving otherwise is provided to the school. Similarly, the

information provided regarding the address(es) where the child resides will be presumed to be correct unless a court order proving otherwise is provided to the school.

Court Orders

Within our school, our aim is to promote the best interests of the child, working in partnership with all parents; subject to the terms of any valid court order.

Upon receipt of a valid court order, the school will look to act in accordance with its terms. However:

- the school is not generally a party to court orders which are in place in relation to the family;
- the school is not responsible for enforcing orders of the court or interpreting these on behalf of parents;
- individuals should seek their own legal advice in the event of any alleged breach of or lack of clarity around the terms of any court order.

Disputes and disagreements

Disputes between parents over the exercise of their parental rights need to be resolved between the parents concerned and/or the courts. It is not the role of the school to provide advice on domestic arrangements or become involved in parental disputes.

Where parents are unable to agree with one another on decisions regarding their child's educational programme, the school – where appropriate - will arrange a meeting with all parents (preferably together, but separately if required) to assist the parents in resolving the situation. The school will reserve the right not to arrange such a meeting if there are concerns that either parent would not uphold the school's Core Values and ethos in such a meeting.

Should a parent approach the school requesting to change the child's surname, both parents will be contacted and legal advice will be obtained.

Consent

For activities and outings, you should seek consent from the resident parent unless:

- The activity is likely to have a long-term and significant impact on the child, or
- The non-resident parent has asked you to seek their consent in all such cases.

If parents don't agree on whether to give consent, treat it as if consent **hasn't** been given. For example, if one parent consents to the child's picture being used on your school's website, and another doesn't, act as if consent wasn't given. (See model letter)

Changes in family circumstances

In order to safeguard the welfare of children and maintain channels of communication between school and home, we ask parents to inform the school office whenever something outside school – such as a change in family circumstances – occurs so that we can sensitively support the child in school.

Many children find parental separation difficult to cope with, especially in the first few weeks and months after one or both of their natural parents have left the family home. Children may struggle to manage their feelings and emotions and this, in turn, may have a detrimental impact upon their concentration, attitude, behaviour and learning. Children's punctuality and attendance can also be adversely affected.

We expect parents to update the school office whenever emergency contact details change for one or both parents and/or there is a new arrangement for collecting children at the end of the school day.

Parents may appoint a trusted adult to pick up their child from school. The school office needs to be informed of these trusted adults and it will be recorded on Arbor.

We recognise the sensitivity of some situations and all staff are aware of the need for discretion and confidentiality. School staff will be informed on a strict need to know basis so that suitable support can be offered.

The release of child(ren)

The school will release children to parents in accordance with arrangements notified to the school. If one parent seeks to remove the child from school in contravention of the notified arrangements, and the parent to whom the child would normally be released has not consented, the following steps will be followed:

- The Headteacher or Deputy Head will meet with the parent seeking to remove the child and, in their presence, telephone the parent to whom the child would normally be released and explain the request.
- If the parent to whom the child would normally be released agrees, the child may be released and the records will reflect that the permission was granted orally.
- In the event that the parent to whom the child would normally be released to cannot be reached, the Headteacher or staff member dealing with the issue may make a decision based upon all relevant information available to her/him.
- The Headteacher or staff member may have to refuse permission if consent cannot be obtained.
- During any discussion or communication with parents, the child will be supervised by an appropriate member of school staff in a separate room.
- In extreme circumstances if there is a belief that a possible abduction of the child may occur or if the parent is disruptive, the Police should be notified immediately.

Access to school information

All key school information is available on our school's websites (all parents are invited to make regular use of the school's website as it contains all backdated newsletters and has a range of information and links). Parents may receive information via email and/or text through Arbor or Class Dojo.

For parents who do not have access to the Internet, alternatively, paper copies of communications may be requested from the school office

Communication between school and separated parents

Newsletters and general school updates are sent via Arbor to all parents for whom we have up-to-date contact details. These updates contain all the main class/school events, including productions, sports days, parents' evenings and class trips. Consent for residentials and school trips that go beyond school hours will be required from either parent on the condition that they have parental responsibility.

Whenever paper letters are sent home with children they are freely accessible to all on request and if relevant uploaded onto the school websites.

The school office is able to deal with separate requests for school photographs and tickets for performances made by separated, divorced or estranged parents who have parental responsibility.

In all circumstances, we aim to maintain our open-door policy with all parents. Class teachers and/or the Headteacher will be available by appointment to discuss any issues.

Medical Treatment

When a child requires medical treatment, parents will be contacted in the order listed on Arbor agreed at the beginning of the year.

Learning Consultation Appointments

Whenever requested, we will offer separate Learning Consultation appointments for separated, divorced or estranged parents who have parental responsibility. However, where possible we would encourage separated parents to attend together so that parents receive exactly the same information. Technology will be used to facilitate meetings for parents that live a distance away from the school that would be prohibitive for them to attend.

Written pupil reports:

Any person who has parental responsibility for a child has the right to receive a written progress report for their child. These will be provided to separated, divorced or estranged parents who have parental responsibility and for whom the school has up-to-date contact details.

Glossary of Terms and Abbreviations

Term/Abbreviation	Meaning