

1. Introduction

The aim of this policy is to ensure that parents know what to expect from us and what we expect from you, in the event of parental separation. It outlines parental responsibility, how we will communicate with you and how we can provide support for your child.

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(ren), this can be traumatic for the child(ren) concerned, as they may worry about their parent's whereabouts and safety and may blame themselves for relationship breakdown and loss of contact. 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.

2. Definition of "parent"

In order to help us to look after children whilst they are in our care, staff are required on our admissions forms to ask parents to provide certain information, such as name of both parents, address, contact details etc. We are also required to ask who has Parental Responsibility for the child. This is important because it allows the school to be sure who has the right to make decisions about a child's education and medical treatment. However, this is a very specific legal term, and many parents may be unaware of how it is applied:

- All mothers automatically have Parental Responsibility.
- If a child's parents were married at the time of the birth, both parents automatically have Parental Responsibility.
- For children born from the 1st December 2003 where the father's name is on the birth certificate, the father and mother will both have Parental Responsibility.
- In all other cases, fathers are required to officially obtain Parental Responsibility.
- Parental Responsibility cannot be lost, except by legal adoption, although it does not guarantee contact

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 parent meetings/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 recognise 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.

3. Parental responsibility

The information provided to the school 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.

4. Court orders

Within our school, our aim is to promote the best interests of the child, working in partnership with all parents unless otherwise directed by a court order. Upon receipt of any Court Order restricting access to a parent, the school complies with the order immediately. The school is only obliged to comply with an order if it is properly notified and has received a digital or paper copy for its files, and only to the extent that it relates to the school. In the event that the school is not informed of the existence of such an order, neither parent will have preferential rights. Should a parent approach the school requesting to change the child's surname, we will attempt to confirm this with both parents.

5. Disputes and disagreements

Parents are encouraged to resolve contact issues without involving the school directly. The interests of the child will always be paramount when deciding whether to accommodate a request from an estranged parent. Staff will not attempt to mediate or resolve disagreements and disputes between parents; disagreements between parents must be resolved between the parents. Staff will not provide information or comment on relationship between the opposing parent and child relationship, unless specifically requested to do so by outside professionals or the courts.

6. 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 us 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, we would provide support in school to help the child express their thoughts and feelings and develop coping strategies, moving forward. For example, a child may need a key person to speak with about their feelings, this could be provided by staff in the classroom or by the Inclusion Hub. Children's punctuality and attendance can also be adversely affected, in which case, the Inclusion Hub would support with this.

We ask that parents 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. 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.

7. Collecting a child from school

The school will release children to parents, in accordance with arrangements notified to the school. These are listed as emergency contacts in our online system, Arbor.

- Where a separated parent, who has parental responsibility and no court order in place, wishes to take the child during or at the end of the school day, the resident parent will be contacted in order to ensure that they are in agreement with the arrangement. 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 verbally. If the parent opposes the other parent wanting to take the child then the school will advise that without a court order we cannot prevent them from doing so.
- In the event that the parent to whom the child would normally be released to cannot be reached, the Head Teacher or staff member dealing with the issue will make a decision based upon all relevant information available to him/her.
- 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.

8. 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 recent correspondence and has a range of information and links) and on Class Dojo. Parents may also receive information via email.

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

9. Communication between school and separated parents

The school recognises that, while the parents of some pupils may be divorced or separated, both have a right to be informed of, and involved in, their child's education. However, we expect that parents, whatever the nature of their separation, will do all they can to communicate with each other and share information from and for the school, for the benefit of their child.

It is assumed that the parent with whom the child principally resides will keep the other parent informed. We expect both parents of a child [separated or not] to attend parents evening appointments. We do, however, recognise that communication between parents is not always possible. If an estranged parent wishes to receive information from the school such as progress reports or attending parent/ teacher meetings, they should contact the school in writing with a specific request for separate communication.

Newsletters and general school updates are sent via email 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 school trips 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.

If a child was receiving an award or certificate and school have been made aware of a separation, both parents would be invited, unless there is a court order in place to preventing this from happening.

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

10. Medical Treatment

When a child requires medical treatment, parents will be contacted in the order listed on Arbor.

11. Parents' evening appointments

Whenever requested, we will offer separate parents' evening appointments for separated, divorced or estranged parents who have parental responsibility.

12. Written pupil reports

Any person who has parental responsibility for a child has the right to receive a written progress reports for their child(ren), known as a Record of Achievement. 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.

13. Useful links:

[Support for your child | Gingerbread](#)

[Telling children you're separating | Relate](#)

[Helping Your Child Cope with Your Divorce or Separation | NSPCC](#)

[Supporting your children through divorce and separation - Cafcass - Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service](#)

[Making child arrangements if you divorce or separate: Making child arrangements - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

[Finding support during divorce/separation | Family Lives](#)

14. Links with other policies

This document links to the following policies:

- SEMH
- Unacceptable Behaviour of visitors
- Complaints

15. Monitoring arrangements

This policy will be reviewed every 3 years, unless there are any changes to relevant legislation, in which case it will be review in line with this.

Policy Author: Jenny Cunliffe

Policy Approved By: Full Governing Board

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