



4 - 18 yrs Co-educational Independent Day School

Separated Parents Policy

Approved by: Laura Sweetman, Head of School

Date: 01.08.25

Last Reviewed: August 2025

Review Period: Annual

Next Review Due: August 2026

I About this policy

- 1.1 We recognise that children from families whose parents are separated, or are undergoing separation, may experience challenges and trauma during their time at school. We will take steps to work with parents with the aim of promoting the welfare of their children and identify measures we can take to support the child's emotional wellbeing.
- 1.2 This policy has been created with the aim of keeping any impact on our pupils to a minimum, to set out steps that we can take to assist, and to provide guidance to separated parents.
- 1.3 Unless we have seen a court order restricting or removing an individual's parental responsibility, we aim to ensure parents are dealt with fairly and in accordance with this policy, where they are contactable.
- 1.4 In addition, there may be times where the Local Authority or police instructs or advises us that a parent should not be permitted contact with their child due to safeguarding concerns, irrespective of any court order. We will normally follow any such guidance, given our priority is to ensure the child's wellbeing and to meet our safeguarding obligations.
- 1.5 We reserve the right to liaise with the Local Authority where we consider that safeguarding and/or wellbeing concerns could exist relating to parental separation. The fact that concerns are relayed in order for us to obtain guidance, does not mean we are passing any judgement on them. Where the circumstances are having a material impact on the school, we may also take independent legal advice.
- 1.6 Where we consider that a child may be at risk of significant harm, we may call 999 or otherwise seek police support.
- 1.7 At the heart of our decision making is the welfare of the child. We will endeavour to resolve issues which may arise between separated parents about their child's education but we will not become involved in conflict.
- 1.8 This policy sets out general guidance and where specific circumstances arise which are not covered by this policy, we will always try to assist and resolve issues but in general, separated parents are required to resolve parental disputes between themselves or, when they cannot do so, determine the issue through the family courts.

2 Definitions

- 2.1 Schools must work in partnership with families and are expected to involve all those with parental responsibility in their child's education (where they are contactable).
- 2.2 Section 576 of the Education Act 1996 defines a "**parent**" as:
 - 2.2.1 All natural parents, including those that are not married;

2.2.2 Any person who has parental responsibility but is not a natural parent (for example, a legally appointed guardian or the Local Authority named in any Care Order); or

2.2.3 Any person who has care of a child (a person who the child lives with and who looks after the child, irrespective of their relationship).

2.3 Where we use the term parents in this policy, we mean this term as defined above, unless expressly stated otherwise.

2.4 All those with parental responsibility must be treated equally, unless a court order is in place which limits an individual's exercise of parental responsibility. If we are not aware of any such order, no parent's rights or views have priority over another's.

2.5 All those considered parents under the legislation have the following rights:

2.5.1 The right to receive information, such as pupil reports and information about school events;

2.5.2 The right to participate in activities;

2.5.3 The right to give consent, for example in relation to school trips; and

2.5.4 The right to be involved in meetings relating to the child, such as appeals against admissions decisions or meetings relating to the disciplinary procedure.

3 Our responsibilities

3.1 We will ask parents for names and contact details of all those with parental responsibility when they register a pupil. Where known, these details will be recorded in the pupil records and admission register.

3.2 If the pupil moves to another school, we will share the contact details where known for all those with parental responsibility with the new school.

3.3 All information the school has related to relevant court orders will be noted in the pupil's record.

3.4 All information regarding formal and informal arrangements that we are notified of relating to residence, contact and school collections and drop offs will be recorded on the pupil's record.

3.5 Our primary obligation is to our pupils and ensuring they are safe and happy. Our safeguarding team are primarily responsible for making decisions regarding sharing information with parents about safeguarding concerns and referral decisions for pupils to relevant support services.

3.6 We should not be expected to provide witness statements or any other written or verbal evidence to be used in any legal proceedings beyond factual information regarding a child's education or attendance, such as a child's progress report.

- 3.7 We will aim to resolve issues raised by parents effectively and sympathetically but we do not have the power to restrict a parents' access and we should not be asked to do so, in the absence of a court order or Local Authority guidance.

4 Parents' responsibilities

- 4.1 Parents should provide a child's birth certificate as part of the admissions process, where this is requested.
- 4.2 Parents should inform us where there is a change to family circumstances to enable us to put appropriate support in place for the child. We will maintain confidentiality, where requested by parents, as far as possible.
- 4.3 Where there is a court order in place, restricting or prohibiting a parent's access to a pupil, a copy of this order must be provided promptly to the school, in order that it can put measures in place to ensure this order is complied with.
- 4.4 Parents, in cases of shared custody, should promptly inform us of any changes to agreed residence, contact and school collections and drop offs and, where there are any disputes regarding these arrangements, you should notify us of these in writing.
- 4.5 Wherever possible, separated parents should attend their child's parents evenings and other key appointments together. We will consider separate appointments where requested in advance or where there are safety concerns. Parents are expected to communicate with each other regarding these arrangements, where it is safe to do so.
- 4.6 Parents are expected to liaise with each other in relation to other school matters, such as tickets for events and school photos, for example, unless there are safety concerns. Unless by prior agreement, or where we are aware of safety issues, we will not generally deal individually with requests from separated parents on matters like this.
- 4.7 Parents must keep us up to date with any changes to their contact details or parental rights.

5 Progress reports

- 5.1 All parents have the right to receive progress reports and review the pupil records of their child, except where a court order is in place limiting this right.
- 5.2 Where parents are separated or divorced, reports will generally be sent to all those with parental responsibility for whom we have contact details.

6 Collection

- 6.1 As mentioned above, we expect parents to keep us up to date in relation to agreed or court order collection arrangements, in writing.

- 6.2 Where an individual with parental responsibility requests to take a child during, or at the end of the school day, we will generally assume that parents are in agreement to this, in the absence of a court order.
- 6.3 We will use discretion as to whether to allow a child to leave the school with a parent that they do not reside with and may seek clarification from the parent with whom they typically reside before releasing the child.
- 6.4 We will not permit a child to be collected by an individual where there is a court order in place preventing this. We will be vigilant to possible breaches of any court order in place and may seek written permission from the other parent where a parent seeks to collect their child on a day not allocated to them under any such order, before releasing the child.
- 6.5 Where a parent has safeguarding concerns about another parent, they should liaise with the Local Authority about this rather than seeking to use this as a reason not to adhere with formal collection arrangements.
- 6.6 No negative behaviours that could directly impact a child's wellbeing or the wellbeing of those around them will be tolerated on collection or drop off of a child.

7 Obtaining consent

- 7.1 Where parental consent is required for school activities or trips, we will generally seek consent from the parent with whom the child generally resides.
- 7.2 Where the parents have joint custody, consent will normally be sought from both parents and in that case, if one parent refuses to provide consent, we will regard this as consent **not** having been given.

8 Name changes

- 8.1 Parents must resolve disputes regarding any change to surname for a child. We will not normally record any change of surname without written consent from both parents and/or a copy of a change of name deed and/or a formal court order approving the change.

9 Communications and disputes

- 9.1 We will endeavour to treat all parents equally unless there is an appropriate court order in place. Where a parent asserts that a court order exists, we will require evidence of this to ensure it is accurate and valid before implementing it.
- 9.2 While we acknowledge that parents of some pupils may be separated, we cannot restrict the entitlements of one parent in the absence of a court order, including in relation to the right to be provided with information about the child's progress or kept up to date on important wellbeing or safeguarding matters, as we determine appropriate. We will treat the information provided to us on

admission about parental responsibility and contact details as correct until new evidence is provided to the contrary.

- 9.3 Where parents cannot reach agreement on matters which are directly relevant to the child's education or participation in school life, we may arrange a meeting (normally with both parents unless this would not be safe or there is a court order in place) to try and resolve the situation.
- 9.4 We will maintain an open door policy with all those with parental responsibility to discuss any issues relevant to the child or their education.
- 9.5 If a parent with whom the child does not reside contacts the school directly to request information, we will provide this information to them directly, in line with our obligations, after taking reasonable steps to satisfy ourselves that this individual is the child's parent. If the parent with whom the child resides refuses to share information with another parent and refuses to provide that parent's contact details, the school cannot do any more in the absence of direct contact from that parent.
- 9.6 We are not required to obtain consent from the parent with whom the child resides before recording the contact details of any non-resident parent or sending them prescribed statutory education information.
- 9.7 To ensure parents are treated fairly, we will generally aim to send the vast majority of general communications to all parents with parental responsibility. To facilitate this, in some cases parents may be asked to download a specific app.
- 9.8 Given time constraints and proportionality, some messages may be discussed with the parent with whom the child generally resides, or on collection, unless they are unavailable or agreed otherwise. In cases of joint custody, reasonable steps will be taken to relay key messages to all parents. As outlined above, it is generally expected that parents will share information, even where they are separated. If requested, we can instead aim to communicate such information by email to both parents so it is received at the same time. Where it would not be appropriate for email addresses of each parent to be shared with the other, separate emails will be sent.
- 9.9 For day to day issues, like absences, the school will generally contact the parent with whom the child is residing on that day.

10 Mental health and wellbeing support

- 10.1 If there is a concern for a child's wellbeing, support can be provided to them in school.
- 10.2 Parents are encouraged to contact us if they have any such concerns but we would ask that parents refrain from attempting to discuss matters like this at the start or end of the day when staff are on duty at the entrances. This is to ensure the safety of all pupils and to protect confidentiality given the sensitive nature of the concerns.

- 10.3 Where concerns are raised and support measures are considered, we will have regard to whether it is appropriate to notify any other parent of this but we have discretion in relation to this, with the child's wellbeing in mind.

11 Safeguarding

- 11.1 In relation to all safeguarding matters, we will have regard to the statutory "Keeping Children Safe in Education" guidance and comply with our child protection policies. We will always put the pupil's interests first.
- 11.2 In cases where a step-parent, foster parent or key worker does not have parental responsibility, we may still engage and work with these individuals in relation to a child, given they are likely to be influential and important people in the child's life.
- 11.3 As mentioned above, if we consider a child to be at risk of immediate danger or harm or if we are concerned that there is an attempt at an unauthorised removal or retention of a child, we will contact the police and/or make an immediate referral to social services.
- 11.4 Where referrals to external agencies have been made by us, we will consider the level of information to provide to each parent on a case by case basis, and take appropriate advice on this.
- 11.5 Social workers will not generally be permitted to enter the school premises without the prior agreement of teachers, those with parental responsibility and/or the child.