



St Mary's and St Peter's C of E School

Separated Parents Policy

We believe high standards of care and love are an integral part in the quality of teaching and learning across the whole curriculum. Our Christian vision of 'Life in all its fullness' is at the heart of our school and we believe that all within our community should be able to flourish and achieve their full potential.

Introduction

Research and experience have shown that separated parents can work well together in the best interest of their children and together can play a role in their children's education. However, some parents become estranged and do not work together in the best interest of their children, especially during the initial stages of their separation. This is very often traumatic for any child concerned and unfortunately these personal family problems can have an impact on the children and the schools the children attend.

This policy is an attempt 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.

We will maintain our open door policy with all parents, and the class teacher and/or a senior member of staff will be available by appointment to discuss concerns.

Definition of a 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 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:

- Appeal against admission decisions;
- Ofsted and school based questionnaires;
- Participate in any exclusion procedure;
- Attend parent meetings/school events;
- Have access to school records and receive copies of school reports, newsletters, invitations to school events, school photographs relating to their child and information about school trips.

The school's Governing Body recognises that while the parents of some pupils may be divorced or estranged, they are 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.

Parent Responsibility

The information provided to the school when the child was enrolled detailing parents with 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.

At St Mary's and St Peter's School, we 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 retains the right to consult the Local Authority before taking immediate action. The school is only obliged to comply with an order if it is properly notified and has received a 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 rights superior to the other.

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.

Change in Parent Responsibility

It is the responsibility of the parents to inform school when there is a change in family circumstances. The school needs to be kept up to date with contact details, arrangements for collecting children and emergencies.

We encourage parents to tell us at an early stage if there is a change in family circumstances. This needs to be done in writing (letter or email). Whenever possible, and where deemed appropriate, staff will be informed of such changes so that suitable support can be offered to the child. We will, however, recognise the sensitivity of some situations and maintain the level of confidentiality requested by parents as far as possible.

Newsletters can be sent to all parents via ParentMail. They will contain all the main events within school, including plays, performances, sports days, parent evenings, class trips, etc. It is the responsibility of each parent to update the school with any change of email address should they wish to continue to receive newsletters/communications direct from the school. We would expect parents to communicate with each other regarding these events. In addition, all parents are recommended to regularly use the school's website – it contains back dated newsletters, a live calendar and has a range of information and links.

We will hold one parents' evening appointment per child, where all parents are welcome. We would expect parents to communicate with each other regarding these arrangements. The school will only consider separate appointments if there is a court order in place that restricts parents attending the same appointment.

We expect parents to liaise and communicate directly with each other in matters such as the ordering of school photographs; tickets for performances and other instances. The school will not deal individually with these requests in view of the significantly increased workload that they represent.

We expect parents to resolve financial matters directly with each other and agree matters such as school trips, including residential ones.

Annual Report to Parents

Any parent has the right to receive progress reports of their child. For parents who are separated, school will make a second copy of the report to be sent home with the child if requested.

Disagreements

Disagreements between parents must be resolved between the parents and cannot be resolved by the school or Local Authority. In the event that the parents are unable to agree with one another on decisions regarding their child's educational programme, including but not limited to placement, participation in extracurricular activities and consent to evaluation and services, the school will arrange a meeting with all parents (preferably together or separately if required) to attempt to assist the parents to resolve the situation. If it cannot be resolved the School may refer the matter to the relevant department of the Local Authority.

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:

- A senior member of staff will meet with the parent seeking to remove the child and 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 cannot be reached, the senior member of staff dealing with the issue may make a decision based upon all relevant information available to him/her.
- The senior member of staff 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 circumstances where there is a belief that a possible removal of the child without consent may occur or if the parents are disruptive, the police will be notified immediately.

Review

This policy will be reviewed regularly by the Senior Leadership Team. If there is a change in guidance or legislation, it will be updated sooner.

Safeguarding

St Mary's and St. Peter's school fully recognises its moral and statutory responsibility to safeguard and promote the welfare of all pupils and staff. Our Separated Parents Policy is one of a range of documents which set out the safeguarding responsibilities of the school. We wish to create a safe, welcoming and vigilant environment for children and staff where they feel valued and are respected.

Policy Date: Autumn 2023

Review Date: Autumn 2025