



**Holy Redeemer Catholic  
Primary School**

## **Separated Parents Policy**

Signed by:	
Head Teacher	Christina Hall
Chair of Governors	Alan Smith
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‘Through the Holy Redeemer we seek to grow in faith and love and become great people who make a difference in our world.’

## **Background**

Research and experience have shown that separated parents can become particularly estranged, especially during the initial stages of a relationship breakdown. This can be very traumatic for the children and can have an impact on the schools the children attend. This policy aims to minimise this impact and clarify to all parties what is expected from the parents and what can be expected from the school and its staff.

The Education Act 1996 defines a parent as:

- All natural parents, including those not married
- Any person with parental responsibility but who is not a natural parent e.g. legally appointed guardian or the Local Authority named in a Care Order

“Care” of a child:

Having care of a child or young person means that a person who the child lives with and who looks after the child, irrespective of what their relationship is with the child, is considered to be a parent in education law. This could be shown by: Interaction with the school – attending meetings, making phone calls, being on the School’s record as being involved (in whatever capacity) etc. residence with the child where, for all intents and purposes, the person is part of the family, a man or woman married to a parent of a child.

For example:

- Are they listed on school records?
- Does the school have contact details for them?
- Do they meet with teachers/attend parents’ evenings?
- Have they been involved with the measures designed to improve attendance?
- Do they contact the school on behalf of the child when s/he is ill?
- Do they live with the child?
- How long has the school known of them being connected with the child?
- Does the adult bring/collect the child to/from school?
- Is the adult married to the parent of the child?

It would not be appropriate to assume that someone having a “casual” relationship with the parent of a child necessarily has ‘care of the child’ unless we have cause to believe the person has some involvement with the child’s life – living with the child could be a determining factor as could the other examples outlined above.

It is therefore those adults who are having significant input to a child’s life who can be classified as “parent”, having “parental responsibility” or who have “care of a child”.

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, this includes:

- Attend parent evenings, meetings and other school events
- Have access to school records, reports, newsletters, invitations to school events, school photographs, information about school trips

- Appeal against admission decisions
- Ofsted and school based questionnaires
- Involvement in any exclusion procedure

The Governing Body recognise that while some parents may be estranged, they are entitled to the above and this entitlement cannot be restricted without a court order. The school does not have the power to act on the request of one parent to restrict another.

The information provided to the school when the child was enrolled detailing whether parents have parental responsibility for the child and where the child resides will be presumed correct unless a court order or original birth certificate proving otherwise is provided to the school.

Should an un-named, or previously unknown parent seek information or access to his / her child, the school will inform the main carer and ensure that there is no court order in place preventing this. Proof of identity of the non-resident parent will always be required in these cases.

Our sole 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 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. The school also has no responsibility for enforcing any court order. 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.

The school will maintain an open door policy with all parents and the class teacher and / or Headteacher will be available by appointment to discuss any issues or concerns that separated / divorced / estranged parents may have in relation to their child or children at the school.

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.

Issues of estrangement is a civil/private law matter and the school cannot be involved in providing mediation, helping an estranged parent to communicate with their child or children, or using the school premises for purposes of contact.

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 interests of the child will always be paramount when deciding whether to accommodate a request from an estranged parent. We recognise that a Court Order can restrict a parent in having contact/access to information and we may be bound by this. In

this situation we will consult with the Local Authority to obtain advice as this may constitute a safeguarding concern.

In any event whereby the parents being estranged is appearing to impact upon the health, wellbeing and safety of a child the matter will be referred to the Local Authority for advice.

### **Change in parental 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. Whenever possible, staff will be informed of such changes so that suitable support can be offered. We will, however, recognise the sensitivity of some situations and maintain the level of confidentiality requested by parents as far as possible
- Newsletters & general school updates can be sent to all parents via e-mail. These updates will contain all the main events within school, including productions, sports days, parents' evenings, class trips, etc. Occasionally letters are sent to individual classes. These are paper copies only and not sent via e- mail. We would expect parents to communicate these messages to each other as and when appropriate.
- 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. We appreciate that this may not always be possible and will therefore attempt to offer an additional appointment where feasible. The school will only guarantee separate appointments if there is a court order in place restricting parents attending the same appointment.
- We expect that parents should 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.

### **Progress reports and Pupil records**

Any parent has the right to receive progress reports and review pupil records of their children. If the parents are separated or divorced, progress reports will be sent to the parent and address in the school's records specifying where the child resides with the expectation that he/she will share the report with the other parent. If the child is subject to a joint residence order and the school's records formally capture that the child resides at two addresses, then progress reports will be sent to both addresses.

The school will send copies of the progress reports to a parent with whom the child does not reside only if that parent submits a written request.

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 and if it cannot be resolved 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:-

- The Head Teacher or designated deputy will meet with the parent seeking to remove the child and, in his/her 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 Head Teacher or staff member dealing with the issue may make a decision based upon all relevant information available to him/her.
- The school cannot **prevent** the other parent collecting the child but we will endeavour to reach an agreement and this may mean keeping the child safe whilst the school try and reach such an agreement.
- The school has the right to refuse admission to a parent whose behaviour is extreme, violent or challenging. In such circumstances this should be notified to that parent, who would have to agree alternative arrangements for dropping off and picking up.
- If there is a Court Order restricting contact or it is in contravention of any access agreement, the child will not be released into their care and the other parent will be advised to take the necessary action which does not involve the school.
- The Head Teacher or staff member may have to refuse permission if consent cannot be obtained and may need to take advice before the child can be released.
- 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.

All parents can have equal access to all school information via our parent mail or website system, or alternatively request in writing additional copies of communications which are not available on the school website (all parents are recommended to regularly use the school's website – it contains all back dated newsletters and has a range of information and links). We will maintain our open door policy with all parents, and the class teacher and/or Head Teacher will be available by appointment to discuss any issues.