

Strawberry Fields Primary School



Separated Parents Policy

September 2020

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Introduction and Background to Policy

Schools have a legal duty to work in partnership with families and to involve all those with parental responsibility in their child's education. This obligation on schools continues even when family circumstances change, for example, when relationships between parents break down. It is generally in the best interest of children if parents can work together with one another and the school.

Research and experience have shown that in some cases where parents separate, their relationship can become difficult, especially during the initial stages of a split. This can be traumatic for children and it is possible that it can affect a child's wellbeing and their schooling.

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

Guidance on Parental Responsibility

In order to help us to look after your children whilst they are in our care, we are required to ask you to provide certain information, such as name of parents, address, contact details etc. We are also required to ask who has parental responsibility for your child. This is important because it allows us to be sure who has the right to make decisions about your child's education and medical treatment. However, we are aware that this is a very specific legal term and many of you may be unaware of how it is applied. The information below aims to provide you with an explanation of who has parental responsibility so that you are able to provide us with accurate information.

- 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 if there is a dispute.

Parental responsibility cannot be lost, except by legal adoption, although it does not guarantee contact.

Those with parental responsibility 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:

- to receive information, e.g. pupil reports
- to participate in activities, e.g. vote in elections for parent governors
- to be asked to give consent, e.g. to the child taking part in school trips
- to be informed about meetings involving the child, e.g. parents evenings, a governors' meeting relating to the child's exclusion.
- to have access to school records and receive copies of school reports.

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The Governing Body recognise 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.

Information provided to the school detailing whether parents 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.

At Strawberry Fields Primary School, our sole wish 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 for advice 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. Parents are encouraged to resolve contact issues without involving the school where possible. The interests of the child and our obligations under the law will always be paramount when deciding whether to accommodate a request from an estranged parent.

Change in Circumstances

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 etc. This should be provided in writing/by email.

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 such situations and maintain the appropriate level of professional confidentiality as far as is possible and appropriate. We will always prioritise the best interests of the child and the legal obligations of the school.

Communicating with Parents

If the parents are separated or divorced, all communications will be sent to the parent with whom the child resides (as specified in the school's records), with the expectation that he/she will share these with the other parent.

Newsletters and general school updates can be accessed via the school website (www.strawberryfields.leeds.sch.uk). These updates will contain all the main events within school, including productions, sports days, parents' evenings, etc.

Occasionally, letters requiring a response, such as invitations to parents evening or end-of-term productions, are sent in paper copies only. Pupil progress reports are also sent in paper copy.

The school will send copies of this type of information to a parent with whom the child does not reside only if that parent submits a written request. Please note some pupil information will include the address and contact details of where the child resides. If you do not wish this information to be shared you must notify us of this in writing.

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We will allocate one parents evening appointment per child, and all parents are welcome. We would expect parents to communicate with each other regarding these arrangements. Only if there is sufficient availability of appointments with an individual teacher, once all children have been accommodated, will we offer separate appointments to parents who request this. The school **will** offer separate appointments if there is a court order in place restricting parents attending the same appointment. If we cannot provide separate appointments, we will offer the non-resident parent a telephone consultation.

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. We will provide additional tickets only after all children have received their initial allocation.

Releasing Children to Parents

We will release children to parents in accordance with the arrangements notified to the school. Parents should be aware that unless a court order specifies otherwise, we cannot refuse to release children to anyone with parental responsibility, even if the other parent does not wish this to happen. Should this situation ever occur the procedure detailed below will be followed:

- The Head Teacher or other senior member of staff will meet with the parent seeking to remove the child, whilst another member of staff telephones the parent to whom the child would normally be released and explains 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 verbally.
- 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.
- If the parent to whom the child would normally be released does not agree, the Head Teacher or staff member will ask that the parents discuss the issue immediately either by phone or in person, and come to an agreement.
- 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 or aggressive, the police will be notified immediately.

Disagreements between parents must be resolved between the parents and cannot be resolved by the school. 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, but separately if required) to attempt to assist the parents to resolve the situation. If it cannot be resolved, the matter may be referred to the relevant department of the Local Authority.

As part of the Induction Pack, when children start school, all parents will receive a copy of this policy. It will also be made available on the school's website.

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Parents of children joining the school are asked to bring their child's birth certificate. This ensures children are joining the correct year group and also helps the school ascertain who has parental responsibility.

Separated parents are asked to inform the school and to return a form (*Appendix A*) indicating the legal situation and any particular wishes/requirements they want the school to be aware of.

The welfare of the child is at the heart of all we do and the Headteacher and Governors maintain the right to discontinue any of the above if it is deemed to be significantly against the child's best interests. Court orders may also alter the position the school adopts.

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September 2020

Appendix A

Information to Help us Work Effectively with Separated Parents

At Strawberry Fields Primary School we are committed to working with families and understand the importance of nurturing the relationship between school and both parents.

Please complete the form below and return to the school office, indicating how we can best work with you.

Name of child	
Your name	
Your relationship to child	
Names of all adults with parental responsibility *	
Address at which your child usually resides	
Your contact telephone number(s)	
Your email address	
Address of other parent	
Telephone number(s)	
Email	

* We may ask for documentary proof of this.

If you are a non-resident parent requesting separate copies of key information etc. please circle the best way to send information to you:

Via your child By email By post

Please tick the information you would like to receive:

Timely information about upcoming events	
Invitations to parents evenings	
Copies of mid year and end of year reports	
Invitations to class assemblies	
Invitations to end of term productions	
Order forms for school photographs	

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Are there any court orders in place? If so please detail below and provide copies of these.

Are there any particular situations or circumstances of which we should be aware?

e.g. A request that a child is only released to you, instructions not to divulge your contact details to the other parent or information we need to know about agreed shared residency etc.

Signature of parent completing this form _____

Date _____

Please remember to inform us of any change to the above.

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