

Separated Parents policy

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This policy should be read in conjunction with other school policies including: Admissions, Equality and Diversity, Child Protection and Safeguarding, Whistle Blowing, E-safety, School Vision statement, Values and ethos, Health and Safety, Managing allegations, Attendance.

1. VISION AND VALUES

We aim to work with all our families in an ethos supported by our Christian values of respect, honesty, compassion, love and friendship. We want to work with families in the best interest of the child, after parents separate. At Westwoodside we believe education is a journey between the child, family and school and it is crucial that all parents are kept up-to-date with their children's learning and attainment. We have a legal duty to work in partnership with families and involve all those with parental responsibility in their child's education. This continues when family circumstances change. It is generally in the best interest of children if parents and the school can work together. At all times the school will put the emotional health and the welfare of the child first. At times this may mean working with other external agencies to provide appropriate support.

2. RATIONALE

Research and experience have shown that separated parents can become particularly estranged, especially during the initial stages of the split. This is very often traumatic for any children concerned and unfortunately these personal family problems can have an impact on the school the children attend.

This policy is primarily an attempt to minimise any impact on the welfare and learning of a pupil. It also aims to clarify to all parties what is expected from separated parents and what can be expected from the school and its staff.

3. DEFINITION

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** (please refer to Appendix A) 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 & 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

4. INITIAL REGISTRATION AT SCHOOL

When a child is registered for a nursery place staff will ask to see the child's birth certificate. They will also record the people who have parental responsibility.

If a child joins the school at any other time. Administration staff will ask to see the birth certificate, any court orders pertaining to the child and any further details regarding parental responsibility.

5. COURT ORDERS

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.

The information provided to the school when the child was enrolled 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. Similarly, the information provided on the address(es) where the child resides will be presumed to be correct unless a court order proving otherwise is provided to the school.

At Westwoodside Church of England Academy, we wish 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 academy will consult with their legal advisors and the LA 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 directly. The interests of the child will always be paramount when deciding whether to accommodate a request from an estranged parent. The school will not pass on messages, presents etc. from an estranged parent or grandparent.

Unfortunately, in extreme circumstances outside agencies may be involved in a family breakdown. In these circumstances the school will work fully with other professionals to support the welfare of the children.

6. CHANGES TO 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 especially arrangements for collecting children and for 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

7. COMMUNICATION WITH PARENTS

It is the responsibility of all parents to keep the school updated with their contact telephone number, email address and home address so that communications can be forwarded.

Newsletters & general school updates are sent to all parents via email and the website. Paper copies can be requested but we cannot post these to separated parents because of the additional costs involved. These regular updates contain all the main events within school, including productions, sports days, parent's evenings, class trips, etc. Occasionally letters are sent to individual classes. These are paper copies only as a response is usually required. We would expect parents to communicate these messages to each other as and when appropriate.

We hold one parents evening appointment per child, per term, where all parents are welcome. We would expect parents to communicate with each other regarding these arrangements. The academy will consider a second appointment at another mutually agreeable time if there are difficulties in 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 accept additional orders from separated parents if requested in the appropriate manner e.g. completion of form etc.

8. ANNUAL REPORTS AND PUPIL RECORDS

Any parent has the right to receive annual reports and review pupil records of their children. If the parents are separated or divorced, annual reports will be sent to each parent either via the child or at the address held in the school's records.

9. PARENT GOVERNOR ELECTIONS

All parents with children registered at the school are able to stand for election providing they meet the criteria as set out in the parent –governor election documentation. This information will be circulated to all registered parents

10. REQUEST TO CHANGE A CHILD'S SCHOOL

Any request to change a child's school are made via the admission team at North Lincolnshire (please refer to admissions policy)

11. REQUEST TO CHANGE A CHILD'S SURNAME

Requests made need to have consent from both parents.

12. INVOLVEMENT IN MEETINGS ABOUT YOUR CHILD e.g. SEN, Exclusions

Every effort is made to involve both parents in important meetings about your child no matter what these relate to. Due to time to the additional work load duplicate meetings are not usually held and we would ask both parents to attend together to work in partnership to support their child. If a parent is unable to attend we would be happy for their views to be shared via letter, email or through a telephone conversation with staff. Minutes or other outcomes of such meetings e.g. SEN support plan will always be shared with both sets of parents

13. PROCEDURES FOR RELEASING A CHILD

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 Head Teacher or staff member 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 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.

14. ACCESS TO INFORMATION

All parents can have equal access to all school information via our website, alternatively they can request in writing additional copies of communications which are not available on the website.

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. We hope that by working together with parents we can achieve the best possible outcomes for our pupils.

The Head teacher will review the effectiveness of the procedures within this policy in relation to individual cases. Information will be shared with Governors where there are Safeguarding concerns.

References

Joseph Rowntree Foundation - *Divorce and separation: the outcomes for children* July 1998 <https://www.sortingoutseparation.org.uk/children-parenting/>

APPENDIX A

PARENTAL RESPONSIBILITY – information is taken from .gov.uk

<https://www.gov.uk/parental-rights-responsibilities/who-has-parental-responsibility>

Parental responsibility gives parents the right to make all the important decisions in the child's life, for example which school they attend or religion they follow.

All mothers have parental responsibility unless it has been surrendered through an adoption.

For fathers it is not as straight forward:

If you were **married** at the time of your child's birth, then the father will have parental responsibility.

If you were **unmarried** at the time of the birth then the child's date of birth is important. If your child was born after 1 December 2003 and the father was named on the child's birth certificate, he will have parental responsibility. If your child was born before that date then only the mother will automatically have parental responsibility.

A father can, however, acquire parental responsibility through one of the following:

- subsequently marrying the mother of the child
- applying to the court for a parental responsibility order
- making a parental responsibility agreement (in a set procedure) with the mother
- applying for and getting a residence order
- being appointed the child's guardian (once the appointment takes effect)