

SHEFFORD LOWER SCHOOL

Working with Separated Parents Policy



Rationale:

At Shefford Lower School we recognise that while some parents may be divorced or separated, both have a right to be informed of, and involved in, their child's educational progress.

Parental Responsibility

In order to help us to look after children whilst they are in our care, staff are required at the admissions interview to ask parents to provide certain information, such as name of both parents, address, contact details etc. They are also required to ask who has Parental Responsibility for the child. This is important because it allows the school to be sure who has the right to make decisions about a child's education and medical treatment. However, this is a very specific legal term and many parents may be unaware of how it is applied:

- 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.
- Parental Responsibility cannot be lost, except by legal adoption, although it does not guarantee contact.
- The information provided to school when the pupil was enrolled, detailing whether both parents have parental responsibility, will be presumed to be correct unless a court order or original birth certificate proving otherwise is provided to the school.
- It is the responsibility of parents to inform the school when there is a change in the family's circumstances. We need to be kept up to date with contact details, arrangements for collecting children and emergencies.

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 (N.B Appeals should be made to the Council's School Admissions team who manage admissions for Shefford Lower School);
- Ofsted & school based questionnaires;
- Participation in any exclusion procedure;
- Attendance at parent meetings/school events;
- Access to school records and copies of school reports, newsletters, invitations to school events, school photographs relating to their child and information about school trips.

This entitlement cannot be restricted without a specific court order. The school does not have the power to act simply on the request of one parent to restrict another.

As applies to all parents, a parent can nominate another person to be allowed access to information. This request must be made in writing to the Headteacher and signed by a parent with legal parental responsibility.

The school will not seek to make judgements about individual circumstances but will treat both parents equally unless there is a specific ruling in existence. Staff will never pass judgement on either parent to the child.

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. The school is under no obligation to inform the resident parent of the absent parent contacting the school. Any such information will be given at the discretion of the Head Teacher.

Court Orders

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. Only a Court Order stating the arrangements is deemed to be valid; a letter from a solicitor is not sufficient.

The school may seek legal advice in respect of any aspect of an order that is unclear. In such circumstances the school's decisions and actions will take into account the advice given.

School communications

The school recognises that, while the parents of some pupils may be divorced or separated, both have a right to be informed of, and involved in, their child's education. However, we expect that parents, whatever the nature of their separation, will do all they can to communicate with each other and share information from and for the school, for the benefit of their child. It is assumed that the parent with whom the child principally resides will keep the other parent informed.

The school will communicate in the following ways:

- All diary dates, Newsletters, and Head Teacher's letters are available on our website.
- Class emails will be sent to both parents. Parents are responsible for providing a correct email address. Occasionally paper letters are sent home with pupils and we expect parents to communicate these messages to each other as and when appropriate.
- We would not expect to send emergency text messages to absent parents, which give information on cancelled activities and reminders.
- Any electronic apps: One login will be sent home for each child: we expect parents to communicate this code to each other.
- We will hold parent's consultation evenings twice a year, where both parents are welcome. If separated parents do not feel able to attend together, the school will arrange separate appointments. The school will not inform either parents that the other has made an appointment to meet with the teacher. We expect parents to communicate with each other regarding these arrangements.
- 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.
- In respect of school concerts where tickets are issued, these will be 2 per family regardless of whether parents are separated and the school expects parents to communicate to make arrangements between themselves. If additional tickets are available, separated parents wanting an additional ticket will be prioritised.
- Both parents are entitled to receive progress reports and review their child's pupil records. Progress reports will be sent to the parent with whom the child resides the majority of the time, with the expectation that he/she will share the report with the other parent. The school will email copies of progress reports to the noncustodial parent if a written request is submitted.

- Should an un-named parent seek information or access to his/her child, the school will always inform the main carer of this to check Parental Responsibility and ensure no court order is in place. For the avoidance of doubt, we will seek written confirmation from the main carer. Proof of identity of the non-resident parent will always be required in these cases.
- Whichever parent is responsible for the child on the day of an absence should notify the school of the reason for absence and expected date of return. Parents are expected to communicate with each other about absence and the school will not contact the other parent to inform them of this. However, should a parent contact the school enquiring as to whether their child is in school or absent, the school will provide this information.
- Term time holidays are not authorised unless considered to be exceptional circumstances by the school. Other leave of absence may be considered for family weddings or funerals. The school will respond to the parent making the request and parents are expected to communicate with each other about such absences.

Disagreements between parents must be resolved between the parents and cannot be resolved by the school or local authority.

In order to safeguard all children, the school will take reasonable steps to avoid exposing children to acrimonious relationships between adults whilst in school.

Collecting a child from school

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 usual arrangements and the parent to whom the child would normally be released has not notified the school of any change the following steps will be followed:

- Where a separated parent, who has parental responsibility and no court order in place, wishes to take the child during or at the end of the school day, the resident parent will be contacted in order to ensure that they are in agreement with the arrangement. 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. If the parent opposes the other parent wanting to take the child then the school will advise that without a court order we cannot prevent them from doing so.
- 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.
- 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.

Policy reviewed	February 2019
Next Review	February 2022
Headteacher	Tracey Callender
Chair of Governors	Val Thompson