



WISHFORD SCHOOLS

P17: SEPARATED PARENTS POLICY

This policy applies to all Wishford Schools, including all EYFS settings.

Date of Policy	May 2023
Member of staff responsible	Mr Andrew Webster
Role	Deputy Director of Education & Compliance
Review date	

Last Review	Significant changes

1. Introduction

This is a central policy, overseen and updated by the Wishford support team and circulated to all schools in the group.

Wishford Schools recognise that children from families whose parents are separated (or are undergoing separation) may go through traumatic changes during their time at school. With this in mind, our schools will make every effort to work with parents to promote the welfare of children. This policy has been created 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.

- a. Schools have a legal duty to work in partnership with families and to involve all those with parental responsibility in their child's education. Section 576 of the Education Act 1996 defines a 'parent' as:
 - i. All natural parents, whether they are married or not. This includes same sex parents.
 - ii. Any person who, although not a natural parent, has parental responsibility for a child or young person (e.g. adoptive parents).
 - iii. Any person who, although not a natural parent, has care of a child or young person (a person with whom the child lives and who looks after the child, e.g. grandparents/foster parents).
- b. Parents as defined above must be treated equally, unless there is a court order limiting an individual's exercise of parental responsibility. In the event that the school is either not informed of the existence of such an order or does not have sight of the order (if informed that one exists), neither parent will have rights superior to the other.
- c. Individuals who have parental responsibility, or care for a child, have the right to:
 - i. Receive information (e.g. pupil reports, school events etc.).
 - ii. Participate in activities (e.g. elections of any description).
 - iii. Give consent (e.g. for school trips).
 - iv. Be involved in meetings concerning the child (e.g. parents' evenings, annual SEND reviews, participate in an exclusion procedure, appeal against admission decisions).

2. The school's responsibilities

- a. The school will ask parents or guardians for the names and addresses of all parents when they register a pupil.
- b. It is the duty of the school to ensure that names and addresses of all parents, where known, are included in the admission register and also in pupil records, and are available to the pupil's teachers.
- c. The school will ensure that names and addresses of all parents are forwarded to any school to which the pupil moves.
- d. The school will ensure that details of court orders are noted in the pupil's record.
- e. The Head has responsibility for overseeing these measures and for delegating responsibilities to the relevant staff.

3. Parental responsibilities

- a. Parents are responsible for informing the school when there is a change in family circumstances. We recognise the sensitivity of such situations and we will maintain confidentiality requested by parents as far as possible. The school will also not make judgements about individual circumstances, and both parents will be treated equally.
- b. Where there is a court mandated restraining order in place, a copy needs to be retained by the school, which will put measures in place to ensure the child is not released to named individuals.

- c. Parents who have joint custody of the child are requested to keep the school informed, in writing, of any disputes they have with each other regarding the collection of children.
- d. Children's welfare and safety are paramount. Where there are issues over access to children, the parent with whom the child resides should contact the school immediately.
- e. If separated parents attend school events at the same time, they are expected to behave accordingly and be respectful of each other. The school will always consider offering separate appointments to separated parents.
- f. The school expects parents to communicate with each other regarding these arrangements.
- g. Parents are expected 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.

4. Progress reports and pupil records

- a. Any parent has the right to receive progress reports and review pupil records of their child.
- b. If the parents are separated or divorced, progress reports (if posted) will be sent to the primary residence in the child's records with the expectation that the report will be shared with the other parent.
- c. The school will send copies of the progress reports to a parent with whom the child does not reside if that parent submits a written request. Electronic copies can also be made available.
- d. 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.

5. Disputes amongst parents

- a. Disagreements between parents must be resolved between the parents and cannot be resolved or mediated by the school.
- b. The school will maintain an open-door policy with both parents and the class teacher and the Head will be available to discuss any issues.
- c. It is the school's policy not to have or state an opinion in favour of one or other parent where there is a dispute between parents unless specifically requested or required to do so by a Court. In such circumstances no member of staff other than the Head is authorised to make any such statement and the Directors should be informed prior to any submission being made. This policy shall be disregarded only in cases where a Safeguarding concern requires different action to be taken.
- d. 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 will be notified immediately.

6. Collecting a child from school

- a. The school will allow any parent with parental responsibility to collect their child from school unless ordered not to do so by a Court.
- b. The school requests that separated parents support the school by establishing a 'usual' routine for collection which is communicated in writing to the school office. Any changes to this routine should then be communicated directly to the school office via email.
- c. As in all cases, if a member of staff on duty has any immediate safeguarding concerns about releasing a child, they have a duty and responsibility not to release the child and ask that the person collecting waits in the school office until the most senior leader available can meet with them. In these circumstances, it may be necessary for the child to be kept safely at school until both parents arrive and resolve the situation. N.B. As stated in point a. above, the school will only refuse to release a child to a person with parental responsibility if there is a court order in place or if the member of staff releasing the child has safeguarding concerns.

7. Obtaining consent

- a. If parental consent is required for outings or activities, the school will seek consent from the resident parent, unless the decision is likely to have a long-term and significant impact on the child or the non-resident parent has requested to be asked for consent in all such cases.
- b. In cases where the school considers it necessary to seek consent from both parents, it is possible that one gives consent and the other withholds it. In such cases, the school will assume that parental consent has not been given.

8. Name changes

- a. Parents are responsible for resolving potential conflicts about the change of a surname.
- b. There must be consent from both parents after divorce or separation for registering a change of name of a pupil.
- c. The school will ensure that the change in surname is supported by written evidence.
- d. A separated parent who has parental responsibility, but no longer lives with the child, may refuse to consent to changing the child's surname. In such cases, the parent wishing to change the child's name would need to apply to the courts for permission to do so.
- e. In circumstances where a name change has previously been affected by the school, but is found to still be in dispute, the best interests of the child are to be the key consideration in any decision-making process as to how the child should be addressed.