



# ST ALBAN'S CE (AIDED) PRIMARY SCHOOL

'Inspired to make a difference in God's world with excellence and love'

## SEPARATED PARENTS' POLICY

DOCUMENT INFORMATION			
<b>Reviewed by:</b>	Standards Committee	<b>Review Cycle:</b>	3 yearly
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This policy should not be read in isolation but should be read in conjunction with the school's Data Protection and Freedom of Information policies, as well as the DfE Guidance [Understanding and dealing with issues relating to parental responsibility.](#)

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## 1 Introduction and Context

Research and experience have shown that separated parents can work well together in the best interests of their children and can together play a role in their children's education. However, some parents become estranged, and do not work together or in the best interests of their children, especially during the initial stages of their separation. This is very often traumatic for any children concerned where personal family problems can have an impact on the child and on the schools the children attend.

This policy summarises the legal framework and recommended guidance in respect of separated parents. This policy is an attempt to minimise any impact, clarify to all parties what is expected from separated parents and what can be expected from the school and its staff.

**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 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 or young person i.e. a person with whom the child resides and who looks after the child irrespective of the relationship*

**Who has "Parental Responsibility"?** (The Children Act 1989, amended by the Children and Families Act 2014)

*Having parental responsibility means assuming all the rights, duties, powers, responsibilities and authority that a parent of a child has by law. Parental responsibility can be removed in some circumstances.*

*People other than a child's natural parents can acquire parental responsibility through:*

- *In the case of step-parents, in agreement with the child's mother (and other parent if that person also has parental responsibility for the child) or as a result of a court order*
- *Being granted a Child Arrangements Order;*
- *Being appointed a Guardian;*
- *Being granted a Residence Order;*
- *Being granted a Special Guardianship Order;*
- *Adopting a child.*
- *A parent by virtue of the human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 2008*

If the parents of a child were not married to each other when the child was born, the mother automatically has parental responsibility; however, the father only has parental responsibility from 1st December 2003 and by jointly registering the birth of the child with the mother. He can, however, subsequently acquire parental responsibility by various legal means.

**What does having "care" of a child mean?**

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

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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”. And as a school we will use this guideline when separated parents make contact.

Parents, as defined above, are entitled to share in the decisions that are made about their child and to be treated equally by schools. We aim to collaborate with parents in the best interests and listen to all parties.

All parents can also receive information about the child, even though, for day-to-day purposes, the school’s main contact is likely to be a parent with whom the child lives on school days. There may be occasions when this school needs to decline requests for action from one or more parents.

Individuals who have parental responsibility for, or care of, a child have the same rights as biological parents. For example, to:

- receive information – such as pupil reports
- participate in statutory activities – such as voting in elections for parent governors
- be asked to give consent - such as to the child taking part in school trips
- be informed about meetings involving the child - such as a governors’ meeting on the child’s exclusion

Entitlements also include: -

- Appeal against admission decisions
- Ofsted and school-based questionnaires
- Attend parent meetings/school events

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- Have access to school records, receive copies of school reports, newsletters, invitations to school events, school photographs relating to their child and information about school trips.

The Governing Body recognise that while the parents of some pupils may be separated, 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. If parental responsibility, addresses and contacts are unclear, then we will make reasonable enquiries to ascertain the information.

If a child or young person is under 16 and is living with someone other than a close family relative (e.g. grandparent) then this may be a private fostering arrangement and the local authority will need to be notified. We will notify the local authority if this is found to be the case.

In any event and if at any time it appears that there is not anyone with parental responsibility who is caring for a child, or if it is unclear and we have taken reasonable steps to find out, we will involve the Local Authority to help clarify and resolve.

## **2 Our responsibilities**

We fully recognise our responsibilities, and our sole wish is to promote the best interests of the child, working in partnership with all parents. **Schools do not have the power to act on the request of one parent to restrict the other parent's involvement. Schools can only do so if there is a specific legal basis such as a court order, which is very rare.**

We will maintain our open-door policy with all parents, and staff will be available by appointment to discuss any issues or concerns separated/divorce estranged parents may have in relation to their child or children at the school. We will not discuss or disclose personal data relating to other adults with parental responsibility, or who can be classified as 'parent' or having 'care of the child' according to the definitions in section 1 above, unless permission has been granted by them. (E.g. this would include not divulging address details of separated or estranged parents).

Parents will be encouraged to resolve any issues around estrangement, contact and access to information without involving the school directly. Issues of estrangement are a civil/private law matter, and our 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.

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If 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, this school will not arbitrate and will ask parents to resolve the issues between themselves and to revert to the school with the solution.

In cases where there is continued conflict and this cannot be resolved, we will advise the aggrieved parent to pursue the matter through the Family Court.

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 Children's Services.

### **3 Our Policy**

It is the responsibility of the parents to inform the 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 reasonably and practically possible

Newsletters and general school updates can be sent to all parents via Parent Mail. (It is the responsibility of separated or estranged parents to provide contact details to the school if they wish to receive these communications). These updates will contain all the main events within school, such as class worships, concerts, sports days, parents' evenings, class trips.

Occasionally paper letters are sent home with the child via books bags (e.g. school photo order forms, Home School Association events, Data Collection Sheets for checking). We would expect parents to communicate these messages to each other, as and when appropriate.

We will hold Parent Consultations twice a year. We would expect parents to communicate with each other regarding these arrangements. The school will consider separate appointments, but by prior agreement only or when a court order is in place restricting contacts with both parents.

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.

A parent as defined in education law has the right to receive progress reports and review pupil records of their children. It is the responsibility of separated or estranged parents to provide contact details to the school if they wish to receive a copy of their child's school report. The second copy of a child's report, will be emailed, rather than physically printed.

Some information is communicated in person by staff, for example at the beginning or end of the day to the parent or, where appropriate, to the adult that the parent has entrusted to collect or drop off their child. Staff may at times also telephone the parent with whom the child normally resides when necessary. The primary purpose of this level of communication is to ensure that school staff can educate and support the development of children in their care on a day-to-day basis. The school does not have the resources or capacity to duplicate these informal communications with separated or estranged parents. We expect parents, or those entrusted to collect and drop off children on their behalf, to communicate these conversations to each other as and when appropriate.

#### In the matter of the release of a child or children:

We will follow the standard agreed procedure in the release of a child or children. In the case of separated parents our school will release a child or children to a parent in accordance with any specific arrangements or a Court Order 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 school will contact 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 verbally.
- In the event that the parent to whom the child would normally be released to cannot be reached, the Headteacher or staff member dealing with the issue may make a decision based upon all relevant information available to him/her. The Headteacher or staff member may have to refuse permission if agreement/consent cannot be obtained and may need to take advice before a child or children are collected/released.
- The school cannot **prevent** the other parent collecting the child or children, but we will endeavour to reach an agreement, and this may mean keeping the child or children safe whilst we try and reach such an agreement.

- If there is a Court Order restricting contact or it is in contravention of any access agreement, the child or children will not be released into their care and the other parent advised to take the necessary action which does not involve the school. If it is deemed necessary by the school to protect the child or children's health and welfare, the school shall immediately contact the police and Local Authority Children's Services where relevant. **It is the responsibility of the parent with whom the child resides to ensure that a copy of any relevant Court Order restricting contact or relevant access agreement is provided to the school.**
- During any discussion or communication with parents, the child or children may be supervised by an appropriate member of school staff in a separate room to avoid causing any upset to the child or children.
- In 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, and the Local Authority notified.

#### **4 Support**

We will try and assist parents where possible by signposting them to relevant national and local support groups, and where they can seek independent advice.