Twin Oaks Primary School

Separated Parents' policy

The school where everyone is valued and all succeed.

Governing Body with Responsibility	Quality of Education committee
Agreed by Governors on	July 2025
Chair's Signature	Maame Attuah
Staff Member Responsible for Review	Headteacher
Date for Review	July 2027

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 Twin Oaks Primary School's policy 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 / 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 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:

- *A step-parent under the terms of a parental responsibility agreement or court order;*
- *Being granted a Residence Order;*
- *Being appointed a Guardian;*
- *Being named in an Emergency Protection Order (although parental responsibility in a such a case is limited to taking reasonable steps to safeguard or promote the child's welfare);*
- *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 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".

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 of their child/ren 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, 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 or proof from the Department for Work and Pensions (Child benefit letter etc) proving otherwise is provided to the school.
If a child or young person and is under 16 and is living with someone other than a close family relative eg- 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 and we have a separate policy on private fostering which we will also refer to in this situation (this forms part of our comprehensive Safeguarding policy).

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 young person who attends the school, or if it is unclear, we will involve the Local Authority to help clarify and resolve. This may mean the provision of support and services for that adult/s in the care of that child or young person.

Our responsibilities
We fully recognise our responsibilities, and it is our sole wish is to promote the best interests of the child, working in partnership with all parents.

We will maintain our open door policy with all parents, and the class teacher and/or senior leaders including the Headteacher will be available by appointment to discuss any issues or concerns with regard to separated/divorce estranged parents may have in relation to their child or children at the school.

Parents will be encouraged to resolve any issues around estrangement, contact and access to information without involving our school directly.

Issues of estrangement is 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.

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 or separately if required) to attempt to assist the parents to resolve the situation; if it cannot be resolved the school may refer the matter to the relevant department of the Local Authority.

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 will be bound by this. In this situation we will consult with the Local Authority to obtain advice as this may constitute a safeguarding concern.
Should there be any disagreement then the school may advise the separated parent to use the Complaints process (please see the relevant Complaints policy).

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 for advice.

Our Policy
It is the responsibility of the parents to inform the school when there is a change in family circumstances. Our 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 possible. The Headteacher or relevant senior leader in their absence will decide whether this confidentiality can be maintained, especially where the knowledge will prevent the child from any unnecessary distress.

Newsletters & general school updates will be sent to all parents via email, text and via the children. Wherever possible general whole school communications can be downloaded from our website. These updates will contain all the main events within school, including; productions, sports days, parents' evenings, class trips, etc.

Occasionally letters are sent to individual classes. We would expect parents to communicate these messages to each other as and when appropriate.

Key dates of events in school and newsletters can be found on the school website, class specific information such as PE days and special assemblies can be found on the class webpage.

We will hold parent consultations termly and will send a letter home for parents to book a time to see their child's teacher. We would expect parents to communicate with each other regarding these arrangements.

The school will consider separate appointments but by prior agreements only or when a court order is in place restricting contact with both parents. Where separate appointments are required we ask that parents liaise with the class teacher to ensure that this is possible

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 this policy has the right to receive progress reports and review pupil records of their children. If the parents are separated or divorced, progress reports will be sent to the parent at the address in the school's records specifying where the child resides with the expectation that he/she will share the report with the other parent.

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.

The school will send copies of the progress reports to a parent with whom the child does not reside only if that parent submits a written request. This will then be placed on file so that the lines of communication can remain open with both parents.

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 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 Headteacher, a member of the senior leadership team or the Designated Safeguarding Lead will meet with the parent seeking to collect/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 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 will be advised to take the necessary action which does not involve the school.

- During any discussion or communication with parents, the child or children will be supervised by an appropriate member of school staff in a separate room.

- In 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 should be called immediately and the Local Authority notified.

Management of the Policy

The Headteacher/ Designated Safeguarding Lead(s) will familiarise themselves with this policy and ensure all Staff, Governors and Volunteers are aware of the procedures to follow should the need occur.

The policy will be made available to parents and published on our school website.