



Thistly Meadow Primary School SEPARATED PARENTS POLICY

THISTLY MEADOW PRIMARY SCHOOL

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At Thistly Meadow Primary School we recognise that when parents separate it can be a difficult situation for all concerned. We understand that emotions may run high and this policy sets out how we will support the all parties within school.

Our staff will work with parents to support the child's emotional wellbeing and report any significant changes in behaviour to the parent. Parents will be signposted to relevant services and organisation for support for the whole family.

Parental responsibility

While the law does not define in detail what parental responsibility is, the following list sets out some of the key features of someone holding parental responsibility. These include:

- Providing a home for the child
- Having contact with and living with the child
- Protecting and maintaining the child
- Disciplining the child
- Choosing and providing for the child's education
- Determining the religion of the child
- Agreeing to the child's medical treatment
- Naming the child and agreeing to any change of the child's name
- Accompanying the child outside the UK and agreeing to the child's emigration, should the issue arise
- Being responsible for the child's property
- Appointing a guardian for the child, if necessary
- Allowing confidential information about the child to be disclosed

Who has parental responsibility?

If the parents of a child are married to each other at the time of the child's birth, or if they have jointly adopted a child, then they both have parental responsibility. Parents do not lose parental responsibility if they divorce, and this applies to both the resident (the parent the child lives with) and the non-resident parent.

This is not automatically the case for unmarried parents. According to current law, a mother always has parental responsibility for her child. However, a father has this responsibility only if he is married to the mother when the child is born or has acquired legal responsibility for his child through one of these three routes:

- By jointly registering the birth of the child with the mother (From 1 December 2003)
- By a parental responsibility agreement with the mother

- By a parental responsibility order, made by a court

Registration

During the registration process when a child joins the school, we will collect details about both parents including who has parental responsibility. We request these details on the child registration form. If a parent does not have parental responsibility, or has a court order in place to prevent this, we must have a copy of this documentation for the child's records. If a child is registered by one parent of a separated family, we request disclosure of all relevant details relating to the child and other parent such as court orders or injunctions. This will make sure we can support the child and family fully.

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
- 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.

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.

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.

- Parents are invited to use the school's e-communication system and App, Parentmail, when their child joins the school.
- Occasionally paper letters are sent home with pupils and we expect parents to communicate these to each other.
- We will hold parents' evenings throughout the year and we expect parents to communicate with each other regarding these arrangements and attend together. Unfortunately the school is unable to offer individual appointments as the school does not have the capacity to support this at the present time.
- 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.
- Both parents are entitled to receive progress reports and review their child's pupil records. Reports will be sent to the parent with whom the child resides with the expectation that he/she will share the report with the other parent. The school will email copies of progress reports to the non-resident 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 resident parent 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 resident parent. Proof of identity of the non-resident parent will always be required in these cases.

Collecting a child from school

The school will release children to parents and contacts in accordance with arrangements notified to the school on the Pick Up form and the Registration form. 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 will be notified immediately.

Welfare

As a school our priority is the welfare and safety of the child. We will ensure all matters known by staff pertaining to the family and the parent's separation remain confidential and no member of staff takes sides regarding the separation and treats both parents equally and with due respect.

We will not restrict access to any parent with parental responsibility unless a formal court order is in place. We respectfully ask that parents do not put us in this position.

To support us, we ask parents to:

- Provide us with all information relating to parental responsibilities, court orders and injunctions
- Update information that changes any of the above as soon as practicably possible
- Work with us to ensure continuity of care and support for your child
- Not involve staff in any family disputes
- Talk to our staff away from the child when this relates to family separation in order to avoid the child becoming upset
- Not ask the school to take sides in any dispute
- Disagreements between parents must be resolved between the parents and cannot be resolved by the school. Where parents give different instructions regarding a child, we will consider that no instruction has been given.

This policy has been compiled following guidance from the Dfe *Understanding and dealing with issues relating to parental responsibility*.

Version	Date	Comment
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