



# **Fowlmere Primary School**

## **Separated Parents Policy**

At Fowlmere Primary School, we are committed to maintaining effective communication with all parents and carers in the best interests of our pupils. We recognise the importance of engaging with all individuals who hold parental responsibility and we aim to support all families, including those where parents are separated.

The school will make every effort to collect accurate and up-to-date information about all individuals with parental responsibility, either through the admissions process or directly from the resident parent. We also welcome direct communication from non-resident parents who wish to provide their contact details and stay involved in their child's education.

This policy is intended to:

- Ensure that all parents with legal rights are appropriately informed and involved;
- Minimise potential misunderstandings or conflicts;
- Clarify the school's role and expectations regarding communication with separated parents.

Our priority is always the wellbeing and educational progress of the child, and we aim to work in partnership with all those who share responsibility for their care.

## **1. Definition of "Parent"**

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;
- Appointed guardian acting in loco parentis or the Local Authority named in a Care Order; and
- 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.

Parents, as defined above, are entitled to share in the decisions about their child's education and to be treated equally by schools. In particular, these entitlements include:

- Attending parent meetings/school events;
- Having access to school records and receiving copies of school reports and newsletters;
- Invitations to school events, school photographs relating to their child and information about school trips;
- Ofsted and school-based questionnaires; and
- Participation in any exclusion procedure.

The Governing Body recognises that while the parents of some pupils may be separated, divorced or estranged, they are still entitled to the above and this entitlement cannot be restricted without a court order, such as a Child Arrangement Order.

## **2. Parental Responsibility**

Parental responsibility means the rights, duties, powers, responsibilities and authority that a parent has for their child. In addition to a child's natural parents, it can be acquired by court order, being appointed a guardian, adopting a child or a formal agreement.

The information provided to the school when the child was enrolled detailing who has 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 regarding the address(es) where the child lives will be presumed to be correct unless the school is provided with a copy of a court order setting out arrangements for where the child should live.

#### **4. Court Orders**

At Fowlmere Primary School, our sole wish is to promote the best interests of the child, working in partnership with all parents. If there is a court order in place, the School will always act in ways to ensure as best it can, that no court order is breached. The school can only be expected to comply with an order if it is properly notified and has received a digital or paper 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, the parents will be treated equally by the school.

#### **5. Disputes and Disagreements**

The school hopes that parents and all those with parental responsibility will support the school in working together for the benefit of their children.

If parents are unable to agree with one another on decisions regarding their child's education (that directly link to the school) the school may arrange a meeting with all parents (preferably together, but separately if required) to support the parents in resolving the issue in dispute only.

Parents should seek to resolve contact issues without involving the school.

The school will not mediate, "take sides" or act as an intermediary between parents who do not communicate with each other.

In exceptional circumstances, where a dispute is not resolved and the school need a decision (eg can the child attend a trip) the school will seek advice from the family court (if involved) or the Local Authority Safeguarding team.

#### **6. Changes in Family Circumstances**

We ask parents to inform the school office whenever something outside school – such as a change in family circumstances – occurs so that we can sensitively support the child in school. We expect parents to update the school office whenever emergency contact details change for one or both parents and/or there is a new arrangement for collecting children at the end of the school day.

We recognise the sensitivity of some situations and all staff are aware of the need for discretion and confidentiality. School staff will be informed on a strict need to know basis so that suitable support can be offered.

## **7. Change of Surname**

Parents are responsible for resolving potential conflicts about the change of a surname. There must be consent from both parents after divorce or separation for registering change of name of a pupil.

The school will ensure that the change in surname is supported by written evidence.

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.

In circumstances where a name change has already been effected by the school and it is in the interest of the child, who might be known by a new name, to refer back to a different name, the school will make a decision holding the best interests of the child under paramount consideration.

## **8. The Release of Child(ren)**

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 notified arrangements, and the parent to whom the child would normally be released has not consented, the following steps will be followed:

- The Headteacher or designated deputy will meet with the parent seeking to remove the child and then 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 orally.
- In the event that the parent to whom the child would normally be released cannot be reached, the Headteacher or designated deputy dealing with the issue may make a decision based upon all relevant information available to her/him.
- The Headteacher or designated deputy may have to refuse permission if consent cannot be obtained.
- During any discussion or communication with parents, the child may 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.

## **9. Access to School Information**

Key school information is available on the Fowlmere Primary School website (all parents are invited to make regular use of the school's website as it contains all backdated newsletters and has a range of information and links). Parents may also receive information via email, Dojo or in writing.

For parents who do not have access to the internet, paper copies of communications may be requested from the school office.

## **10. Communication Between School and Separated Parents**

Newsletters and general school updates are sent via email to all parents for whom we have up-to-date contact details. These updates contain all the main class/school events, including productions, sports days, parents' evenings and class trips.

The school office is able to deal with separate requests for school photographs and tickets for performances made by separated, divorced or estranged parents who have parental responsibility. However, the school expects parents to communicate directly on these matters where they can.

Where online systems do not support the use of two separate emails for parents (e.g. parent consultation booking system), the school will manually ensure that both parents are communicated with and treated equally.

The school will try to comply with requests, however in certain circumstances it will not always be possible, for example when a court order preventing contact with the child or each other is in place.

In all circumstances, we aim to maintain our open-door policy with all parents. Class teachers and/or a member of the Senior Leadership Team will be available by appointment to discuss any issues.

## **11. Consent**

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.

## **12. Parents' Consultations Appointments**

We hope that separated, divorced or estranged parents will consent to attending parent consultations together. In exceptional circumstances we will endeavour to provide separate appointments for those who have parental responsibility.

## **13. Written Pupil Reports**

Any person who is known to the school to have parental responsibility for a child has the right to receive written progress reports for their child(ren). These will be provided to separated, divorced or estranged parents who have parental responsibility and for whom the school has up-to-date contact

## **14. Policy Review**

This policy will be reviewed in line with the school's policy review schedule.