



Policy for dispute between parents – January 2020

Rationale

Relationships between separating carers can become particularly estranged, especially during the initial stages of the separation. This can be traumatic for any children involved. Personal family problems will often impact on the schools these children attend. This policy is an attempt to minimise this impact and clarify for all parties what is expected from separated parents and what can be expected from Bright Futures School and its staff.

Roles and Responsibilities

School managers

School managers recognise that although the parents of some pupils may be divorced or estranged, both have a right to be informed of and involved in their child's educational process. The information provided to the school when their child was enrolled identifying 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.

At Bright Futures School we wish to promote the best interests of the child, working in partnership with both parents. In our dealings with parents under arrangements that provide equal access by both parents neither parent will have rights superior to the other except if the school is informed otherwise through a court order.

Parents

It is the responsibility of parents to inform school when there is a change in the families' circumstances. We need to be kept up to date with contact details, arrangements for collecting children and emergencies.

If one parent seeks to remove the child from school, and the parent with whom the child ordinarily resides has not consented the following steps will be followed:

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- A member of the management team or designated deputy will meet with the parent seeking to remove the child and, in his/her presence, telephone the parent with whom the child ordinarily resides and explain the request. If the parent with whom the child ordinarily resides agrees, the child will be released and the records will reflect that the permission was granted orally.
- In the event that the parent with whom the child ordinarily resides, cannot be reached, the management team member or staff member dealing with the issue may make a decision based upon all relevant information available to him/her.
- The management team member or staff member may refuse permission if consent cannot be obtained.

In extreme circumstances, if there is reason to believe that a possible abduction of the child may occur or if the parent is disruptive, the police will be notified immediately.

The school – communications with parents

A copy of the termly newsletter, containing information about school events, is sent to all parents via email. Termly newsletters can also be viewed on the school website.

A home-school communication book is completed by school staff each day and carried home to the parent with whom the child resides each evening by the school pupil. Occasionally letters are enclosed giving information about a forthcoming event and occasionally seeking parental approval for their child's participation in a school activity or outing. We expect parents to communicate the content of these letters and any matters in the communication book to each other as and when appropriate.

Where parental consent is required, this would only be requested from the parent with whom the child resides. If the parent with whom the child normally resides is away, a written note from this parent giving permission for the absent parent to consent must be provided to the school.

Meetings in school

If we need to meet with parents regarding their child, both parents are welcome. We expect parents to communicate with each other regarding arrangements for meetings. Wherever possible it is preferable that both parents attend the same meeting at the same time, however, we do recognise that there may be circumstances where this may not be possible and alternative arrangements may need to be made. The same arrangements will also be made if necessary, for Annual Review meetings.

Progress reports and pupil records

Both parents have the right to receive progress reports and review the pupil records of their children. If the parents are separated or divorced, progress reports will be sent to the parent with whom the child normally resides, with the expectation that he/she will share the report with the absent parent.

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The school will only send copies of the progress reports to the non-custodial parent if that parent asks in person (with proof of identity) or submits a verbal (telephone) and written request.

When there is a dispute concerning issues other than those relating to the child's educational programme, if both parents have parental responsibility, the school will usually respect the wishes of the parent with whom the child resides, recognising that the law allocates more responsibility to the residential parent for the day to day running of a child's life.

School will act in accordance with any court orders that may be issued, for example, an order prescribing who should have residence (or regulating decisions about the child), or an order for only limited contact by one or other of the parents.

Parental conflict

For children whose parents are separating, school can often be the only normality. It is important that disputes and conflict between parents do not enter into school life. The school is here to educate children and to provide a safe environment for them in which to learn. The school cannot be drawn into parental disputes.

We wish to be as helpful as possible when families are facing difficult circumstances however: **it is the school policy to remain neutral** in order to best protect the interests of the child.

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 assessment and services, the school will arrange a meeting with both parents (either together or separately) to attempt to resolve the situation. If it cannot be resolved the school may consider referral to relevant support services or may ask the parents to seek to resolve the issues through mediation or court proceedings. It is **NOT** the school's role to adjudicate on parental disagreements. Where necessary the school will make a decision in the best interests of the child. This may involve consulting with the child's social worker or with the duty social worker if the child's social worker is unavailable to ensure that the child's best interests are protected and safeguarded. **The school will not become involved in parental conflict issues.**

The child's legal name on the register will remain the same unless there is a court order or a deed poll (signed by all with parental responsibility). Where there is a dispute over changing a child's name all those with parental responsibility must agree and complete a deed poll or the school can be provided with the court order.

It is vitally important that both parents remain involved in their children's learning and to this end we will maintain our open door policy with both parents. The management team will be available to discuss any issues by phone or meeting.

Information requested by either parent in support of a legal case against the other parent

It is our policy to remain neutral and not to become involved in any conflict issues. We will provide factual information such as school reports or records of meetings to either parent but requests by one parent for information about the other parent's: parental behaviour; the impact of parental

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behaviour on the child; the presentation of the child in the company of one parent; parenting competence etc. will not be met. The school is happy to make written statements on such matters when requested by a neutral body such as CAFCASS or a child's social worker.

Requests for copies of or information about personal correspondence (e.g. an email or letter) between one parent and the school by the other parent will not be granted unless there is a court order requiring such information to be divulged.

The school will not comment upon or provide any observations either verbally or in writing about either parent in terms of character, conduct or any other matter unless required to do so by a court order.

On any other matters, we reserve our right to make decisions based on our assessment of the best interests of the child.