



**MARK**  
Education  
Trust

# **SEPARATED PARENTS POLICY**

**June 2025**

Written By:	Behaviour, Safeguarding and Welfare Manager (DDSL)
Governing Board Responsible	QES Committee
Approved By and Date:	June 2025
Date of Next Monitoring & Review	June 2026
SLT Responsible for Monitoring & Review	Beacon Academy DSL & Uplands Academy DSL

## **Contents:**

Statement of intent

1. Legal framework
2. Definitions
3. Roles and responsibilities
4. Progress reports and student records
5. Parent disputes
6. Collecting a child from school
7. Obtaining consent
8. Name changes
9. Changes to records
10. Safeguarding
11. Information sharing
12. Students moving school
13. Governance and administration
14. Monitoring and review

## Statement of intent

MARK Education Trust recognises that students from families whose parents are separated, or are undergoing separation, may experience unique challenges during their time at school that can affect their welfare and attainment. With this in mind, we make every effort to work with separated parents to promote the welfare of their child.

This policy has been created to help minimise the educational impact on an affected student due to a family separation. We also aim to clarify to all involved parties what is expected from them and what can be expected from the school and its staff.

### 1. Legal framework

This policy has due regard to all relevant legislation and guidance including, but not limited to, the following:

- Education Act 1996
- Data Protection Act 2018
- UK General Data Protection Regulation
- DfE (2024) 'Keeping children safe in education 2024'
- DfE (2023) 'Understanding and dealing with issues relating to parental responsibility'
- Children Act 1989
- The Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014
- Freedom of Information Act 2000

This policy operates in conjunction with the following school policies:

- Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy
- Data Protection Policy
- Parent Code of Conduct
- Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Policy

### 2. Definitions

Schools have a legal duty to work in partnership with families and to involve all those with parental responsibility in their child's education.

Parents may be recognised differently under education law and family law. Section 576 of the Education Act 1996 defines a **"parent"** as:

- All biological parents, whether they are married or not
- Any person who, although not a biological parent, has parental responsibility for a child or young person – this could be an adoptive parent, a step-parent, a guardian or other relative
- Any person who, although not a biological parent and has no parental responsibility, has care of a child or young person

Parents as defined above will be treated equally, unless there is a court order limiting an individual's exercise of parental responsibility. 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.

Family law defines **"parental responsibility"** as the rights, duties, powers, responsibilities and authority that a parent has in relation to a child.

Individuals who have parental responsibility, or care for a child, have the same rights as birth parents.

This includes the right to:

- Receive information relating to their child's education, e.g. student reports
- Participate in activities, e.g. elections for parent governors
- Give consent, e.g. for school trips
- Be involved in meetings concerning the child, e.g. participate in an exclusion procedure

Any disputes regarding whether a person is a student's parent, within the meaning of section 576 of the Education Act 1996, will be decided by the courts.

Non-biological parents can acquire parental responsibility through:

- Adopting a child
- Being appointed a guardian
- Being named in an emergency protection order
- Being granted a child arrangements order stating the child should live with them
- The agreement of a child's mother (and other parent if that person also has parental responsibility)
- A court order

A LA has parental responsibility if it is named in a child's care order. Civil partners have parallel rights to married couples.

Under section 8 of the Children Act 1989:

- A prohibited steps order imposes a restriction whereby no steps which a parent could take within their parental responsibility may be taken without the court's consent
- A specific issue order gives directions for determining a specific question in connection with an aspect of parental responsibility
- A child arrangements order sets out living arrangements and arrangements for whom a child is to spend time or have contact with
- A care order is where the LA limits the role that parents can play in their child's life and schooling
- Terminating parental responsibility means the court can make an order under section 4(3) of the Children Act 1989 to terminate parental responsibility

For the purpose of this policy, a **"resident parent"** is defined as the parent with whom the student primarily lives, if a joint residency arrangement is not in place. A **"non-resident parent"** is a parent with whom the child does not primarily live.

### **3. Roles and responsibilities**

The headteacher is responsible for:

- Asking for the names and addresses of all parents when they register a student
- Ensuring that names and addresses of all parents, where known, are included in the admission register and also in the student's records, and are available to the student's teachers
- Ensuring that names and addresses of all parents are forwarded to any school to which the student moves
- Ensuring that details of court orders are noted in the student's record
- Ensuring at least one emergency contact per student is obtained – where possible, two or more will be obtained
- Where the address of a non-resident parent is unknown, telling the resident parent that the non-resident parent is entitled to be involved in their child's education and request that information is passed on to them
- Ensuring staff are given appropriate advice and support to respond to parental disputes

Parents are responsible for:

- Providing their child's birth certificate upon admitting their child to the school
- Informing the school when there is a change in family circumstances. The school recognises the sensitivity of these situations and will maintain all confidentiality requested by parents as far as possible. The school will also not make judgements about individual circumstances, and both parents will be treated equally
- Where there is a court-mandated restraining order in place, providing the school with a copy, which will put measures in place to ensure the student is not released to named individuals
- Where parents have shared care of their child (also known as joint custody), informing the school of the details of any disputes they have regarding the collecting of their child from school, in writing
- Attending parents' evening appointments for their child – the school expects parents to communicate with each other regarding the arrangements of appointments for parents' evenings and be able to attend together if they both wish to attend; alternatively passing on information gathered to the other parent
- Liaising and communicating directly with each other in matters such as the ordering of school photographs, tickets for performances and other instances. The school will not deal individually with these requests in view of the significantly increased workload that they represent
- Signing leave of absence request forms and, where only one parent has signed, supplying a letter of written consent from the other parent
- Contacting the school immediately where issues to the access of their child arise
- Ensuring that the School has up-to-date contact details and that any changes in circumstances (such as new court orders) are communicated promptly
- Communicating respectfully with School staff and each other to avoid placing their child in the middle of parental conflicts

The DSL is responsible for:

- Ensuring students are safe and happy at school
- Making decisions regarding sharing information with parents about safeguarding concerns
- Referring a student to the relevant support services, where required

For further Information, please refer to the Behaviour Policy on the school website.

#### **4. Progress reports and student records**

Progress reports will be proactively offered to all parents with parental responsibility, including non-resident parents, unless a court order restricts such communication.

The school is responsible for the data it holds and will therefore process requests for student information in line with the Data Protection Act 2018 and the Freedom of Information Act 2010. Where a court order is in place that expressly states a parent is not entitled to their child's student information, the school will uphold the court's instruction

If the student's parents are separated or divorced, progress reports will be sent to the parent and address noted in the school's records specifying where the child resides, with the expectation that the parent will share the report with the other parent.

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, and their identity has been verified.

#### **5. Parent disputes**

Schools within the trust will expect all parents to understand and adhere to the Parent Code of Conduct. If the behaviour or language of a parent, or someone with PR, is deemed to be a risk to students or staff, their access to the school site may be restricted and they will be informed of this in writing.

Disagreements between parents will be resolved between the parents and will not be resolved by the school. The school will ensure that it focusses on the welfare and education of the student at all times.

The school will ensure all parents are treated equally unless there is a court order in place limiting a parent's ability to make educational decisions, participate in school life or receive information about their child. Where one parent makes a claim that a court order against another parent is in place, the school will ask for evidence of the court order and ensure that the order is valid.

The school will seek advice from the relevant authorities and/or governing board if there are any safeguarding concerns.

In the event that a parent's action or proposed action contravenes the school's ability to act in their child's best interests, the school will make efforts to resolve the problem with the parent but will avoid becoming involved in any conflict.

The school will be mindful that making child arrangements via the family courts following a separation can be stressful, and entrench conflict in families which can have a negative impact on a student. The school will not become directly involved in such issues; however, it will approach the situation sensitively and point parents towards the government's ['Get help with child arrangements'](#) guide.

The school will not give evidence for one side or the other in a residence hearing, and if this is requested, the school may seek legal advice.

#### **6. Collecting a child from school**

Parents will contact the school where there are any changes to who may collect their child from school.

When known, the school will not permit the child to be collected by a parent for whom a non-contact order is in place. Where a child arrangements order is in place, the school will be vigilant for breaches of this order in terms of parents collecting their child, e.g. if a parent collects their child on a day they have not been allocated.

If one parent does not want the other to collect their child from school, unless there is a court order in place stating restrictions, and no safeguarding issues, the school could not prevent a child going home with one or the other parent

The headteacher will use their discretion on the decision to allow a child to leave the premises with a non-resident parent.

## **7. Obtaining consent**

### **School trips and activities**

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.

The school will make reasonable efforts to inform all parents, but one parent's consent will be sufficient unless a court order dictates otherwise. If the trip falls outside of the UK, BOTH parents' consent is required, again, unless a court order dictates otherwise. However, if there is a child arrangement order, it can be the case that the trip falls during the time with the live-in parent and that only their consent is given.

In cases where the school considers it necessary to seek consent from both parents, it is possible that one gives consent and the other withholds it. In such cases, the school will assume that parental consent has not been given.

If a dispute arises between parents regarding consent, the School will follow its safeguarding responsibilities and may seek legal guidance if necessary.

### **Medical treatment**

Where the school requires urgent consent because a child needs emergency medical treatment, the Children Act 1989 allows the school to act in place of a parent (in loco parentis) or to seek consent from a parent that does not have parental responsibility.

While the NHS is responsible for obtaining consent for vaccinations, the school will ensure that both parents with parental responsibility are informed of the vaccination schedule. If one parent objects, the school will seek further guidance in line with safeguarding procedures.

The school will inform all parents of the vaccination schedule.

While the NHS is responsible for obtaining consent for vaccinations, the school will ensure that both parents with parental responsibility are informed of the vaccination schedule. If one parent objects, the school will seek further guidance in line with safeguarding procedures.

### **SEND provision**

The school will ensure it focusses on the best interests of the student. In line with the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Policy, the school will ensure it identifies and addresses any SEND needs.

The school will assert that it **does not** need parental consent to provide SEND provision to a student. The school will inform the student's parents that such a decision has been made.

The school will seek parental consent where it feels that a student needs to attend an external agency or service to support their SEND. In this case, consent from the student's primary caregiver will be sought, unless explicitly stated otherwise.

Where there is a dispute between the student's parents about the provision of SEND support, the school will consider the wider implications of the dispute, the student's welfare, and whether there is a potential safeguarding issue present, e.g. the student is being used as a tool for control.

## **8. Name changes**

The school will act in the best interests of the child first and foremost.

Parents are responsible for resolving potential conflicts about the change of a name.

The school will only act to change a student's name on its records once consent from both parents has been received and 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 affected 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.

Informal use of a different name may be accommodated where appropriate, but the school must ensure this does not conflict with official records or cause confusion. All such cases will be reviewed carefully.

## **9. Changes to records**

The school will not remove a parent's details from the school records unless a court order is in place to this effect.

Where a court order to this effect is in place, the school will ensure it seeks evidence of this. In an emergency situation, the school may accept written confirmation from a solicitor as evidence.

Details of all known parents will be retained unless a court order instructs otherwise.

## **10. Safeguarding**

The school will always have regard to the statutory guidance 'Keeping children safe in education' and enact its safeguarding procedures in line with its Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy. The school will always put the best interests of the student first.

**"Child abduction"** is the unauthorised removal or retention of a child and can be considered as such even if the child is removed or retained by somebody with parental responsibility. The school will ensure it acts accordingly in the event that a student is considered to be abducted by a parent, including calling the police.

While parental responsibility is not given to a foster parent or key worker in residential care, the school will engage and work with these individuals, who are often the most influential and important people in the student's life.

If the school believes a student is in immediate danger or at risk of harm, it will immediately make a referral to children's social care or the police, as appropriate.

Where referrals have been made, the school will consider the level of information to provide to parents on a case-by-case basis.

The DSL is responsible for safeguarding, including decisions regarding sharing information with parents about safeguarding concerns. A child's social worker may collect them from school – in these instances, a prior agreement with the student's birth parents and/or foster carers depending on the individual circumstances will be in place.

Schools will not permit social workers to enter the school premises to collect children to attend care review meetings or go to contact meetings without the prior agreement of teachers, foster carers, parents or the children themselves.

## **11. Information sharing**

Information sharing will always be in the best interests of a student. The school will work closely with children's social care and other agencies to consider next steps if it has reason to believe sharing information with a parent will potentially put a child at greater risk of harm.

The school will balance the requests of parents with their statutory duties – having parental responsibility does not allow a parent to obstruct the school from carrying out its duties under legislation.

Under the principles of the UK GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018, children and young adults can assume control over their personal information and restrict access to it from the age of 13.

Parents are, however, permitted to request access to, or a copy of their child's educational record, even if the child does not wish them to access it – this applies up until the age of 18.

A parent is **not** entitled to information that the school could not lawfully disclose to the child under the UK GDPR or in relation to which the child would have no right of access.

If the school does not know the location of a non-resident parent, it will promote that the resident parent is aware of the need to share information regarding their child as the other parent is entitled to be involved in their child's education. If a resident parent refuses to share information with the other parent, and also refuses to provide the non-resident parent's contact details to the school, the school can do no more.

If a non-resident parent contacts the school and requests access to information, the school will provide it to that parent directly, after taking reasonable steps to satisfy that the individual is, in fact, the child's parent.

The school will not seek the consent of the parent with whom the child resides before recording the contact details of the non-resident parent or sending them their child's prescribed statutory educational information.

## **12. Students moving school**

In the case of separated parents, the school will ensure that those with parental responsibility are consulted before the decisions are made in respect of:

- Removing a student from the school
- When a student should leave the school
- Which new school a student should attend

The school will comply with the Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006 when it receives a request to remove a student from the school register; however, the responsibility to notify

one parent if the other decides to remove their child rests solely with the separated parents. Staff may, however, ask the parent making the decision to remove their child if the other has been informed and has agreed to this.

The school will not become involved in conflicts relating to students being removed from the school, and parents will be advised to seek independent legal advice or other options such as referring the matter to non-court dispute resolution, e.g. mediation, or to the family court for adjudication.

### **13. Governance and administration**

The school will not restrict parent governors' eligibility to nominate, vote or otherwise participate in governor elections to parents holding parental responsibility.

The school will protect the private data of each parent from any other and avoid inadvertent disclosure.

### **14. Complaints**

Complaints from parents will be managed in accordance with the trust's Complaints Policy.

If both parents raise complaints separately, the school will address each complaint on its own merits but will ensure consistency in responses.

The school will not become involved in parental disputes but will act in the best interests of the child at all times.

### **15. Monitoring and review**

This policy will be reviewed annually or in response to changes in legal guidance. Feedback from parents and staff will be considered as part of the review process.

The scheduled review date for this policy is **June 2026**.

Any changes to this policy will be communicated to all staff and parents.

## **Appendix – Parental responsibility and definitions**

This policy applies to all separated or divorced parents, guardians, and carers of children enrolled at the school. Its objectives are to:

- Ensure that the welfare of the child is paramount.
- Provide clarity on parental rights and responsibilities.
- Facilitate effective communication between the school and parents.
- While the NHS is responsible for obtaining consent for vaccinations, the school will ensure that both parents with parental responsibility are informed of the vaccination schedule. If one parent objects, the school will seek further guidance in line with safeguarding procedures.

The school aims to provide a safe, supportive, and inclusive environment for all students, regardless of family circumstances. This policy ensures that child's best interests remain central to all decisions and that separated parents are treated fairly and consistently.

More information can be found on the [DFE Government Website](#)