



HAILSHAM COMMUNITY COLLEGE
ACADEMY TRUST

'Be the very best you can be'

Separated Parents Policy

SLT responsible:	Head of Business Services
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Statement of intent

Hailsham Community College recognises that pupils from families whose parents are separated, or are undergoing separation, may experience unique challenges during their time at college 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 pupil 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 college and its staff.

1. Legal framework

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

- Education Act 1996
- Data Protection Act 2018
- UK General Data Protection Regulation
- DfE (2022) 'Keeping children safe in education'
- Children Act 1989
- Education (Independent College Standards) Regulations 2014
- Freedom of Information Act 2010

This policy operates in conjunction with the following college policies:

- Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy
- Data Protection Policy
- Adult Behaviour Policy
- Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Policy

2. Definitions

Colleges 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 birth parents, whether they are married or not.
- Any person who, although not a birth parent, has parental responsibility for a child or young person.
- Any person who, although not a biological parent and has no parental responsibility, has care of a child or young person (a person with whom the child lives and who looks after the child).

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 college 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. pupil reports.
- Participate in activities, e.g. elections for parent governors.
- Give consent, e.g. for college trips.
- Be involved in meetings concerning the child, e.g. participate in an exclusion procedure.

Any disputes regarding whether a person is a pupil'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.

An 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 education.
- 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 pupil 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 Head of School is responsible for:

- Asking for the names and addresses of all parents when they register a pupil.
- Ensuring that names and addresses of all parents, where known, are included in the admission register and also in the pupil's records, and are available to the pupil's teachers.
- Ensuring that names and addresses of all parents are forwarded to any college to which the pupil moves.
- Ensuring that details of court orders are noted in the pupil's record.
- Ensuring at least one emergency contact per pupil 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.

Parents are responsible for:

- Providing their child's birth certificate upon admitting their child to the college.
- Informing the college when there is a change in family circumstances. The college recognises the sensitivity of these situations and will maintain all confidentiality requested by parents as far as possible. The college 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 college with a copy, which will put measures in place to ensure the pupil is not released to named individuals.
- Where parents have joint custody, informing, in writing, the college of the details of any disputes they have regarding the collecting of their child from college.
- Attending parents' evening appointments for their child – the college expects parents to communicate with each other regarding this.
- Liaising and communicating directly with each other in matters such as the ordering of college photographs, tickets for performances and other instances. The college 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.

The parent with whom the pupil resides is responsible for:

- Contacting the college immediately where issues to the access of their child arise.

The DSL is responsible for:

- Ensuring pupils are safe and happy at college.
- Making decisions regarding sharing information with parents about safeguarding concerns.
- Referring a pupil to the relevant support services, where required.

4. Progress reports and pupil records

Parents do not have an automatic right to request progress reports and review pupil records of their child and may be subject to certain limitations. The college is responsible for the data it holds and will therefore process requests for pupil 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 pupil information, the college will uphold the court's instruction.

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

If the child is subject to a joint residence order and the college's records formally capture that the child resides at two addresses, then progress reports will be sent to both addresses.

The college 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

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

The college will ensure all parents are treated equally unless there is a court order in place. Where one parent makes a claim that a court order against another parent is in place, the college will ask for evidence of the court order and ensure that the order is valid.

In the event that a pupil's parents are unable to agree with one another on decisions regarding their child's educational programme, including, but not limited to placement and participation in extracurricular activities, the college will need to take the decision from the resident parent.

The college will maintain an open door policy with parents and the class teacher will be available to discuss any issues. However, it is not the college's responsibility to solve parental disputes.

The college will seek advice from the LA and/or trustee board about parent disputes, where required. 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.

6. Collecting a child from college

When a child joins the college, the college will ask parents to complete a form listing the names of those who may collect their child. It is the parents' responsibility to ensure these are updated.

Parents will contact the college where there are any changes to who may collect their child from college on a particular day.

Where a separated parent has parental responsibility, and needs to collect their child during or at the end of the college day, the resident parent will be contacted to ensure that parents are in agreement, providing a non-contact order is not in place.

The college 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 college 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.

Members of the senior leadership team will use their discretion on the decision to allow a child to leave the premises with a non-resident parent.

7. Obtaining consent

If parental consent is required for outings or activities, the college will seek consent from the resident parent.

In cases where the college 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 college will assume that parental consent has not been given.

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

SEND provision

The college will ensure it focusses on the best interests of the pupil. In line with the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Policy, the college will ensure it identifies and addresses any SEND in its pupils.

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

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

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

8. Name changes

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

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

The college will only act to change a pupil'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 college 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 college will make a decision holding the best interests of the child under paramount consideration.

Informal name changes

The college will assert that it is under no legal obligation to accept informal name change requests from parents, also called 'known as' names, unless ordered to do so by a court.

Where the college accepts an informal name change without the order of a court, it will ensure that the name is only used informally, e.g. by teachers, and is not amended on any college systems, official documentation or databases.

9. Changes to records

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

Where a court order to this effect is in place, the college will ensure it seeks evidence of this. In an emergency situation, the college 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 college 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 college will always put the best interests of the pupil 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 college will ensure it acts accordingly in the event that a pupil 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 college will engage and work with these individuals, who are often the most influential and important people in the pupil's life.

If the college believes a pupil 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 college 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 college – in these instances, a prior agreement with the pupil's birth parents and/or foster carers depending on the individual circumstances will be in place.

Colleges will not permit social workers to enter the college 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

The college will balance the requests of parents with their statutory duties – having parental responsibility does not allow a parent to obstruct the college 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 college could not lawfully disclose to the child under the UK GDPR or in relation to which the child would have no right of access.

Under Part 6 of the Schedule to the Education (Independent College Standards) Regulations 2014, the college will provide parents with an annual written report of each registered pupil's progress and attainment in the main subject areas taught – no report need be provided where the parent has agreed otherwise.

If the college does not know the location of a non-resident parent, it will ensure the resident parent is aware that 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 college, the college can do no more.

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

The college 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.