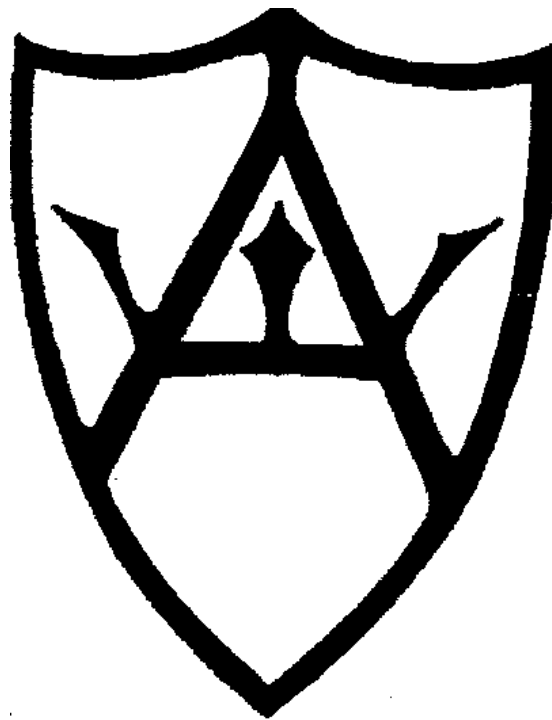


Alfriston School



Separated Parents Policy

November 2024

Introduction

In line with its vision and values, Alfriston Primary School will always aim to promote the best interests of the child, working in partnership with all parents or carers where possible. This policy is an attempt to clarify to all parties what is expected from separated parents or carers and what can be expected from the school and staff.

Parental Responsibility

To help us to look after children whilst they are in our care, school staff are required to ask parents or carers to provide certain information, including the names of both parents or carers, address(es) and contact details. Additionally, the school is required to ask who has Parental Responsibility for the child. This is important because it allows the school to be sure who has the right to make decisions about a child's education and medical treatment. However, this is a very specific legal term and many parents or carers may be unaware of how it is applied. We have summarised the position below:

- All mothers automatically have Parental Responsibility;
- If a child's parents were married at the time of the birth, both parents automatically have Parental Responsibility;
- For children born from the 1 December 2003 where the father's name is on the birth certificate, the father and mother will both have Parental Responsibility;
- In all other cases, fathers are required to officially obtain Parental Responsibility;
- Parental Responsibility cannot be lost, except by legal adoption, although it does not guarantee contact.

Parents, as defined above, are entitled to share in the decisions that are made about their child and to be treated equally by schools. 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 or carer to restrict another. Additionally, 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 or carer to the child and will remain independent throughout.

Court Orders

The school is only obliged to comply with a court 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. If the school is not informed of the existence of such an order, neither parent nor carer will have rights superior to the other. Only a court order stating the arrangements is deemed to be valid; a letter from a solicitor will not be sufficient. Upon receipt of any court order restricting access to a parent or carer, the school retains the right to consult legal advice before taking any action.

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, the school expects 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(ren). It is assumed that the parent with whom the child principally resides will keep the other parent informed. The school does recognise that communication between parents is not always possible. If an estranged parent wishes to receive information from the school such as progress reports or attending parent/teacher consultation meetings, they should contact the school in writing with a specific request for separate communication. The school would not expect to send emergency text messages to absent parents, giving information on cancelled activities and reminders. Should an un-named parent seek information or access to their child(ren), the school will always inform the main carer of this to check Parental Responsibility and ensure no court order is in place. For the avoidance of doubt, the school will seek written confirmation from the main carer. Proof of identity of the non-resident parent will always be required in these cases. Disagreements between parents must be resolved between the parents and cannot be resolved by the school.

Collecting a child from school

We will follow our standard procedure in the release of a child or children.

In the case of separated parents, our School will release a child or children to a parent in accordance with any specific arrangements or a Court Order 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 Head Teacher, designated deputy or Designated Safeguarding Lead will contact 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 will be released, and school records updated to show that permission was granted verbally.
- In the event that the parent to whom the child would normally be released to cannot be reached, the Head Teacher or senior member of staff will make a decision based upon all relevant information available to them.
- The Head Teacher or senior member of staff may have to refuse permission if agreement/consent cannot be obtained and may need to take advice before a child or children are collected / released.
- The School cannot prevent the other parent collecting the child or children, but we will endeavour to reach an agreement, and this may mean keeping the child or children safe whilst we try to reach such an agreement.
- If there is a Court Order restricting contact or it is in contravention of any access agreement, the child or children will not be released into their care and the other parent advised to take the necessary action, which does not involve the school. If it is deemed necessary by the school to protect the child or children's health and welfare, the school shall immediately contact the police and the Local Authority where relevant.
- During any discussion or communication with parents, the child or children will be supervised by an appropriate member of school staff in a separate room to avoid causing any upset to the child or children.

- In circumstances if there is a belief that a possible abduction of the child may occur or if the parent is disruptive, the police should be notified immediately, and the Local Authority notified.

All parents or carers can have equal access to all school information via eSchools, our communication system and/or the school website.