



## **SEPARATED PARENTS POLICY**

### **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 Bowdon Preparatory School (**BPS**) recognises that children from families whose parents are separated, or are undergoing separation, may go through traumatic changes during their time at school. With this in mind, we will make every effort to work with parents to promote the welfare of children.
- 1.2 We aim to maintain contact with both parents in the best interests of their child(ren). This policy has been created to minimise any impact and to clarify to all parties what is expected from separated parents and what can be expected from the school and its staff.

### **2. Definition of a "parent"**

- 2.1 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, whether they are married or not;
  - any person who, although not a natural parent, has parental responsibility for a child or young person;
  - any person who, although not a natural parent, has care of a child or young person (such as a person with whom the child lives and who looks after the child).

It is this definition of **parent** that is used through this policy

### **3. Responsibilities of parents**

- 3.1 Parents are responsible for informing the school (and we encourage parents to tell us at an early stage) when there is a change in family circumstances so that, whenever possible, we can inform staff of such changes so that suitable support can be offered to the child(ren). The school also needs to be kept up to date with contact details, arrangements for collecting children and emergencies.
- 3.2 We recognise the sensitivity of such situations and we will maintain confidentiality requested by parents as far as possible.
- 3.3 Children's welfare and safety are paramount and where there are issues over access to children, the parent with whom the child resides should contact the school immediately. Where there is a court mandated restraining order in place, a copy needs to be retained by the school, which will put measures in place to ensure the child is not released to named individuals.
- 3.4 Parents who have joint custody of the child are requested to keep the school informed, in writing, of any disputes they have with each other regarding the collection of the child.

### **4. Entitlement of parents**

- 4.1 Parents are entitled to share in the decisions that are made about their child. Parents have the right to:
  - receive information (e.g. pupil reports, details of school events etc.);
  - attend parent meetings/school events;
  - give consent (e.g. for school trips);
  - be involved in meetings concerning the child (e.g. participate in an exclusion procedure, appeal against admission decisions);
  - deal with any medical issues that arise and/or vaccinations that may be offered.
- 4.2 BPS will maintain our open door policy with all parents, and the form teacher and/or Headteacher will be available by appointment to discuss any issues.
- 4.3 BPS will not seek to make judgements about individual circumstances but will treat both parents equally unless there is a specific (court) ruling in existence. BPS does not have the power to restrict the rights of one parent at the request of the other parent.
- 4.4 BPS is under no obligation to inform one parent about the other parent contacting the school (unless there is a specific (court) ruling in existence). Any such information will be given at the discretion of the Headteacher.

- 4.5 Should an un-named parent seek information or access to his/her child, 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, we will seek written confirmation from the main carer. Proof of identity of the non-resident parent will always be required in these cases.

## **5. Parental consent**

- 5.1 If parental consent is required for outings or activities, BPS 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.
- 5.2 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.

## **6. School communications**

- 6.1 BPS recognises that both parents have a right to be informed of, and involved in, their child's education. However, we expect 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. It is assumed that the parent with whom the child principally resides will keep the other parent informed.
- 6.2 Provided we have been given accurate contact details, school emails will be sent to both parents. If paper letters are sent home with pupils, we expect parents to communicate these messages to each other as and when appropriate.
- 6.3 Under normal circumstances, we will hold one parent's evening appointment per child, two times a year, where both parents are welcome and we expect parents to communicate with each other regarding these arrangements. Similarly, in the event that other meetings are required with the school to discuss a child (whether at the request of the school or a parent), we would again expect both parents to attend and to communicate with each other about the arrangements. We will not normally hold separate meetings to accommodate parents separately although, if there is a very strong case for doing so, this will be considered by the Headteacher.
- 6.4 Both parents are entitled to receive progress reports and review their child's pupil records. Progress reports will be sent to the parent with whom the child resides with the expectation that he/she will share the report with the other parent. The school will email copies of progress reports to the parent with whom the child does not reside only if that parent submits a written request.
- 6.5 We expect parents to liaise and communicate directly with each other in matters such as the ordering of school photographs, residential/school trips, tickets for performances etc. The school will not deal individually with these requests in view of the significantly increased workload that they represent.
- 6.6 Disagreements between parents must be resolved between the parents and cannot be resolved by the school.

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

- 7.1 BPS 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 usual arrangements and the parent to whom the child would normally be released has not notified the school of any change, the following steps will be followed:
- (a) where a separated parent has parental responsibility (and there is no court order in place) and wishes to take the child during or at the end of the school day, the resident parent will be contacted in order to ensure that they are in agreement with the arrangement;
  - (b) if the parent to whom the child would normally be released agrees, the child will be released and the records will reflect that the permission was granted orally;
  - (c) if the parent opposes the other parent wanting to take the child then, whilst BPS cannot (without a court order) prevent the other parent collecting the child, we will endeavour to reach an agreement;
  - (d) in the event that the parent to whom the child would normally be released to cannot be reached, the Headteacher or staff member dealing with the issue will make a decision based upon all relevant information available to him/her.
- 7.2 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.

## **8. Name changes**

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

- 8.3 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.