



## Policy for working with separated families

At Brooke Hill Academy we recognise that some children are from families where parents are already separated or indeed may go through difficult changes in family circumstances during their time at school. Our responsibility is for the welfare of the children and we make every effort to work with parents to support the needs of these children. This policy is designed to ensure effective contact and liaison with separated families.

### **Equal opportunities**

Brooke Hill Academy Trust has a legal duty to work in partnership with families and to involve all those with parental responsibility in their child's education. All parents will be treated equally, unless a limit is in place by the issue of a court order.

Everyone who is a parent (whether they are a resident or a non-resident parent) has the right to participate in decisions about a child's education and receive information about their child (even though the school's main contact is likely to be the parent with whom the child lives on school days).

The DfE's guidance explains that individuals:

- receive information, e.g. pupil reports
- to participate in activities e.g. vote in elections for parent governors
- to be asked to give consent e.g. to the child taking part in school trips
- to be involved in meetings involving the child, e.g. to discuss special educational needs etc.
- receive timely information about upcoming events provided, assuming contacting information is held by the school

### **Guidance on parental responsibility**

In order to help us to look after your children whilst they are in our care, we are required to ask you to provide certain information, such as name of parents, address, contact details etc. We are also required to ask who has Parental Responsibility for your child. This is important because it allows us to be sure who has the right to make decisions about your child's education and medical treatment.

- 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 1st 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.

**(If you would like further guidance, there is clear information on the government website [www.direct.gov/uk/en/Parents/ParentsRights/DG\\_4002954](http://www.direct.gov/uk/en/Parents/ParentsRights/DG_4002954))**

### **Guidance for Heads of School**

The DfE's guidance also provides advice for Heads of School, who should:

- Ask parents or guardians for the names and addresses of all parents when they register a pupil
- Ensure that names and addresses of all parents, where known, are included in the admission register and also in pupil records and are available to the pupil's teachers
- Ensure that names and addresses of all parents are forwarded to any school to which the pupil moves
- Ensure that details of court orders are noted in a pupil's record
- Where the address of a non-resident parent is unknown, tell the resident parent that the non-resident parent is entitled to be involved in their child's education and ask that information is passed on to them.

### **Name changes for child/ren**

There must be the consent of both parents after divorce or separation for a change in name of a child or children.

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 a case the parent wishing to change the child's name would need to apply to the courts for permission to do so.

Before registering a change of name, schools need to ensure all those with parental responsibility have consented.

### **Working together**

As part of the Induction Pack, when children start school, all parents will receive a copy of this policy. (Working with Separated Parents)

Our Admissions procedures require parents of children joining the school to bring in their original child's birth certificate. This ensures children are joining the correct year group and also helps the school ascertain who has Parental Responsibility.

Separated parents should inform the school of ways in which they would like to be kept informed.

Children's welfare and safety is of paramount importance to us, and where there are issues over access, the parent with whom the child resides should contact the school immediately.

Where a court restraining order is in place, a copy should be made available to the school.

Where an absent parent has parental responsibility and there is no court order in place, the school is required to allow the child to go home with them; however, the Head of School is able to use his/her discretion, and would seek clarification, if it was felt that there was a child protection issue.

Parents who have joint custody, are requested to keep the school informed, in writing, of any disputes regarding the collection of children.

Leave of absence request forms must either be signed by both parents, or signed by one parent with an accompanying letter from the other parent.

We would not normally expect to send out emergency text messages (informing of cancelled activities/reminders etc) to absent parents, unless we are asked, in writing, to do so.

**As the welfare of the children is at the heart of everything we do, the Executive Headteacher, Head of School and Governors maintain the right to discontinue any of the above if it is deemed significantly against the child's best interests. Court orders may also alter the position that the school adopts.**

### **Changes in circumstances**

We encourage parents to tell us at an early stage if there is a change in family circumstances. We will recognise the sensitivity of some situations and will respect any legal requirements that have been entered into by the parents or required by the courts.

The school will not make judgments about individual circumstances but will treat both parents equally unless there is a court order limiting an individual's exercise of parental responsibility.

### **School responsibilities**

#### **Contact in person:**

- If a parent unknown to the school arrives at the school unannounced, asking for confirmation that children are at the school, we are unable to confirm this without documents proving the identity of the person asking.
- We would ask that the request is put in writing to the school, together with photographic evidence (eg passport, driving licence) of their identity.
- The resident parent would not be informed of the absent parent contacting the school by anyone other than the Head of School, who is under no obligation to do so.

### **Telephone enquiries**

**If a telephone enquiry is received, about a child registered at the school, the following information would be given:**

*"I am sorry but we cannot disclose information about child/ren over the phone. If you would like to request information please write to the school. You will be asked to provide photographic proof of your identity (eg passport, driving licence) and proof of your relationship to the child/ren.*

*Please also include a copy of one of the following documents: child's birth certificate, marriage certificate, Parental Responsibility Agreement.*

*On receipt of this information, we will contact you to arrange the appropriate exchange of information”.*

- This procedure should be visible in the school office to ensure the correct information is given.
- If the children are not registered at the school we will give the same answer as above.
- If the parent is known to the school, but is now no longer living with the family and he/she requests information, we will take details of how we can work together to provide information, eg: newsletters, parents evenings, copies of reports, order forms for school photographs etc.

### **Communication with families**

At Brooke Hill Academy Trust we will:

- send routine information such as newsletters or information about school visits etc. via our Parentmail system to the resident parent and also a non-resident parent, should a request be received.
- ensure that newsletters are placed on our website for **all** parents to access
- not facilitate contact arrangements for a separated parent. If a parent wishes for such arrangements they must do so with the other parent or obtain a contact order through a solicitor or the courts
- need to be informed as to who is able to give messages to the school regarding the child's welfare such as a change in adult collecting the child, collection for medical appointments etc., this may include new partners
- arrange additional meetings for parents evenings where amicable arrangements cannot be made. This must be requested in writing and should be addressed to the Head of School
- need notification if there is a change in circumstances and the non-resident parent wishes to collect the child from school

### **Collecting a child from school**

Where a separated parent has parental responsibility and there is no court order in place, and requires to take the child during or at the end of the school day, the resident parent will be contacted in order to ensure that parents are in agreement with the arrangement. The Head of School is able to use his/her discretion not to allow a child to leave the school building with a non-resident parent if it was felt that there was a child protection issue.