

Southend High School for Boys

Separated Parents Policy



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At Southend High School for Boys, **our sole wish is to promote the best interests of the child**, working in partnership with all parents, unless otherwise directed by a court order.

Introduction & background to policy

Research and experience have shown that separated parents can become estranged, especially during the initial stages of the split. This is very often traumatic for any children concerned and unfortunately these personal family problems can have an impact on the schools the children attend.

This policy is an attempt 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.

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, including those that are not married;
- Any person who has parental responsibility but is not a natural parent, eg a legally appointed guardian or the Local Authority named in a Care Order;
- Any person who has care of a child, ie a person with whom the child resides and who looks after the child irrespective of the relationship

Parental entitlement & Court Orders

Parents, as defined above, are entitled to share in the decisions that are made about their child and to be treated equally by the school. In accordance with DfE guidance, all adults with parent rights will receive invitations to participate in statutory activities (for example, voting in elections for parent governors) and communications regarding important meetings and decisions.

The Governing Body recognises that while the parents of some pupils may be divorced or estranged, they are entitled to the above and this entitlement cannot be restricted without a specific court order. In particular, the school does not have the power to act on the request of one parent to restrict another.

Where there is not a consensus between separated parents, the school will follow the published guidance, exercising discretion where necessary, and make judgements based on the circumstances known to it.

The information provided to the school when the child was enrolled detailing whether parents have parental responsibility for the child will be presumed to be correct unless a court order or original birth certificate proving otherwise is provided to the school. Similarly, the information provided on the address(es) where the child resides will be presumed to be correct unless a court order proving otherwise is provided to the school.

Upon receipt of any court order restricting a parent's access to their child, the school retains the right to consult other authorities before taking immediate action. The school is only obliged to comply with an 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. The school has no responsibility for enforcing a court order. In the event that the school is not informed of the existence of such an order, parents will be treated on the same basis. Similarly, if a court order is revised and the school is not informed, the school is entitled to act on the basis of the preceding court order. Parents are encouraged to resolve contact issues without involving the school directly. The interests of the child will always be paramount when deciding whether to accommodate a request from an estranged parent.

Change in parent responsibility

It is the responsibility of the parents to inform school when there is a change in family circumstances. The school needs to be kept up to date with contact details, arrangements for collecting children and emergencies.

The school encourages parents to inform it at an early stage if there is a change in family circumstances. Whenever possible, staff will be informed of such changes so that suitable support can be offered. The school will, however, recognise the sensitivity of some situations and maintain the level of confidentiality requested by parents as far as possible.

The school expects that parents will liaise and communicate 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.

Communication from school

The school uses WisePay to communicate with parents. The system allows up to two parents to be nominated to receive emails. Parent letters and other information will be sent to all parents via WisePay and will also be posted on the school's website. The school calendar is available on the school's website; this gives the dates of all the main events within school, including productions, sports days, parents' evenings, class trips, etc. Occasionally letters are sent to individual classes; these may be paper copies only and not sent via WisePay. The school expects parents to communicate these messages to each other as and when appropriate.

WisePay

The WisePay account for making payments for lunch top-ups, trips etc is held by 'contact 1' only (parents are identified as 'contact 1' or 'contact 2' and self-identify when their child joins the school). If parents are separated or divorced, it is expected that 'contact 1' will be the parent with whom the child is principally resident (at the address held on the child's school record), with the expectation that he/she will share access to the account with the other parent if required. If the child is subject to a joint residence order and the school's records formally indicate that the child resides at two addresses, then access to payments may also be given to 'contact 2'. The school will give access to the parent with whom the child does not reside only if both parents indicate agreement by submitting a written request and there is no restrictive court order in place.

Parents Evenings

The school will hold one parents' evening appointment per child, where all parents are welcome. Parents are expected to communicate with each other regarding these arrangements. The school will only consider separate appointments if there is a court order in place restricting parents attending the same appointment.

Progress Reports

Every parent has the right to receive Annual Reports. Southend High School for Boys may also choose to provide parents with Interim Assessment Reports. All reports are made available to all parents on Go4Schools unless there is a restrictive court order in place.

Pupil Records

As an Academy, the school is subject to the ICO's guidelines on Subject Access requests. Parents may not make a Subject Access Request on behalf of their child without their permission. The school therefore requires parents to provide written and signed permission from their child in order to obtain a copy of the child's pupil record.

Release of pupils during the school day

The school 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 notified arrangements, and the parent to whom the child would normally be released has not consented the following steps will be followed:

- The Headteacher or designated Deputy will meet with the parent seeking to remove the child and, in his/her presence, telephone 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 may be released and the records will reflect that the permission was granted orally.
- In the event that the parent to whom the child would normally be released cannot be reached, the Headteacher or staff member dealing with the issue may make a decision based upon all relevant information available to him/her, including establishing the preference of the child.
- The Headteacher or staff member may choose to refuse permission if consent cannot be obtained from the other parent and/or the child declines.
- During any discussion or communication with parents, the child will be supervised by an appropriate member of school staff in a separate room.
- In extreme circumstances, such as 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.

Arbitration

Disagreements between parents must be resolved by the parents or their intermediaries; they cannot be resolved by the school. In the event that the parents are unable to agree with one another on decisions regarding their child's educational programme, including but not limited to placement, participation in extra-curricular activities, and consent to evaluation and services, the school will arrange a meeting with all parents (preferably together, or separately if required) to attempt to assist the parents to resolve the situation and if it cannot be resolved within the school, the parents will be responsible for seeking alternative arbitration.

The school will maintain its open door policy for all parents, unless there is a restrictive court order. The Tutor, Year Leader and/or Headteacher will be available by appointment to discuss any issues. The school encourages all parents to initiate contact by email to ensure any concern is raised with the most appropriate member of staff.