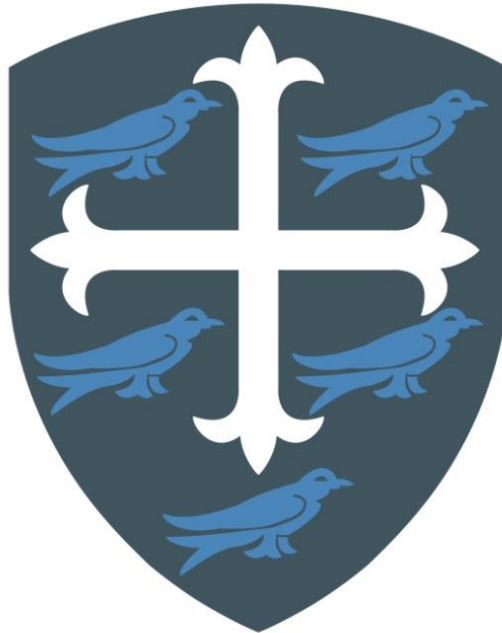


# St Mary's Catholic Primary School



## Separated Parents Policy

<b>Legal Status:</b>	Non-Statutory
<b>Last Review:</b>	
<b>Review date:</b>	March 2026
<b>Next Review:</b>	September 2029
<b>Responsible Person:</b>	Governing Body

### **Mission Statement**

“Inspired by Mary,  
We grow together in God’s love and care,  
Opening our Heart and Minds”

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## 1. Introduction

The Department for Education (DfE) guidance informs this policy: *Understanding and dealing with issues relating to parental responsibility*. It outlines what parental responsibility is and who may hold it.

At St Mary's Catholic Primary School, we are committed to maintaining positive and inclusive communication with all parents and carers, in the best interests of the child. This policy aims to minimise the impact of parental separation on the child's education and wellbeing, and to clarify expectations for separated parents and the role of the school.

When a child is admitted to the school, the parent(s) with parental responsibility who submitted the application are expected to have consulted all others with parental responsibility. They should also provide the school with full details of all individuals who hold parental responsibility. If this information is not provided, the school welcomes direct contact from any parent with parental responsibility. However, the school cannot be held accountable for excluding a parent from communication if their details have not been shared.

If parents separate after a child has already enrolled, it is essential that the school is informed immediately. This enables the school to maintain appropriate contact with both parents and, where necessary, arrange to communicate separately with each parent.

## 2. Definition of Parent

For the purposes of school decision-making and access to educational records, the school must consider whether an individual holds Parental Responsibility as defined under the Children Act 1989. While the Education Act definition of 'parent' is broad, certain rights such as access to pupil records, school reports and educational decision-making apply specifically to those with Parental Responsibility.

Under Section 576 of the Education Act 1996, a 'parent' is defined as:

- All biological parents, regardless of marital status
- Any individual with parental responsibility (e.g. adoptive parents, step-parents, guardians)
- Any person who has care of the child (e.g. foster carers), even if they do not have parental responsibility

All individuals defined as parents are entitled to be involved in decisions regarding the child's education and to be treated equally by the school. This includes, but is not limited to:

- Receiving school reports and newsletters
- Accessing school records
- Attending parent meetings and school events
- Receiving information about trips and vaccinations
- Access to school photographs
- Participation in exclusion procedures
- Being informed of medical issues

These rights remain unless restricted by a Court Order. If parents are involved in legal proceedings concerning the child, they should seek permission from the court to share relevant Court Orders with the school.

### **3. Parental Responsibility**

Parental responsibility, as defined in the Children Act 1989, refers to the legal rights, duties, powers, and responsibilities a parent has for their child. It may be held by biological parents or acquired through adoption, guardianship, or a formal agreement or Court Order.

The school will rely on the information provided at the time of enrolment regarding parental responsibility and the child's living arrangements, unless updated documentation (e.g. birth certificate or Court Order) is provided.

All parents with parental responsibility have equal rights to be involved in decisions about their child's education. The school must treat all such parents equally unless a Court Order restricts their rights or removes parental responsibility.

### **4. Court Orders**

Our school's primary concern is the welfare of the child. We aim to work in partnership with all parents and carers. If a Court Order is in place, the school will act in accordance with its terms to the best of its ability.

If the school is not informed of a Court Order, it cannot be held responsible for any unintentional breach.

### **5. Disputes and Disagreements**

We encourage all parents and carers to work collaboratively with the school in the best interests of their child. However, any disputes between parents must be resolved independently and not through the school.

Staff will not become involved in disputes between parents or act as a channel of communication between parents. Any communication that is aggressive, abusive or places staff in an inappropriate position may be referred to the Headteacher and managed in accordance with the school's Complaints Policy.

The school will not act as a mediator, take sides, or become involved in parental disagreements. Where parents cannot reach agreement, they should seek independent legal advice or pursue resolution through the appropriate legal channels.

### **6. Changes in Family Circumstances**

We kindly ask parents and carers to inform the school of any significant changes in family circumstances that may affect a child's wellbeing or behaviour. This enables us to provide sensitive and appropriate support within the school environment.

It is essential that parents keep the school updated with any changes to emergency contact details or arrangements for collecting children at the end of the school day. Accurate and current information helps us ensure the safety and welfare of all pupils.

## **7. Release of Children**

Unless a Court Order or formal advice from Children's Services or the police, states otherwise, any individual with parental responsibility may collect their child from school. Staff will not challenge this unless there are clear safeguarding concerns.

The school will normally follow the day-to-day collection arrangements provided by the parent with whom the child normally resides, unless a Court Order specifies alternative arrangements or safeguarding advice is received from external agencies.

## **8. Communication with Separated Parents**

Routine school communications will be issued through the school's standard communication systems. While the school will make reasonable efforts to ensure both parents with Parental Responsibility receive key information, the school cannot duplicate all communications individually and parents remain responsible for ensuring they access information through the normal school channels.

Parents are expected to communicate respectfully with school staff at all times. The school will not relay messages between parents or become involved in personal disputes. Parents should communicate directly with one another regarding arrangements for their child wherever possible.

School communications, including newsletters and general updates, are sent via School gateway to all parents and carers with parental responsibility, provided we have up-to-date contact details.

These communications include key information such as:

- Parents' evenings
- School productions and events
- Sports days
- Class trips and outings

Where possible, the school will accommodate separate requests from separated, divorced, or estranged parents for invitations to school events. However, we encourage parents to communicate directly with one another regarding such matters, where appropriate. We recognise that this may not always be feasible and will do our best to support individual circumstances.

Please note that in cases where a Court Order restricts contact between parents or with the child, the school will act in accordance with the Order and may not be able to fulfil certain requests.

In line with our Data Protection and Information Security Policy, any communication from the school to one parent will exclude personal information about the other parent.

## **9. Parents' Evening Appointments**

Upon request, the school will offer separate parents' evening appointments for separated, divorced, or estranged parents who hold parental responsibility.

## **10. Written Pupil Reports**

All individuals known to the school as having parental responsibility are entitled to receive written progress reports. These will be provided to separated, divorced, or estranged parents, provided we have accurate and current contact details.

## **11. Change of Name**

A child's name (forename and/or surname) can only be changed if:

- Both parents provide written consent with signatures, or
- A legal Court Order authorises the change

In the absence of either, the child will be recorded as the name recorded on their birth certificate.

## **12. Safeguarding and Confidentiality**

The school will always prioritise the safety and wellbeing of the child. In certain circumstances the school may limit the information shared with a parent if there are safeguarding concerns or advice from Children's Services, the police or other relevant agencies. The school will follow safeguarding procedures and any legal requirements when determining what information can be shared.