



Policy of support for Separated Parents

Adapted from model policy offered by 'Right to love UK' website

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Governor with responsibility for this policy –

Due for review September 2025, or as required.

This policy takes into account the government's explanation of [Parental rights and responsibilities](#) and the Department for Education's (DfE) guidance [Understanding and dealing with issues relating to parental responsibility](#)

Government guidance outlines [what is parental responsibility](#) and who can obtain it.

1. Introduction

At Heltwate School, we aim to maintain positive and collaborative contact with both parents in the best interests of their child(ren). This policy aims to minimise any impact and to clarify to all parties what is expected from separated parents and what can be expected from the school.

The basis of the advice within this policy is with regards to a child or children who have already been admitted to the school.

The person(s) with parental responsibility who requested the child's admission should have involved all others with parental responsibility in making the decision to apply. They should have provided the school with details of all those with parental responsibility for a child.

Where this has not happened, the school welcomes direct contact from those parties with parental responsibility, providing their own details, and evidence of their parental status. The school, however, cannot be held responsible for excluding a parent or person with parental responsibility, if the information has not been provided to them.

If parents separate whilst their child/ren already attend the school, the parents should notify the class teacher(s) or school office immediately, so that we can ensure continuing contact with both parents, in their child/ren's best interests.

In the event that the parents have separated acrimoniously, the school will endeavour to accommodate each parent separately in terms of communications, meetings and at any other attendances, in support of their child/ren.

2. Definition of "parent"

The definition of a "parent" for our purposes is much wider than for any other situation. Section 576 of The Education Act 1996 defines a parent as:

- all biological parents, whether they are married or not
- includes any person who, although not a biological parent, has parental responsibility for a child or young person - this could be an adoptive parent, a stepparent, guardian or other relative with the responsibility of caring for a child.
- any person who, although not a biological parent and does not have parental responsibility, has care of a child or young person.

A person typically has care of a child or young person if they are the person with whom the child lives, either on a full or part time basis, and who looks after the child, irrespective of what their biological or legal relationship is with the child.

For example, this may be a foster carer or family and friend's carer who do not have parental responsibility but have been delegated the responsibility for taking day-to-day decisions about the child.

Parents, as defined here, are legally entitled to share in the decisions made about the child's education and to be treated equally by schools.

In particular, these entitlements include, but are not limited to, the following:

- receiving copies of school reports
- having access to school records
- attending parent meetings
- receiving newsletters
- receiving invitations to school events
- receiving information about school trips
- receiving school photographs relating to their child
- participation in any exclusion procedure and
- dealing with any medical issues that arise and/or vaccinations that may be offered.

The school recognises that whilst the parents of some pupils may be separated, divorced, or estranged, they are still entitled to the above and this entitlement cannot be restricted without a Court order.

If the parents are involved in proceedings before the Court directly relating to their child(ren), the parents should seek the Court's permission to disclose the current order(s) made, and to share this in confidence with the school. In addition, and should the court so require, the school will be willing to provide a letter setting out any information that is specified in a Court order.

3. Parental Responsibility (PR)

Parental responsibility is defined in the Children Act, 1989 and means the rights, duties, powers, responsibilities, and authority that a parent has for their child. In addition to a child's natural parents, parental responsibility can be acquired by Court order, by being appointed a child's legal guardian, adopting a child or a formal agreement.

The information provided to the school when the child was enrolled detailing who has 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.

The school will be reliant on such information being provided as accurate and true. The information provided regarding the address(es) where the child lives will be presumed to be correct unless the school is provided with a copy of a court order setting out arrangements for where the child should live.

Every parent with parental responsibility for a child has an equal right to be engaged with decisions regarding their education. Unless there is a court order limiting an individual's exercise of parental responsibility the school must treat all parents equally and must provide them with the same information.

Where contact has been limited by a court order, the parent still has the right to receive information about the child and be involved in decisions regarding their education and welfare, unless a court order restricts what information they can receive or removes their parental responsibility.

We will not remove a parent's contact details without such a court order being in place or unless a parent asks for their **own** contact details to be removed. In this case evidence of the request will be recorded.

4. Court Orders

At Heltwate School our sole wish is to promote the best interests of the child, working in collaborative partnership with all parents and/or those with parental responsibility for our students.

If there is a court order in place, the school will always act in ways to ensure, as far as is possible, that no court order is breached. The school can only be expected to comply with an order, if it is properly notified and has received a sealed digital or paper copy for its files, and then, only to the extent that it relates to the school in effectively support of the child.

The school has no responsibility for enforcing a court order, but we will endeavour to ensure that if there are restrictions in place with regards to the collection of a child, such restrictions are adhered to.

In the event that the school is not informed of the existence of such an order, the parents will be treated equally by the school. If there is an order in place and neither the parents and/or those with parental responsibility inform the school then if there is any breach of such order, the school cannot be held responsible and/or liable

5. Disputes and disagreements

Heltwate School hopes that parents and all those with parental responsibility for our students, will support us in working together for the benefit of their child/ren.

It is very important to note that any dispute between parents sharing these rights will need to be resolved between them and that school is not responsible for achieving resolution.

In all cases where parents and/or those with parental responsibility cannot agree on various issues, parents should seek independent legal advice as to the options available to them to resolve those issues, either by mutual agreement or by obtaining a Court order.

Parents should seek to resolve contact issues without involving the school. The school will not mediate, "take sides" or act as an intermediary between parents who do not or are unable to communicate effectively with each other.

6. Changes in family circumstances

We ask parents to inform us whenever something outside school, such as a change in family circumstances or domestic arrangements occurs, so that we can sensitively support the child in school as required.

We expect parents to update the school whenever emergency contact details change for one or both parents and/or there is a new arrangement for collecting children at the end of the school day, and in particular if there is any court order that has been made.

We recognise the sensitivity of such situations, and all staff are aware of the need for discretion and confidentiality. School staff will be informed on a strict need-to-know basis so that suitable support can be offered.

7. The release of child(ren) from school's care

On admission to the school, and unless we are notified to the contrary, the school will only release children to either or both parents and/or those with known parental responsibility.

In the event that a parent asks another responsible adult to collect their child, the school expects a written request

- stating the name,
- relationship and
- contact details of the adult collecting the child.

Agreement will be made by prior arrangement between custodial parents and the class teacher. In such cases, we will also agree a suitable password to be shared at the time of collection and handover.

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 then 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, such agreement must be immediately confirmed by an email or Class Dojo message, to ensure there is record on the school's files. The child may then be released, and the records will reflect that the permission was granted in writing.
- In the event that the parent to whom the child would normally be released to cannot be reached, the Headteacher or designated deputy dealing with the issue may make a decision based upon all relevant information available to him/her.
- The Headteacher or designated deputy may refuse release of the child if consent cannot be obtained.

- During any discussion or communication with parents and/or those with parental responsibility, the child will be supervised by an appropriate member of school staff in a separate room, and away from adult discussions.
- In extreme circumstances, if there is a belief that a potential abduction of the child may occur or if the parent is belligerent, aggressive, or disruptive, the police will be notified immediately.

8. Communication between school and separated parents

Bulletins, newsletters and general updates to parents and carers are sent via Class Dojo messaging, in addition to those who have agreed parental responsibility and for whom we have up-to-date contact details.

These updates contain all the main class/school events, including parents' evenings, productions, sports days and class outings and events, either on a class basis (the class story) or on a whole school basis (the school story)

The school will endeavour to manage and accommodate separate requests for invitations to school events and performances made by separated, divorced, or estranged parents, but who have parental responsibility. Parents are asked to be aware that this may not always be possible, and in these cases, the wishes of the custodial parents will take priority.

The school would be grateful if parents could communicate directly on such matters if they are able to do so in their child(ren)'s best interests, although in some instances, we recognise that this may not be possible, if there be a court order in place preventing the parties from contacting or communicating with each other.

The school will try to comply with such requests equally and sensitively and in a child's best interests. However, in certain circumstances, it may not always be possible to accommodate a parent's request, for example, when a court order is in place which prevents or restricts contact with the child or each other.

In all circumstances, we aim to maintain our open-door policy with all parents. Class teachers and/or the Headteacher or his/her deputy, will be available by appointment to discuss any issues as required.

9. Parents' evening appointments

Whenever requested, we will offer separate parents' evening appointments for separated, divorced, or estranged parents who have confirmed parental responsibility.

10. Written pupil reports

Any person who is known to the school to have confirmed parental responsibility for a child has the right to receive written progress reports for their child.

These will be provided to separated, divorced, or estranged parents who have parental responsibility and for whom the school has up-to-date contact details.

11. Change of name

A parent can only change their child's name (forename and/or surname) either by both parents providing a signed and dated letter confirming their consent and bearing 'wet' signatures or by an order of the court. Unless either of the above are provided, the child will be known and addressed by their birth name as recorded on their birth certificate.

The school is under no obligation to do so, but we may effect an informal change of name if this is requested by the parent(s) for example:

- By verbally addressing a child with a familiar name which they prefer and/or recognise from home.
- Using this name on schoolbooks etc to support a child to recognise their personal autonomy.

It is important to note that the school's database, unless changed by direction from a court order, will reflect the child's name as stated at birth. In addition, and as stated above, any informal change of name addressing the child, is at the school's complete discretion after the school has considered all of the circumstances.

12. Access to school information

Key information is available on the Heltwate School website at www.heltwate.co.uk

Parents may also receive information contained in this policy by Class Dojo messaging or by email.

For parents who do not have access to the internet, paper copies of all communications can be requested from the school office by calling (01733) 262878.