



**Southern
Education
Trust**

ESTRANGED/SEPARATED PARENTS POLICY

As a trust, our ethos is encompassed in our vision statement

‘Making Lives Better’

and we commit to doing this through:



KINDNESS



COLLABORATION



CREATIVITY

Reviewed by: Chief Executive Officer
Adopted: May 2026
Review due: Summer 2029
Review cycle: Three years

Estranged/Separated Parents Policy

Parental separation can lead to some parents becoming estranged from their child and losing contact with school. When a parent loses contact with their child, this can be traumatic for the child, as they may worry about their parent's whereabouts and safety.

Within our Trust, we aim to build positive relationships with both parents in the best interests of their child. Research and experience indicate that whenever separated parents make a concerted effort to work well together and in partnership with school staff, the negative impact on children's overall well-being and academic attainment can be reduced.

This policy clarifies what is expected from separated parents and what can be reasonably expected from the school/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 e.g. a legally appointed guardian or the Local Authority named in a Care Order;
- Any person who has care of a child i.e. a person with whom the child resides and who looks after the child irrespective of the relationship e.g. step parent.

Who has "Parental Responsibility"?

For the most up to date guidance, visit the .GOV website:

[Parental rights and responsibilities: What parental responsibility is - GOV.UK](#)

What does having "care" of a child mean"?

Having care of a child or young person means that a person who the child lives with and who looks after the child, irrespective of their relationship with the child, is considered to be a parent in education law.

Parents, as defined above, are entitled to share in the decisions that are made about their child and to be treated equally by schools. However, we do expect estranged parents to co-operate and communicate with each other when making decisions about their child.

Our responsibilities

The Trust's priority is to promote the best interests of the child, working in partnership with parents.

Parents will be encouraged to resolve any issues around estrangement, contact and access to information without involving the school or Trust. Issues of estrangement are a civil/private matter, and the school or Trust cannot be involved in providing mediation, helping an estranged parent to communicate with their child or children, or using the school premises for purposes of contact.

In the event that parents are unable to agree with one another on decisions regarding their child's education, including placement, participation in extracurricular activities, and consent to assessment, the school will arrange a meeting with all parents (preferably together but separately if required) to assist the parents to resolve the situation; if it cannot be resolved, the school may refer the matter to Social Care.

The interests of the child will always be paramount when deciding whether to accommodate a request from an estranged parent.

The Trust will always make a safeguarding referral if it believes the health, wellbeing or safety of a child is at risk.

Communication

It is the responsibility of parents to inform the school when there is a change in family circumstances that may affect the child. The school will work with its staff, within the bounds of confidentiality, to ensure suitable support can be offered.

Who should be listed as the primary contact on the school's records?

The Primary Contact will be the parent that the child normally lives with for the majority of the school week. This may vary, for example where a child has shared residency with each parent. We ask parents to update us regularly if shared care arrangements change.

The Primary Contact will be informed/contacted if the school needs to contact someone urgently. In the case of shared residency, we will contact the parent with whom we understand the child to be residing with at that time. It is vital that parents keep the school up to date with this information.

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 evidence to the contrary is provided. Parents are expected to give names and contact details for everyone who has parental responsibility. This information is recorded on the school enrolment documentation and it is updated regularly when the school asks for families to update their personal information.

Day to Day Matters

For day to day issues and communications (e.g. absence from school or lateness, sports days), the school's point of contact will be the child's resident parent, unless told otherwise. The non-resident parent will not be contacted. Meetings to discuss day to day issues will be held with the resident parent.

Access to School Information

Newsletters and general school updates are sent via email and/or text to all parents for whom the school has up-to-date contact details. These updates contain all the main class/school events, including productions, sports days, parents' evenings and class trips.

Parent Consultation Evenings

With respect to parent consultation evenings, we would expect parents to communicate regarding these arrangements. Schools will consider separate appointments but by prior agreement only or when a court order is in place restricting contacts with both parents.

Performances, School Photographs etc

We expect that parents should liaise and communicate directly with each other in matters requiring parental involvement such as the ordering of school items; tickets for performances and other instances.

Should there be availability, the school office is able to deal with separate requests made by separated, divorced or estranged parents who have parental responsibility.

School Trips and Events

Consent for school trips will be required from either parent on the condition that they have parental responsibility.

If parents do not agree to consent, the school will have to assume consent has NOT been given for an activity or event. We will inform the parent who the child resides with regarding the issue and it will be the parent's responsibility to come to an agreement about consent.

School Reports

A parent, as defined in this policy, has the right to receive progress reports and review pupil records of their children. The exception to this is with regard to GDPR legislation around the age a child must give permission for their records to be shared. In this case, the law would supersede parental right.

If the parents are separated or divorced, progress reports will be sent to both parents.

The school can only send copies of the progress reports to the parent with whom the child does not reside if the school has up-to-date contact information. It is the responsibility of the non-resident parent to keep their contact information up to date.

Medical Treatment

When a child requires medical treatment, parents will be contacted in the order listed on the Data Collection form agreed at the beginning of the year.

It will be the responsibility of the parent who is contacted to inform others with parental responsibility about the incident.

Collection of Children from School

Schools will follow their standard procedure regarding collection from school.

In the case of separated parents, the school will release a child or children to a parent in accordance with any specific arrangements notified to the school.

We expect separated or estranged parents to agree on collection arrangements to minimise distress and confusion for their child, and to support the school not being drawn into disputes. 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 Head Teacher or a member of the Senior Leadership Team will meet with the parent seeking to collect/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 verbally.
- In the event that the parent to whom the child would normally be released cannot be reached, the Head Teacher or member of the Senior Leadership Team dealing with the issue will make a decision based upon all relevant information available to him/her.
- The Head Teacher or member of the Senior Leadership Team may have to refuse permission if agreement/consent cannot be obtained and may need to take advice before a child is collected/released.
- If there is a Court Order restricting contact or it is in contravention of any access agreement, the child will not be released into their care and the other parent advised to take necessary action.
- In circumstances where there is a belief that a possible abduction of the child may occur, the police will be notified.

The School cannot prevent the other parent collecting the child or children but we will endeavour to reach an agreement and this may mean keeping the child or children safe whilst we try and reach such an agreement.

Changing a surname

The department for Education guidance states:

A change of surname is a private law matter and should be resolved between parents. Where one parent seeks to change the surname by which their child is known, schools should ensure that they do not change the surname without written evidence that consent has been given by the other parent or by anyone else who has parental responsibility for the child. Schools should source this evidence independent of the parent seeking to make the change. Regulation 5(1)(a) of the Education (Pupil Registration) Regulations 2006 requires a school to record the full name of every pupil in alphabetical order in the admissions register. This means the child's full legal name and not any other name that the child is known by.

To comply with this guidance, all official correspondence relating to a pupil will use their legal name. This includes school reports and examination certificates. To facilitate this, pupils' legal names will be recorded on class registers. However, if a pupil uses a 'preferred name' then this can be used informally in school and teachers will refer to the pupil by this name. For example, pupils can use their preferred name on class exercise books. First names or nick names used must be appropriate. This should be recorded under the student notes section of the school's database (MIS).

Court orders

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.

A Court Order can restrict a parent having contact/access to information and the school may be bound by this.

Equality Impact

The Trust does all it can to ensure that its policies do not discriminate against pupils or others, either directly or indirectly, in line with any Equality Act 2010 protected characteristics.