

GUIDANCE FOR SEPARATED PARENTS



Date of revised policy approval	June 2026
Next review date	June 2027
Distribution to	All Staff
Owner of policy	Headteacher
Approved by	Staffing Governor's Committee
Reviewed and prepared by	SIMS Manager
Location of policy	HR Toolkit and School website

Guiding Principles

At Loreto Grammar School Altrincham, students, staff, parents and governors form a Catholic community. We aspire to create a caring, structured environment in which teaching and learning and the experience of school

- are characterised by joyful and loving service to others
- challenge each of us to realise our full potential in a spirit of joy and creativity
- encourage the pursuit of excellence
- uphold honesty, justice and mutual respect
- enable us to be questioning and “seekers of truth”
- prepare each of us to meet with confidence the challenges of a changing world
- improve and enrich the life of the wider community and enable us to be an example of Christian values in the world as witnesses to God’s Living Kingdom

Our values are centred in God, rooted in gospel values and derive from the vision of Mary Ward.

For the purposes of this guidance the terms ‘child’ and ‘children’ refer to pupils below the age of 18 years.

1. Introduction

Research and experience show that separated parents can work well together in the best interests of their children and together, can play a role in their children’s education. However, some parents are unable to work together effectively, compromising the best interests of their children, especially during the initial stages of their separation, and this is often traumatic for any children concerned.

2. Purpose

As a school, we understand that issues of family breakdown and separation can be fraught. This guidance is an attempt to minimise any impact of separation and to clarify to all parties what is expected from separated parents, the school and its staff.

3. Aims

- To act at all times in the best interests of the child;
- To support families, wherever possible, with the issues that separation may bring;
- To continue to work with families and involve all parents in the life of the school, in the best interests of the child, after separation;
- To remain neutral in difficult family circumstances.

4. Definitions

Parent

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

Become seekers of truth and doers of justice – Mary Ward

- all biological parents, whether they are married or not;
- any person who, although not a biological parent, has parental responsibility for a child;
- any person who, although not a biological parent and does not have parental responsibility, has care of a child.

Any disputes about whether a person is a 'parent' in this context are for the courts to decide.

Parental Responsibility

Parental responsibility means all the rights, duties, powers, responsibilities and authority that a parent has in relation to a child.

- A child's birth mother has parental responsibility unless it is removed by court order;
- If the mother and father of a child were married at the time of birth, they each have parental responsibility;
- If the father of the child was not married to the mother of the child at the time of the birth but they subsequently marry each other, he acquires parental responsibility;
- For children born to unmarried parents in England after 1 December 2003, where the father's name is on the birth certificate, he would usually have parental responsibility. Different dates apply to the other countries of the UK;
- Same-sex partners both have parental responsibility if they were civil partners at the time of the treatment;
- Where same sex partners are not civil partners, the second parent can acquire parental responsibility by becoming a civil partner of the other parent and either entering into a parental responsibility agreement or jointly registering the birth;
- Parental Responsibility can be acquired by a formal agreement or court order either by a biological parent, same-sex partners who are not civil partners, or by others.

For further guidance see www.gov.uk/parental-rights-responsibilities.

Care of a child

A person typically has care of a child if they are the person with whom the child lives, either full or part time and who looks after the child, irrespective of what their biological or legal relationship is with the child. However, it would not be appropriate to assume that someone having a casual relationship with the parent of a child necessarily has 'care of a child' and we would need to be satisfied that the person has significant involvement in the child's life before treating the person as a parent in education law.

5. Our process

It is the school's wish to promote the best interests of the child, working in partnership with all parents. However, where a parent's action, or proposed action, conflicts with our ability to act in the child's best interests, and the issue cannot be resolved, we may decline requests for action from one or more parents.

Parents are encouraged to resolve any issues relating to separation without involving the school directly. Such issues are a matter of private law and we cannot be involved in providing mediation, helping a separated parent to communicate with his/her child or using school premises for the purposes of contact. In the event of irreconcilable difficulties, parents should seek independent legal advice and, if necessary, take court action.

We recognise that separated parents have certain entitlements which cannot be restricted without a court order. Everyone who is a parent can participate in their child's education and receive information about their child whether they live with the child or not. As a school, we must treat all parents equally unless a court order limits a parent's ability to make educational decisions, participate in school life or receive information about their children. We do not have the power to act on the request of one parent to restrict the entitlements of another and there is no requirement for us to inform one parent about communications with the other parent.

Where a court order restricts a parent's contact or access to information, we will be bound by this. If this constitutes a safeguarding concern or where it appears that separation is having an adverse impact upon the health, wellbeing or safety of a child, we will seek advice from the relevant external providers.

Children can assume control over their personal information and restrict access to it from the age of 13. Once a young person attains the age of 18 years, she can make her own decisions about communications and the sharing of information with parents.

Collection of information

- In preparation for the child's admission to school, we will ask for parental contact details to be provided, including names and addresses, using our online Data Collection Form;
- We expect the parent completing the Data Collection Form to provide details of the other parent, if known, unless there is good reason for withholding the information;
- The information in the Data Collection Form detailing the relationship(s) to the child will be presumed to be correct unless a court order, original birth certificate or other evidence proving otherwise is provided;
- The child's address in the Data Collection Form will be presumed to be correct unless a court order proving otherwise is provided;
- We expect parents to keep their contact details up to date either by informing the school direct at info@loretogrammar.co.uk, via 'Contact Us' on the school's website, www.loretogrammar.co.uk or by using the 'Update Information' section of Edulink One (referred to below).

Issues and court orders relating to children

- We encourage parents to tell us, at an early stage, of any separation whether it has taken place prior to admission or whilst the child is at school. This will enable us to maintain accurate contact and other records and inform staff so that any necessary support can be offered to the child;
- Court orders preventing a parent's contact with a child should be provided without delay so that we can put measures in place to ensure that the child is not released to him/her;
- Where a separated parent is not the parent with whom the child usually resides and there is no court order in place, we are required to allow the child home with him/her. However, the Headteacher or Designated Safeguarding Lead is able to use discretion, particularly in the case of an unexpected or unusual request, and would seek clarification from the resident parent before allowing the child to leave the premises;
- If a person who is unknown to the school claims to be a parent and seeks contact with or information about his/her child, we will provide no contact or information unless and until we are satisfied that the person is a parent in education law and no court orders restrict his/her entitlement to contact or information;
- We expect parents to be courteous and respectful at all times in their dealings with school.

Communication and information sharing

- The vast majority of school communications are sent by email and all parents will receive these provided we hold an email address for them. This will include Interim, Final and Full school reports;
- All parents will be given access to EduLink One, a parental portal and communication app, where they will be able to view attendance information, class and examination timetables, and communications relating to their child;
- Some communications together with newsletters and information about events and trips are available on the school's website;
- Consent to activities and trips will be accepted from either parent and only one such parent needs to give consent;
- We expect that, wherever possible, separated parents will attend their child's Parents' Evening appointments together and we cannot offer two appointments as a matter of course for all separated couples. We will consider separate appointments only when a court order is in place restricting contact between both parents. However, we have no obligation to offer this arrangement;
- We expect separated parents to liaise and communicate directly with each other in matters such as the ordering of school photographs and tickets for performances;
- When we need to contact parents, including in case of an accident or emergency, we will telephone the child's contacts in the order of priority given in the Data Collection Form.

6. Management of the process

The Headteacher/Designated Safeguarding Lead will familiarise themselves with this process and ensure all staff, governors and volunteers are aware of the procedures to follow should the need occur. This guidance will be published on the school's website.