

Archbishop Cranmer C of E Academy

'Striving for life in all its fullness' John 10:10

Standard for Separated Parents



This standard takes into account the government's explanation of [parental rights and responsibilities](#) and the Department for Education's (DfE) [guidance](#) on understanding and dealing with issues relating to parental responsibility. Government guidance outlines parental responsibility as:

- All mothers and most fathers legal rights and responsibilities as a parent, which include:
 - Providing a home for the child
 - Protecting and maintaining the child
 - Disciplining the child
 - Choosing and providing for the child's education
 - Agreeing to the child's medical treatment
 - Naming the child and agreeing to any change of name
 - Looking after the child's property.

Introduction

At Archbishop Cranmer C of E Primary Academy, we aim to maintain contact with both parents in the best interests of their child(ren). This standard 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 the regards to a child or children who have already been admitted to the school.

The person(s) with parental responsibility who applied for 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 the child. Where this has not happened, the school welcomes direct contact from those with parental responsibility providing their own details. However, the school cannot be held responsible for excluding a parent or person with parental responsibility if the information has not been provided.

If parents separate whilst their child/ren already attend the school, the parents or carers must notify the school immediately so that the school can ensure continuing contact with both parents and, in the event that the parents or carers have separated on an acrimonious basis, the school will endeavour to accommodate each parent or carer separately in terms of communications and any attendances at the school.

Definition of 'Parent'

The definition of 'parent' for school purposes is defined in section 576 of The Education Act 1996 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 step-parent, guardian or other relative;
- 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 full or part time 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 friends 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 above, are entitled to share in the decisions about the child's education and to be treated equally by schools. In particular, these entitlements include, but are not limited to:

- Receiving copies of school reports;

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- Having access to school records;
- Attending parent/carer meetings;
- Receiving newsletters, invitations to school events and information about school trips;
- Receiving school photographs relating to the child;
- Participation in any exclusion procedure;
- Dealing with any medical issues that arise and/or vaccinations that may be offered.

At Archbishop Cranmer we recognise 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/ carers are involved in proceedings before the court directly relating to the child(ren), the parents/ carers should seek the court's permission to disclose the court order(s) made to the school. In addition, and should the courts so require, the school will be willing to provide a letter setting out any information that is specified in a court order.

Parental Responsibility

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

The information provided to the school when the child/ren 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. At Archbishop Cranmer we are 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 we are provided with a copy of a court order setting out arrangements for where the child should live.

Every parent/ carer with parental responsibility for a child has an equal right to be engaged with decisions regarding their education. Unless there is a court order limited an individual's exercise of parental responsibility, the school must treat all parents/ carers 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 if a parent asks for their own contact details to be removed.

Court Orders

At Archbishop Cranmer our sole wish is to promote the best interests of the child, working in partnership with all parents and/or those with parental responsibility. If there is a court order in place, we will always act in ways to ensure that no court order is breached. We can only be expected to comply with an order if it is properly notified and has received a sealed digital or paper copy for our files, and only to the extent that it relates to the school.

At Archbishop Cranmer we have no responsibility for enforcing any court order but 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 of the parents and/or those with parental responsibility inform the school then if there is any breach of such an order, the school cannot be held responsible and/or liable.

Disputes and Disagreements

At Archbishop Cranmer we hope that parents and all those with parental responsibility will support the school in working together for the benefit of their child/ren.

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It is very important to note that any dispute between parents sharing these rights will need to be resolved between them. In all case 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 resolve those issues, either by agreement or by obtaining a court order.

Parents should seek to resolve contact issues without involvement of the school. The school will not mediate, 'take sides' or act as an intermediary between parents who do not communicate with each other.

Changes in Family Circumstances

We ask parents to inform the school whenever something outside school – such as a change in family circumstances – occurs so that we can sensitively support the child in school. We expect parents to update us whenever emergency contact details change for one or both parents and/or there is a new arrangement for collecting child/ren at the end of the school day, in particular if there is any court order that has been made.

We recognise the sensitivity of some 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 to the child/ren.

The Release of Child/ren

On being admitted to Archbishop Cranmer, and unless notified to the contrary, teaching staff will release children to either or both parents and/or those with parental responsibility and/or those with care of the child. 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 deputy headteacher 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 to immediately be confirmed in writing to ensure there is record on the school's files), the child may be released and the records will reflect that the permission was granted.
- In the event that the parent to whom the child would normally be released to cannot be reached, the Headteacher or deputy headteacher dealing with the issue may make a decision based upon all relevant information available to him/her.
- The Headteacher or deputy headteacher may have to refuse permission if consent cannot be obtained.
- During any discussion or communication with parents and/or those with parental responsibility, the child may be supervised by an appropriate member of school staff in a separate room.
- In extreme circumstances 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.

Communication Between School and Separated Parents

Newsletters, letters and general updates are sent via Scholar Pack Comms to all parents and/or those who have parental responsibility for whom we have up-to-date contact details and are listed as 'Contact 1'. These updates contain all of the main class and school events, including parents' evenings, sports days and class visits and events.

At Archbishop Cranmer we are able to deal with separate requests for initiations to school events and performances made by separated, divorced or estranged parents who have parental responsibility. However, we would be grateful if parents could communicate directly on such matters if they can, although in some instances we recognise that this may not be possible should there be a court order in place preventing the parties from contacting one another. We will always aim to comply with requests, however, in certain circumstances and as stated above, this will not always be possible. For example, when a court order preventing contact with the child or each other is in place.

In all circumstances, we aim to maintain our open-door policy with all parents. Class teachers and the Headteacher, Mrs Melanie Stevens, will be available by appointment to discuss any issues.

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Parents' Evening Appointments

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

Written Pupil Reports

Any person who is known to the school to have parental responsibility for a child has the right to receive written progress reports for their child. These will be provided for separated, divorced or estranged parents who have parental responsibility and for whom the school has up-to-date contact details.

Change of Name

A parent can only change their child's name (forename and/or surname) either by both parents providing a letter confirming such 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 they may, effect an informal change of name if that is requested by the parent(s) for example (a) verbally addressing a child (b) name on books etc. It is important to note that the school database, unless changed by an order of the court, will reflect the child's name at birth. In addition, and as stated, any informal change of name addressing the child is at the school's complete discretion after the school has taken into account all of the circumstances.

Access to School Information

Key information is available on our school website (www.archbishopcranmer.co.uk). Parents may also receive information via Scholar Pack Comms email and text message.

For parents who do not have access to the internet, paper copies of communications may be requested from the school office.

Supporting Pupils

Going through parental separation is one of the most common Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) worldwide. The more ACEs a child experiences the greater the likelihood of victimisation and perpetration of abuse, the poorer lifelong health and opportunity. Putting a child in the middle of parental conflict (triangulation) has devastating lifelong impacts, where a child may experience:

- Depression or sadness
- Anxiety and agitation
- Low self-esteem
- What can appear as ADHD/ Autism / conduct disorder symptoms without neurological basis for the symptoms
- Risk taking behaviours
- Eating disorders
- Personality disorders
- Inability to maintain relationships
- Guilt in adult years
- Suppressed and repressed memories
- Sleeplessness
- Lack of focus
- Inability to describe their emotions

Triangulated children may develop coercive and controlling or compliant and co-dependent strategies to cope. Some may display protest behaviours such as shouting, kicking, hitting and damaging property. They may display a lot of anger towards the rejected parent and extended family members and this may extend to other authority figures.

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Early intervention can lead to better outcomes for children and significantly reduce the amount of support services required at later stages. Support is offered by:

- Understanding that having a relationship with both parents, where it is safe, is important for a child's long-term wellbeing and prospects. We recognise that children need as much love from both parents as possible.
- Staying neutral. Both parents have the right to be informed about their child's progress and be involved in making important decisions unless a court order or social services specifically states otherwise.
- Following the above standard for separated parents to ensure that communication includes both parents.
- Ensuring that the child's right to their identity is maintained.
- Educating children on respectful and caring relationships – as supported by our RHE curriculum.
- Reporting any concerns about the child to the Designated Safeguarding Lead (Mel Stevens or Eleanor Hodgson).
- Providing nurture support through SEAL and circle time, ELSA support, referral to Mental Health Support Team or CAHMs (via Mental Health and Wellbeing Lead: Eleanor Hodgson).

Teaching staff recognise the potential emotional trauma and impact on wellbeing that a separation can have on a pupil. Decisions for additional support will be made in partnership with parents to ensure that the child can receive appropriate support.

Written: February 2022

Review: February 2024

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