

# Hiltingbury Junior School

## Separated Parents Policy

Approved: March 2017



## **Aim**

This policy provides clarification for separated parents whose children attend Hiltingbury Junior School.

Research and experience have shown that separated parents can work well together in the best interests of their children and can, together, play a role in their children's education. However, some parents become estranged, and do not work together or in the best interests of their children, especially during the initial stages of their separation. This is very often traumatic for any children concerned where personal family problems can have an impact on the child and on the schools the children attend.

This policy attempts to minimise any impact, clarify to all parties what is expected from separated parents and what can be expected from the school.

The policy has been developed using the following government advice:

*Understanding and dealing with issues relating to parental responsibility*

*Departmental advice for maintained schools, maintained nursery schools, academies, free schools, local authorities and dioceses*

*January 2016*

When this government advice changes (2019) then the policy will be updated.

### **'Who is a parent?'**

For the purposes of education law, section 576 of the Education Act 1996 defines a 'parent' as:

- All natural (biological) parents, whether they are married or not;
- Any person who, although not a natural parent, has parental responsibility for a child or young person (this could be a step-parent, guardian or other relative);
- Any person who, although not a natural parent, has care of a child or young person. A person has care of a child or young person if they are the person with whom the child lives and who looks after the child, irrespective of what their relationship is with the child.

## **Parents and Court orders**

Court orders under section 8 of the Children Act 1989 (often called section 8 orders) settle areas of dispute in relation to the exercise of parental responsibility or a child's care or upbringing, and can limit how an individual exercises their parental responsibility.

Parents should, therefore, ensure that Hiltingbury Junior School is provided with a copy of the most recent court order in place, so that the school's duties in respect of child safeguarding are supported.

The school is advised to follow the detail of the court order wherever possible, unless they believe the child's welfare is under threat.

## **Initial 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 a court order or original birth certificate proving otherwise is provided to the school. Similarly, the information provided on the address(es) where the child resides will be presumed to be correct unless a court order proving otherwise is provided to the school.

## **Guiding principles**

In any case of parental dispute, Hiltingbury Junior School will always consider the welfare and needs of the child. We do not seek to make any judgements about a particular parent or take sides in a dispute.

Hiltingbury Junior School will treat all parents equally, unless there is a court order limiting an individual's exercise of parental responsibility. Everyone who is a parent, as defined under education law, has a right to participate in decisions about a child's education and receive information about the child (even though, for day-to-day purposes, the school's main contact is likely to be a parent with whom the child lives on school days).

## **Education**

In the event that the parents are unable to agree with one another on decisions regarding their child's educational programme, including, for example, placement, participation in extracurricular activities, and consent to evaluation and services, the school will arrange a meeting with all parents (preferably together or separately if required) to attempt to assist the parents to resolve the situation; if it cannot be resolved the school may refer the matter to the relevant department of the Local Authority.

## **School reports**

A separate copy of the school report will be sent to parents who are separated. This must be requested in advance. The extra report will be sent home with the child unless a stamped addressed envelope and specific instructions are left with the school office

## **Information**

### **School:**

The school is able to inform separated parents about 'school life' through various means. Please leave a relevant email address with the school office. The school website is accessible for all parents and is regularly updated.

### **Specific :**

Should the parent who is not the main carer seek information or access to his/her child, the school will always inform the main carer of this and ensure no court order is in place preventing this. For the avoidance of doubt, we will seek written confirmation from the main carer. Proof of identity of the non-resident parent will always be required in these cases.

## **Parent Consultations**

### **Consultations:**

The school will offer one formal consultation for each child which parents are invited to attend. The school would encourage separated parents to attend together so that the same messages are heard about the child's progress.

### **Booking:**

The school operates an on line electronic booking system. This is an open system that allows both parents to book the one available slot. The school would recommend that (where appropriate) parents take turns across the school year in booking the slot for their child.

## **Payments**

For any payments owed to the school only one bill can be issued. (This could be for school trips, dinner money, peripatetic music lessons, before and after school care etc.) This bill will be sent to the parent(s) listed as priority 1 on the school system. The school is not responsible for how the bill should be split between each parent.

**Consent**

For any school trips, after school sports or other such events, either parent can give permission (unless a court order states otherwise).

**Participation in statutory activities (for example elections for parent governor, OFSTED questionnaires)**

In this case, both parents would be informed and may take part unless a court order states otherwise.

**Meetings involving your child**

Both parents will be informed about a specific meeting about your child (unless a court order states otherwise).

**Collecting a child after school**

Where there is no court order, we would expect the parents to come to a reasoned decision about who should be collecting their child from school. Where a court order exists, the school would follow the guidance laid down in the court order as to which parent should collect on a particular day. If the school has a serious concern about the welfare of the child then the school may keep the child at school whilst the relevant authorities are contacted.

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**For Review: 2019**