

Michael Hall

a Steiner Waldorf School

Working with Separated Parents Policy

Policy Owner	SLT
Formally endorsed by	Director of Operations
Endorsement Date	February 2019
Next Review Date	February 2020

POLICY STATEMENT

At Michael Hall School we recognise that while some parents may be divorced or separated, both have a right to be informed of, and involved in, their child's educational progress.

Evidence shows that after separation children do best when those around them cooperate, provide stability, and avoid conflict. We understand that this can be difficult and parents can become estranged. Our aim is to work with all parties to promote positive family involvement. This policy clarifies what is expected from separated parents and carers, the School and its staff.

The Definition of a 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:

- all natural parents, including those that are not married;
- any person who has parental responsibility but is not a natural parent eg a legally appointed guardian or the Local Authority named in a Care Order; or
- 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.

Who has 'Parental Responsibility?' (The Children Act 1989)

- All mothers automatically have parental responsibility;
- If the parents of a child were married/in a civil partnership at the time of birth, both parents automatically have parental responsibility;
- For children born after 1 December 2003 to unmarried parents, where the father's name is on the birth certificate, both the mother and father would usually have automatic parental responsibility; and
- In all other cases, parents seeking parental responsibility rights can acquire them through various legal means.

Having parental responsibility means assuming all the rights, duties, powers, responsibilities and authority that a parent of a child has by law. People other than a child's natural parents can acquire parental responsibility through:

- being granted a Residence Order;
- being appointed a Guardian;
- being named in an Emergency Protection Order (although parental responsibility in such a case is limited to taking reasonable steps to safeguard or promote the child's welfare); or
- adopting a child.

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

Parents as defined above are entitled to share in the decisions that are made about their child and to be treated equally by schools. In particular, these entitlements include:

- appeals against admission decisions;
- Ofsted & school based questionnaires;
- participation in any exclusion procedure;

- attendance at parent meetings/school events; access to school records, copies of school reports, newsletters, invitations to school events, consent for school photographs of their child held/used and information about school trips. (There is more detail on this later in the policy.)

The School recognises that while the parents of some pupils may be separated they are entitled to the above and this entitlement cannot be restricted without a specific court order. In particular, the School does not have the power to act on the request of one parent to restrict another. The information provided to the School when the child is admitted, 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.

Our Responsibilities

The School fully recognises its responsibilities, and it is our sole wish to promote the best interests of the child, working in partnership with all parents. Michael Hall will maintain our open door policy with parents, and the relevant teacher(s) will be available by appointment to discuss any issues or concerns which separated/divorced estranged parents may have in relation to their child or children at the School.

Parents will be encouraged to resolve any issues around estrangement, contact and access to information without involving the School directly. Issues of estrangement is a civil/private law matter and Michael Hall School 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 the parents are unable to agree with one another and/or consent to decisions regarding their child's educational provision, (including but not limited to placement, participation in extracurricular activities, consent to evaluation, assessment and services). The School will arrange a meeting with all parents (preferably together but separately if required) and attempt to assist the parents in resolving the situation. If a resolution is not reached, the School may seek further guidance from external providers (mediators), which will be charged to the parents.

Communication

We encourage parents to tell us at an early stage if there is a change in family circumstances. Whenever possible, staff will be informed of such changes so that suitable support can be offered to students. We will, however, recognise the sensitivity of some situations and maintain the level of confidentiality requested by parents as far as possible.

Newsletters & general school updates are available to all parents via the school's website, parent portal and are also distributed via our students. These updates will contain all the main events within school including; festivals, productions, sports days etc.

When letters are sent to individual classes/students regarding subject specific trips/events, school photos etc, we would expect parents to communicate these messages to each other as and when appropriate. We would not expect to general messages and letters to be sent to both parents.

We expect that parents should liaise and communicate directly with each other in matters such as the ordering of School photographs; tickets for performances, enrichment activities and other instances.

We hold regular parent evenings for each class. These dates are published on the School Calendar and in the Friday Flier both of which are accessible via the School website. We would expect parents to communicate with each other regarding arrangements/appointments for these.

A parent, as defined in this policy, has the right to receive progress reports and review the pupil records of their children. If the parents are separated or divorced, progress reports will be made available to both parents via the parent portal. Information relating to attendance and exclusions will be communicated to both parents.