



Together we can make a Difference

Policy for Separated Parents

Name of school: Bexton Primary School

Date of review: Autumn 2026

New review date: Autumn 2029

Rationale

Research and experience have shown that separated parents can become particularly estranged, especially during the initial stages of a separation. This is often traumatic for the children concerned and can have an effect on their learning. This policy sets out to minimise this impact and clarify to all parties what is expected from separated parents and what can be expected from Bexton Primary School and its staff.

The Local Governing Body recognises that while the parents of some pupils may be separated, divorced or estranged, both are entitled to be informed of, and involved in, their child's educational process and this entitlement cannot be restricted without a court order.

The school's role is educational, not legal or mediatory. Staff will not mediate disputes between parents, take sides, or pass messages or opinions between parents. Where parents cannot resolve a disagreement between themselves, this policy sets out the school's approach, but the school is not able to provide legal advice; in complex or contested cases, the school will seek its own advice from the Trust or, where appropriate, the Local Authority.

Parental Responsibility

The information provided to the school when a child was enrolled, detailing who holds 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. The same applies to the address(es) at which the child is recorded as living.

As a general guide (this is not legal advice):

- a child's birth mother always has parental responsibility, unless this is removed by an adoption order;
- a father has parental responsibility if he was married to the mother at the time of the birth or afterwards, if he is named on the birth certificate (for births registered in England and Wales since 1 December 2003), or if he has a parental responsibility agreement or court order;
- a step-parent, other relative or carer may acquire parental responsibility through a parental responsibility agreement, a court order, or by adopting the child;
- both parents normally keep parental responsibility after separation or divorce, unless a court decides otherwise.

At Bexton Primary we work in partnership with all those who hold parental responsibility, unless directed otherwise by a court order. Where the school has not been told of such an order, neither parent will be treated as having rights superior to the other.

Where a court order (for example a Child Arrangements Order, Prohibited Steps Order, Specific Issue Order, non-molestation order or restraining order) affects a child's arrangements, contact or collection from school, parents must provide the school office with a copy. This will be stored confidentially and shared with relevant staff on a need-to-know basis only, in line with the school's Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy and Data Protection Policy.

Roles and Responsibilities

- **Headteacher:** holds overall responsibility for this policy; agrees any exception to the standard parents' evening arrangements; makes the final decision in contested child collection cases where the resident parent cannot be reached.
- **Designated Safeguarding Lead /Deputy DSL:** receives and safely stores copies of court orders, non-molestation orders and restraining orders; briefs relevant staff on a need-to-know basis; manages any safeguarding concern arising from parental conflict, in line with the Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy.
- **School Office:** keeps contact details and addresses for both parents up to date on the school's information systems (e.g. SIMs, Scopay); issues duplicate communications, consent forms and tickets on request.
- **Class Teachers:** deliver separate appointments where these have been arranged; remain professionally neutral; do not relay messages or opinions between parents; refer any concerns to the Designated Safeguarding Lead.

Parents' Responsibilities

- Inform the school promptly when there is a change in family circumstances. We need to be kept up to date with contact details, addresses, arrangements for collecting children, and emergency contacts.
- Provide the school office with a copy of any court order that affects arrangements for the child, including any order restricting a parent's contact with the child or with the other parent.
- Communicate directly with each other, wherever possible, on matters such as the ordering of school photographs, tickets for performances, and similar day-to-day arrangements. Except where set out in this policy, the school is not able to act as an intermediary for these requests, given the significantly increased workload this would represent.

Communication

- Newsletters can be sent to both parents via SCOPAY Newsletters cover the main events in school, including productions, sports days, parents' evenings and class trips. Most communications are sent electronically via SCOPAY; it is a parent's responsibility to sign up. Where communications are sent on paper, we expect parents to share these with each other as appropriate.
- School reports are sent electronically to priority 1 and 2 contacts via Insight tracking software. It is a parent's responsibility to ensure they are signed up to receive these.
- Both parents can have equal access to school information via SCOPAY, or may request in writing that additional copies of communications be posted to them.
- All parents are encouraged to use the school website, which holds back-dated bulletins and a range of information and links.
- The school maintains an open-door policy with both parents, and the class teacher will be available to discuss any issues by phone or by arranging a meeting.

Parents' Evenings

To protect staff workload, the school's standard offer is one joint parents' evening appointment per child, in both the autumn and spring terms, at which both parents are welcome together. If parents would prefer not to attend in person together, this same joint appointment can instead be attended online, with each parent joining from a different location; we would still expect parents to communicate with each other regarding these arrangements.

Except where the school holds a copy of a court order, or written police confirmation, restricting contact between the parents, we are not able to offer separate appointments in addition to this joint slot. Providing an additional appointment for every family in this situation would mean each class teacher running significantly more parents' evening sessions per cycle, which is not something the school has the staffing capacity to sustain.

Where the school does hold a court order or police confirmation of this kind, we will instead offer each parent a separate appointment at each parents' evening, so that both parents receive the same information about their child's progress each term. This relies on parents letting the school know in good time, so that separate slots can be planned into the schedule.

Staff will not be asked to relay one parent's comments or questions to the other and will keep each appointment focused on the child's progress rather than on the parents' relationship.

Any other variation to these arrangements — for example, additional meetings outside the usual parents' evenings — will only be offered in exceptional circumstances, and must be agreed in advance with the Headteacher.

Educational Decisions and Disagreements

Where parents are unable to agree with one another on decisions regarding their child's educational programme — including, but not limited to, placement, participation in extra-curricular activities, and consent to assessment or additional support — the school will arrange a meeting with both parents to try to resolve the situation. Where this cannot be resolved, the school may refer the matter to the relevant department of the Local Authority, or signpost parents to family mediation services.

Where a decision involves a child with SEND, the school's SEND Policy also applies; both parents with parental responsibility will be included in the process unless a court order says otherwise.

Collection and Removal of a Child from School

If one parent seeks to remove the child from school, and the parent with whom the child ordinarily lives 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, in that parent's presence, telephone the parent with whom the child ordinarily lives to explain the request.
- If the parent with whom the child ordinarily lives agrees, the child will be released, and the school's records will show that permission was granted orally.
- If that parent cannot be reached, the Headteacher or member of staff dealing with the matter may make a decision based on all the information available to them, and may need to refuse permission if consent cannot be obtained.
- The school cannot prevent a parent with parental responsibility from collecting a child, unless a court order restricting contact is held on file; where such an order applies, the child will not be released to that parent, and the other parent (or relevant authority) will be informed.

In extreme circumstances, where there is a belief that a possible abduction of the child may occur, or where a parent is behaving in a disruptive or threatening way, the police will be notified immediately and any concern will also be passed to the Designated Safeguarding Lead in line with the Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy.

Safeguarding

Parental separation can sometimes be linked to wider safeguarding concerns, including domestic abuse. Staff who become aware of such a concern, whether disclosed by a parent, a pupil, or observed directly, will report it to the Designated Safeguarding Lead without delay, in line with Keeping Children Safe in Education and the school's Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy. Staff will not attempt to investigate or resolve concerns of this kind themselves.

Monitoring and Review

This policy will be reviewed every three years or sooner if there is a significant change in legislation or guidance.

This policy should be read alongside:

- Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy
- Data Protection Policy
- SEND Policy
- Complaints Policy