



Separated Parents Policy (Ref 26 MPTSPP)



# Mosaic Partnership Trust

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### History of most recent policy changes

Version	Date	Page	Change	Origin of Change
V1.0	05/03/2025	Whole Document	Adoption by the Mosaic Partnership Trust and Implementation	Policy to support schools in the context of separated parents



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## Separated Parents Policy (Ref 26 MPTSP)

### 1.0 Introduction

This policy takes into account the following legislation:

- Children and Families Act 2014;
- Child Arrangement Order (Sc8 Children Act 1989);
- Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 2008;
- Private Fostering Arrangements (Children Act 1989, Private Fostering Regulations 2011);
- Special Guardianship Order (Regulations 2005 & 2016);
- Mosaic Partnership Trust Complaints Procedures.

We will also refer to the DfE guidance, updated August 2023: [Understanding and dealing with issues relating to parental responsibility - GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/understanding-and-dealing-with-issues-relating-to-parental-responsibility)

### 2.0 Context

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 may become estranged and therefore do not always work together or in the best interests of their children, especially during those 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. The basis for this policy is outlined below.

*"School and local authority staff 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 child. In most circumstances, the question a school must ask itself when making decisions is not just whether a parent holds parental responsibility but whether they are a parent under education law\*."*

*\*A parent under education law includes carers with whom a child lives.*

This policy summarises the legal framework and recommended guidance in respect of separated parents. This policy is an attempt to minimise any impact, clarify to all parties what is expected from separated parents and what can be expected from the Trust / school / staff.

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 e.g. a legally appointed guardian or the Local Authority named in a Care Order;
- Any person who has care of a child or young person 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, amended by the Children and Families Act 2014). Having parental responsibility means assuming all the rights, duties,



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powers, responsibilities and authority that a parent of a child has by law. Parental responsibility can be removed in some circumstances.

People other than a child's natural parents can acquire parental responsibility through:

- In the case of step-parents, in agreement with the child's mother (and other parent if that person also has parental responsibility for the child) or as a result of a court order
- Being granted a Child Arrangements Order;
- Being appointed a Guardian;
- Being granted a Residence Order;
- Being named in an Emergency Protection Order (although parental responsibility in a such a case is limited to taking reasonable steps to safeguard or promote the child's welfare);
- Being granted a care order not sure whether the two highlighted orders should be included as they are only granted to the LA – could say awarded to the Local Authority
- Being granted a Special Guardianship Order;
- Adopting a child.
- A parent by virtue of the human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 2008

If the parents of a child were not married to each other when the child was born, the mother automatically has parental responsibility; however, the father only has parental responsibility from 1st December 2003 and by jointly registering the birth of the child with the mother. He can, however, subsequently acquire parental responsibility by various legal means.

What does having "care" of a child mean? Having care of a child or young person means that a person who the child lives with and who looks after the child, irrespective of what their relationship is with the child, is considered to be a parent in education law. This could be shown by: Interaction with the school – attending meetings, making phone calls, being on the school's record as being involved (in whatever capacity) etc. Residence with the child where, for all intents and purposes, the person is part of the family, a man or woman married to a parent of a child.

For example:

- Are they listed on school records?
- Does the school have contact details for them?
- Do they meet with teachers/attend parents' evenings?
- Have they been involved with the measures designed to improve attendance?
- Do they contact the school on behalf of the child when s/he is ill?
- Do they live with the child?
- How long has the school known of them being connected with the child?
- Does the adult bring/collect the child to/from school?
- Is the adult married to the parent of the child?



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It would not be appropriate to assume that someone having a “casual” relationship with the parent of a child necessarily has ‘care of the child’ unless we have cause to believe the person has some involvement with the child’s life – living with the child could be a determining factor as could the other examples outlined above.

It is therefore those adults who are having significant input to a child’s life who can be classified as “parent”, having “parental responsibility” or who have “care of a child”. And as a school we will use this guideline when separated parents make contact.

Parents as defined above are entitled to share in the decisions that are made about their child and to be treated equally by schools. We aim to collaborate with parents in the best interests and listen to all parties.

**All parents** can also 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. There may be occasions when this school needs to decline requests for action from one or more parents.

Individuals who have parental responsibility for, or care of, a child have the same rights as biological parents. For example, to:

- receive information – such as pupil reports
- participate in statutory activities – such as voting in elections for parent governors
- be asked to give consent - such as to the child taking part in school trips
- be informed about meetings involving the child

Entitlements also include: -

- Appeal against admission decisions
- Ofsted & school-based questionnaires
- Attend parent meetings/school events
- Have access to school records, receive copies of school reports, newsletters, invitations to school events, school photographs relating to their child and information about school trips.

The Trust Board recognise 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 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.



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If parental responsibility, addresses and contacts are unclear, then the school will make reasonable enquiries to ascertain the information.

If a child is living with someone other than a close family relative e.g.- grandparent then this may be a private fostering arrangement and the local authority will need to be notified.

In any event and if at any time it appears that there is not anyone with parental responsibility who is caring for a child or if it is unclear, and we have taken reasonable steps to find out, we will involve the Local Authority to help clarify and resolve.

### **3.0 Responsibilities**

As a Trust we fully recognise our responsibilities, and through our Trust principles we will continue to promote the best interests of the child, working in partnership with all parents. Schools do not have the power to act on the request of one parent to restrict the other parent's involvement. Schools can only do so if there is a specific legal basis such as a court order, which is very rare. Each Mosaic Partnership Trust school will maintain our open door policy with all parents, and the class teacher and/or Head Teacher will be available to discuss any issues or concerns with regard to separated/divorce 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 our School directly. Issues of estrangement are a civil/private law matter and the 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.

If the parents are unable to agree with one another on decisions regarding their child's educational program, including but not limited to placement, participation in extracurricular activities, and consent to evaluation and services, the Trust and the school will not arbitrate and will ask parents to resolve the issues between themselves and to revert to the school with the solution.

In cases where there is continued conflict and this cannot be resolved, we will advise the aggrieved parent to pursue the matter through the Family Court.

The interests of the child will always be paramount when deciding whether to accommodate a request from an estranged parent.

We recognise that a Court Order can restrict a parent in having contact/access to information and we may be bound by this. In this situation we will consult with the Local Authority to obtain advice as this may constitute a safeguarding concern. In any event whereby the parents being estranged appears to impact upon the health, wellbeing and safety of a child the matter will be referred to the Local Authority for advice. Should there be any disagreement between this school and the parent this school may advise the parent to use the Trust's complaints process.



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It is the responsibility of the parents to inform the school when there is a change in family circumstances. Each School needs to be kept up to date with contact details, arrangements for collecting children and emergencies.

We encourage parents to tell us at the **earliest possible 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. We will, however, recognise the sensitivity of some situations and maintain the level of confidentiality requested by parents as far as possible.

Newsletters and general school updates can be sent to all parents via the school's chosen form of communication whether that be text, email or a combination of both. These updates will contain all the main events within school, including; productions, sports days, parents' evenings, class trips, etc. Occasionally letters are sent to individual classes. We would expect parents to communicate these messages to each other as and when appropriate.

All Mosaic Partnership Trust schools host parent consultation meetings. We would expect parents to communicate with each other regarding these arrangements. The school will consider separate appointments but by prior agreements only or when a court order is in place restricting contacts with both parents.

We expect that parents should liaise and communicate directly with each other in matters such as ordering school photographs; tickets for performances and other instances.

A parent as defined in Education law has the right to receive school reports and review pupil records of their children. If the parents are separated or divorced, school reports will be sent to both parents at the addresses in the school's records.

As a Trust we recognise the rights of respective parents' personal details including basic information i.e., name, address, telephone number, email, and personal viewpoints etc... Personal details should not be shared between the separated parents without prior consent.

### **4.0 Release of a child or children**

We will follow the standard agreed procedure in the release of a child or children. In the case of separated parents our School will release a child or children to a parent in accordance with any specific arrangements or a Court Order notified to the school.

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 Head Teacher, designated deputy or Designated Safeguarding Lead will contact 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, the child may be released, and the records will reflect that the permission was granted verbally.





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- In the event that the parent to whom the child would normally be released to cannot be reached, the Head Teacher or staff member dealing with the issue may make a decision based upon all relevant information available to them.
- The Head Teacher or staff member may have to refuse permission if agreement/consent cannot be obtained and may need to take advice before a child or children are collected / released.
- The School cannot prevent the other parent collecting the child or children, but we will endeavor to reach an agreement, and this may mean keeping the child or children safe whilst we try and reach such an agreement.
- If there is a Court Order restricting contact or it is in contravention of any access agreement, the child or children will not be released into their care and the other parent advised to take the necessary action which does not involve the school. If it is deemed necessary by the school to protect the child or children's health and welfare, the school shall immediately contact the police and the Local Authority where relevant.
- During any discussion or communication with parents, the child or children may be supervised by an appropriate member of school staff in a separate
- room to avoid causing any upset to the child or children.
- In circumstances if there is a belief that a possible abduction of the child may occur or if the parent is disruptive, the police and Local Authority Children Services should be notified immediately.

### 5.0 Support

We will try and assist parents where possible offering national and local support groups, and where they can get independent advice:

- [NSPCC | The UK children's charity | NSPCC](#)
- [Home | Gingerbread](#)
- [Finding support during divorce or separation | Family Lives](#)
- [Resources - Voices in The Middle - For Young People When Parents Split Up](#)

### 6.0 Management of the Policy

The Headteacher/Designated Safeguarding Lead(s) will need to familiarise themselves with this policy and ensure all Staff, ACC members and Volunteers are aware of the procedures to follow should the need occur.