



Separated Parents Policy

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Author/owner: Board of Trustees

Anticipated Review: December 2028

NB. 'Trustees' means the Directors referred to in the Trust's Articles of Association.

Introduction

History of most recent policy changes

Version	Date	Page	Change	Origin of Change e.g. TU request, Change in legislation
1	10.12.25		New policy adopted from Ventrus Divorced & Separated Parents Policy	Harmonisation on merger

Links to other Trust Policies

None

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AT A GLANCE

- All parents with parental responsibility (PR) have equal rights to information, involvement and access unless a court order states otherwise.
- THSP schools must remain neutral, avoid mediating disputes, and prioritise the welfare of the child above all.
- Schools must not restrict a parent's rights based solely on the request of another parent.
- Schools must communicate with both PR holders, provide duplicate information on request, and offer separate appointments where needed.
- Parents are responsible for resolving disputes privately; schools are responsible for safeguarding, not arbitration.

1. Purpose of this Policy

The Harbour Schools Partnership is committed to working positively with all parents and carers, including those who are separated, divorced, or otherwise living in different households.

This policy aims to:

- Provide clarity about **what schools will and will not do**
- Reduce unnecessary workload on staff
- Ensure a **consistent trust-wide approach** based on national guidance
- Maintain the **child's welfare** as the central consideration
- Ensure compliance with the **Education Act 1996**, the **Children Act 1989**, and DfE parental responsibility guidance

2. Who Counts as a Parent?

For education law purposes, a "parent" includes:

- **Biological parents** (married or unmarried)
- Anyone with **parental responsibility**
- Any adult who has **care of the child**, even without legal responsibility (e.g. kinship carers, foster carers)

This broad definition means several adults may legitimately receive information or be involved in school life.

Schools must not exclude a parent unless a **court order** explicitly restricts their involvement.

3. Parental Responsibility

Parental responsibility (PR) includes the legal rights, duties, powers and responsibilities of a parent. PR may arise through:

- Birth
- Being named on the birth certificate (after 1 Dec 2003 for fathers)
- Adoption
- Court orders
- Parental Responsibility Agreements
- Appointment as a guardian

Schools will assume PR details provided at admission are correct unless official documentation indicates otherwise.

Where PR is unclear (e.g. a private fostering arrangement), the school will seek Local Authority advice.

4. What THSP Schools MUST Do

Schools must:

- Treat all parents with PR equally, unless restricted by court order
- Send newsletters, reports and key information to all parents with PR
- Provide duplicate information where requested
- Offer separate parents' evening appointments when needed
- Allow both PR holders to attend events unless restricted
- Keep accurate, up-to-date contact details for all PR holders
- Consider the child's wishes and data rights (from age 12+, where competent)
- Seek clarification where a safeguarding issue may be present

5. What THSP Schools MUST NOT Do

Schools must not:

- Mediate or negotiate between parents
- Take sides or interpret legal disputes
- Prevent a parent exercising their legal rights at the request of another parent
- Facilitate or supervise contact between an estranged parent and child
- Provide legal advice
- Act as a communication channel between parents

Parents must resolve disputes privately or through legal processes.

6. Communication With Separated Parents

Schools will:

- Communicate routinely with **all parents who hold PR**
- Provide additional copies of correspondence if requested
- Encourage parents to share information between households
- Offer a named school contact for a non-resident parent where helpful
- Inform the other PR holder when one parent requests external agency involvement (unless unsafe)

Information will be handled sensitively, using a **strict need-to-know approach** within the staff team.

7. Parents' Evenings and School Events

Schools will:

- Provide **separate appointments** where parents cannot attend together
- Accommodate remote/online dual attendance where feasible
- Allocate event tickets fairly, within capacity
- Refuse attendance only where required by court order or due to safeguarding concerns

Parents are encouraged to reach their own arrangements, though the school will not mediate.

8. Release of Children

Unless arrangements specify otherwise, schools may release a child to:

- Any parent
- Any adult with PR
- Any adult authorised by a parent

If a parent seeks to collect in contradiction of existing arrangements:

1. A senior member of staff will speak with the parent and contact the other PR holder if possible
2. If consent is given, the child may be released
3. If consent cannot be obtained, the school may refuse release
4. If there is risk of harm or abduction, the school will contact the police and Local Authority safeguarding team
5. A child will not be released where a court order prohibits contact

During discussions, the child will be supervised in a safe space.

9. Change of Name

Schools must not change a child's legal name without:

- Written consent from all holders of PR, or
- A court order / enrolled deed poll

Schools may use a "known-as" name only where:

- No court order prohibits it,
- It is appropriate for the child,
- All PR holders have been given the opportunity to comment

10. Consent for School Activities

Schools may normally accept consent from *any* parent with PR.

However, **joint consent** is required where:

- The activity has long-term or significant impact (e.g. SRE withdrawal, overseas trip), or
- A parent has specifically requested to be consulted

Where parents disagree on consent:

- Staff must treat the situation as consent not given, in line with national guidance.

11. Removal From Roll / Moving Schools

Where one parent wishes to move the child:

- It is the **parents' responsibility** to discuss and agree the move
- Schools may ask whether the other parent is aware (for safeguarding reasons)
- Schools must **not** remove a child from roll where PR holders disagree
- Where disagreements arise, parents must seek a **court order**

12. Safeguarding and Wellbeing

Where parental conflict causes concern about:

- A child's emotional wellbeing
- Physical safety
- Stability of home arrangements
- Potential private fostering

...the school will consult the Local Authority and follow THSP safeguarding procedures.

The welfare of the child remains the overriding priority.

13. Review and Publication

- This policy will be published on all THSP school websites
- Headteachers and DSLs will ensure staff are aware of procedures
- The policy will be reviewed every **three years** or earlier if statutory guidance changes