Heath House Prep School

Separated Family Policy

When parents separate, it is a difficult situation for all concerned. The school understands that emotions run high, and this policy is designed to support the child's safety and welfare above all else, while providing a clear framework for how the school and staff will interact with separated parents.

This policy sets out the school's commitment and defines clear, mandatory expectations for parental conduct.

This policy has regard to the Children Act 1989, the Education Act 1996 and Department for Education guidance on understanding and dealing with issues relating to parental responsibility. It should be read alongside the school's Safeguarding Policy, Admissions Policy, Attendance and Pupil Welfare Policy and Data Protection Policy.

Parental Responsibility and Information Sharing

School's Requirements for Parents

Parents are expected to provide the school with accurate and up-to-date information relevant to the child's education, welfare and safety, including:

- details of those who have parental responsibility for, or care of, the child;
- information about the child's living and contact arrangements where this is relevant to the school's responsibilities;
- a copy of any current court order that may affect the child's education, collection arrangements, contact or the school's sharing of information, where the parent is permitted to provide this; and
- prompt notification of any relevant change in circumstances or court arrangements.

Where the school is informed of a court order but has not been provided with sufficient information to understand its effect, the school may request further information or seek appropriate legal advice before taking action.

For the purposes of education law, the definition of a parent may include a biological parent, a person with parental responsibility and a person who has care of the child. The school will recognise the rights of parents in accordance with education law and will treat parents fairly, subject to any applicable court order, statutory duty or safeguarding consideration. Where there is uncertainty about a person's rights or the effect of a court order, the school will seek appropriate advice.

Where a non-resident parent is entitled under education law to receive information about their child, the school will normally communicate with that parent directly and will not require the consent of the

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resident parent before doing so. The school may take reasonable steps to verify the person's identity and status as a parent before sharing information. Information may be withheld or limited where required by law, a court order, safeguarding considerations or data-protection obligations.

Collection and Contact Arrangements

Parents are responsible for informing the school of agreed collection arrangements and any relevant changes. The school will not normally become involved in disputes between separated parents about contact or collection arrangements. Where parents with relevant rights are unable to agree, they should seek independent legal advice or resolution through the family court where appropriate.

The school will follow any applicable court order of which it has been made aware. Where there is uncertainty, conflicting instructions, or a safeguarding concern regarding the collection of a child, the school will prioritise the child's welfare and safety, consult the Designated Safeguarding Lead where appropriate, and may seek legal or other professional advice before releasing the child.

Important Educational Decisions

Where the school is aware that separated parents with parental responsibility disagree about a significant decision affecting the child's education, the school will seek to avoid becoming the decision-maker in the parental dispute. Where appropriate, the school will seek the views of those with parental responsibility and will act in accordance with any applicable court order and its legal duties.

Significant decisions may include a proposed change of school, removal from the school, significant changes to educational provision or other matters likely to have a substantial or long-term impact on the child. Where parents remain unable to agree, they may be advised to seek independent legal advice or determination through the family court. The school will continue to prioritise the child's welfare and safeguarding throughout.

Changes to a Child's Name

Where a parent requests a change to the surname by which a child is known at school, the school will act in accordance with current Department for Education guidance and applicable family law. The school will normally require appropriate written evidence that all persons whose consent is required have agreed to the change, or evidence of an applicable court order. Where there is disagreement or uncertainty, the school will not determine the private family-law dispute and may seek legal advice.

Mandatory Code of Conduct and Enforcement

The welfare, safety, and emotional wellbeing of our pupils are paramount and non-negotiable. The school maintains a zero-tolerance policy for any parental behaviour that breaches our safeguarding rules, is aggressive, or is likely to cause distress or psychological harm to any child (including their own) or staff member.

Unacceptable Parental Conduct

The following behaviours are strictly prohibited on school premises, during school-related activities, or in any communication with school staff:

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- Aggressive or Hostile Behaviour: Any form of violence, verbal abuse, intimidation, harassment, or swearing directed at a child, staff member, or another parent.
- Breach of Confidentiality/Privacy: Seeking to involve staff in family disputes or asking them to take sides.
- Causing Distress to the Child: Engaging in disputes, arguments, or aggressive behaviour in the presence of the child (or any child) which could reasonably be expected to cause them distress, anxiety, or emotional harm.
- Breach of Safeguarding: Any act that violates the school's established child protection and safeguarding policies (e.g. unauthorised presence in restricted areas, attempts to remove a child in violation of a court order, or engaging in inappropriate conversations with pupils).
- Vexatious or Abusive Communication: Sending excessive, persistent, or abusive emails, calls, or letters to staff members.

Consequences of Policy Breach

Any breach of the Code of Conduct will result in immediate action to ensure safety and may progress through a phased sanction framework:

Phase	**Action by School**	**Purpose & Rationale**
Phase 1: First Breach	**Verbal and Written Warning.** Parent issued a formal letter outlining the specific breach and the expected standard of behaviour.	Immediate de-escalation and clear articulation of the mandatory standards.
Phase 2: Repeated Breach / Serious Single Incident	Restriction or Exclusion from School Premises. Where a parent's behaviour presents a risk to pupils, staff or the orderly operation of the school, the school may restrict or withdraw that person's permission to enter the school premises. Except where immediate temporary action is necessary to protect safety, the individual will be informed of the proposed restriction in writing and given an opportunity to make representations. Any decision to continue a restriction will be confirmed in writing and reviewed within a reasonable period. Appropriate alternative arrangements will be made, where necessary, to enable essential communication concerning the child.	To protect children and staff from harm, intimidation, or distress.

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Phase 3: Persistent Breach / Extreme Incident	Restriction of Communication. Where communication is persistently abusive, unreasonable or highly disruptive, the school may put proportionate arrangements in place to manage communication. These may include restricting communication to a specified method, designated member of staff, reasonable frequency or agreed times, or requiring communication to take place through an appropriate third party. Any restrictions will be kept under review and will not prevent the school from providing information that it is legally required to provide or communicating where necessary in relation to the child's education, welfare or safeguarding.	This is the final step to manage unreasonable behaviour and protect staff time and wellbeing, ensuring the child's educational provision is not compromised by parental conflict.
Safeguarding Breach	Safeguarding Response. Where a parent's behaviour gives rise to a safeguarding concern, staff will act in accordance with the school's Safeguarding Policy. Concerns will be reported to the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) or a deputy and, where appropriate, a referral will be made to Children's Social Care, the Police or another relevant statutory agency. Where a child is in immediate danger or at risk of immediate harm, appropriate emergency action will be taken.	Statutory duty to protect children from harm.

<u>Expectations for Parents and School Staff</u>

Parents are Expected to:

- Behave respectfully toward all school staff, pupils and other parents at all times.
- Utilise formal meeting slots for all discussions relating to separation. These meetings must be arranged in advance and conducted away from the child.
- Manage their separation conflict entirely outside of the school environment.

The School Will:

- Remain impartial in disputes between separated parents and focus decisions on the child's education, welfare and safeguarding;
- Communicate with parents fairly and respectfully, while recognising that arrangements may differ where required by law, a court order or safeguarding considerations;
- Have regard to and act in accordance with any court order relevant to the child's education, welfare or the school's responsibilities, while continuing to fulfil the school's statutory safeguarding and education duties;

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- Handle information about family circumstances sensitively and confidentially, sharing information only where there is a lawful and appropriate reason to do so, including where necessary to safeguard a child.

Internal use only

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