



“Every Opportunity for Every Child”

Alpha Trust

Separated Parents Policy



Alpha Trust Policy & Procedures No: AT 6

Committee:	Board of Trustees
Responsibility:	CEO
Policy created:	May 2022
Approved by Alpha Trustees:	July 2022
Review cycle:	Three years
Review due:	July 2025
Adopted by all Alpha Trust Academies	

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This policy was created in May 2022 and will be reviewed every 3 years



Alpha Trust Separated Parents Policy

Introduction

Alpha Trust and its schools recognise that separated parents can work well together in the best interests of their children and can together play an effective role in their children's education. However, it is also understood that some parents who are separated or who are undergoing the initial stages of their separation can become estranged which can often be difficult or traumatic for any children concerned. After separation, children do best when those around them co-operate, provide stability and avoid conflict and so, with this in mind, we will make every effort to work in partnership with parents to promote the welfare of children.

Aims of this policy

We aim to support families wherever we can with the issues that a separation may bring. However, we will remain neutral in difficult family circumstances.

The welfare and well-being of all our students is central to all we do and if we have any safeguarding or other concerns about a child then we will involve all adults with parental responsibility, as appropriate.

We wish to ensure our schools continue to work with families and to fully involve all those with parental responsibility in the life of the school, in the best interests of the child. To assist this, this policy clarifies what is expected from separated parents and what can be expected from our schools and their staff.

Definitions

Child, children, student:

For the purposes of this policy the terms 'child', 'children' or 'students' refers to all students below the age of 18.

Parent:

Parents may be recognised differently under education law than under family law. Section 576 of the Education Act 1996 states that a 'parent', in relation to a child or young person, includes any person who, although not a biological parent, has parental responsibility, or who has care of the child.

For the purposes of education law, the Department for Education considers a 'parent' to include:

- all biological parents, whether they are married or not
- any person who, although not a biological parent, has parental responsibility for a child or young person (e.g., an adoptive parent, a step-parent, guardian or other relative, or the Local Authority named in a Care Order)
- any person who, although not a biological parent and does not have parental responsibility, has care of a child or young person (i.e., a person with whom the child lives and who looks after the child, even though they do not have legal responsibility, e.g., a foster carer)

This is outlined in the DfE guidance on parental responsibility: [Department for Education \(DfE\) guidance on parental responsibility](#).

Parent rights:

Parents, as defined above, must be treated equally, unless there is a court order limiting an individual's exercise of parental responsibility. In the event that the school has not been granted access to a copy of such an order, neither parent will have rights superior to the other.

Individuals who have parental responsibility, or care for a child, have the same rights as biological parents. This includes the right to:

- Receive information (e.g., student reports, school events etc.).
- Participate in activities (e.g., elections for parent governors, Ofsted and school-based questionnaires).
- Give consent (e.g., for school trips).
- Be involved in meetings concerning the child (e.g., parent/teacher consultations, participate in an exclusion procedure, appeal against admission decisions).

There is more information in the DfE guidance at: [general principles for schools and local authorities](#).

Resident parent:

When parents separate, the resident parent is the parent the child lives with most of the time. If a child lives with each parent for an equal amount of time, both parents count as resident parents.

The Trust and its schools' responsibilities

- Trust schools will have arrangements in place to ask parents or guardians for the names and addresses of all parents when they register a student.
- The names and addresses of all parents, where known, are included in the admission register and in student records and are available to the student's teachers.
- The names and addresses of all parents are forwarded to any school to which the student moves.
- Details of court orders are noted in the student's records
- Where the address of a non-resident parent is unknown, the Executive Principal/Principal/ Headteacher/ Head of School will inform the resident parent that the non-resident parent is entitled to be involved in their child's education and request that information is passed on to them.
- The school will not make judgements about individual circumstances, and both parents will be treated equally.
- The school will always reserve the right to refuse entry or enter into communication with parents who are abusive and use inappropriate language or aggressive, coercive or any form of hostile behaviour towards any member of the school community (see also below, 'Disputes and Disagreements').
- In extreme circumstances, if there is a belief that a possible abduction of the child may occur or if the parent is threatening, the police will be notified and advice will be sought.

Responsibilities of parents

- Parents of children joining a Trust school will be requested to bring into school their child's birth certificate if it is necessary to ensure that their child(ren) are joining the correct year group or to help the school ascertain who has parental responsibility.
- Parents and partners may need to check who has official parental responsibility and provide evidence of this.
- Parents are responsible for informing the school when there is a change in family circumstances. We recognise the sensitivity of such situations and we will maintain any confidentiality requested by parents, as far as possible; the welfare of the child, however, is paramount.
- Where there is a court order in place, a copy needs to be sent to the school to be retained in its student records. Our schools will put measures in place to ensure the child is not released to any individuals named in the court order as persons who do not have parental responsibility.
- Parents who have joint custody of the child are requested to keep the school informed, in writing, of any disputes they have with each other regarding the collection of children (please also see below).
- If a leave of absence request form is received and signed by only one parent, the school will endeavour to seek confirmation that the other parent is aware.
- Children's welfare and safety are paramount, where there are issues over access to children, the parent with whom the child resides should contact the school immediately.
- The policy of the trust is that parents work together in the best interest of their child(ren), putting aside their personal differences for the betterment of the child(ren). It is only realistic and feasible to make use of the time available to discuss each child once per parent meeting or One Plan/EHCP review and we hope parents can make amicable arrangements to accommodate this.

There are, sometimes, unforeseen circumstances that necessitate separate meetings these can be, and are not limited to, legal barriers, safeguarding concerns and new situations. Each school within the trust has its own particular arrangements (please contact the relevant school) and under extenuating circumstances, separated parents have the opportunity to request alternative arrangements but it is under the discretion of the individual school, dependent on the availability of sufficient time and space and any other pertinent or relevant circumstances, that any request is granted.

Online appointments may also be made available

- Parents are expected to liaise and communicate directly with each other in matters such as the ordering of school photographs, tickets for performances and other such instances.
- The parent with whom the student resides (the main carer) is responsible for making all payments to the school for dinners educational visits and residential visits. The school will not pursue the non-resident parent for payments; the main carer is expected to collect any money from the non-resident parent.

Progress reports and student records

- Any parent has the right to receive progress reports and review student records of their child.
- If the parents are separated or divorced, progress reports will be sent to the parent and address, including email address, which are noted in the school's records as specifying

where the child resides with the expectation that they will share the report with the other parent.

- If the child is subject to a joint residence order and the school's records formally capture that the child resides at two addresses, then progress reports will be sent to both addresses.
- The school will send copies of the progress report to a parent with whom the child does not reside if that parent submits a written or electronic request for this to happen.

Collecting a child from school

- Where a separated parent has parental responsibility, and requests to take the child during or at the end of the school day, the resident parent will be asked to confirm that they are aware of this, providing a non-contact order is not in place.
- The Executive Principal/Principal/ Headteacher/ Head of School will exercise discretion on the decision to allow a child to leave the premises with a non-resident parent.

Obtaining consent for off-site activities

- If parental consent is required for outings or activities, the school will seek consent from the resident parent, unless the decision is likely to have a long-term and significant impact on the child or the non-resident parent has requested to be asked for consent in all such cases.
- In cases where the school considers it necessary to seek consent from both parents, it is possible that one gives consent and the other withholds it. In such cases, the school will assume that parental consent has not been given.

Name changes

- Parents are responsible for resolving potential conflicts about the change of a surname. There must be consent from both parents after divorce or separation for registering a change of name of a student. The school will ensure that the change in surname is supported by written evidence.
- A separated parent who has parental responsibility, but no longer lives with the child, may refuse to consent to changing the child's surname. In such cases, the parent wishing to change the child's name would need to apply to the courts for permission to do so.
- In circumstances where a name change has already been implemented by the school and it is in the interest of the child, who might be known by a new name, to refer back to a different name, the school will make a decision holding the best interests of the child under paramount consideration.

Disputes and disagreements

- The school will maintain an open-door policy with both parents, however, disagreements between parents must be resolved between the parents and cannot be resolved by the school.
- Disputes between parents can be difficult for everybody involved in a child's education. In the event that the parents are unable to agree with one another on decisions regarding their

child's educational programme, including but not limited to placement and participation in extracurricular activities, the school will aim to reach consensus by facilitating a meeting with all parents. The guiding principle at any such meeting will be to ensure the best interests of the child are met

- Where, in the reasonable opinion of the school, the issue requiring parental consent is likely to have a long term and significant impact on the child, the school may require the consent of all those with parental responsibility for the child who are known to the school. An example of the circumstances where joint consent is likely to be required includes the decision to withdraw a child from sex education or religious education within the school curriculum. However, if unanimous consent is not obtained, the child's school experience will mirror that of their peers.
- The Trust and its schools recognise that the tensions that can be generated in respect of the difference between wishes and feelings and best interests, may have long-term consequences for the child by, for instance, giving rise to parental alienating behaviour where one parent attempts to manipulate the child, usually psychologically, against the other parent so that the child aligns themselves with one parent's view and sides with them. Our schools will take this possibility into consideration when making educational and safeguarding decisions on behalf of the child. Our schools will work, where feasible, to ensure the best interests of the child at all times
- In extreme circumstances, if there is a belief that a possible abduction of the child may occur or if a parent is threatening, the police will be notified and advice sought