

Separated Parents Policy

North Leigh CE Primary School



Valuing Everyone in our school, in our community, in our world.

This policy was updated in December 2025.

The policy must be reviewed and updated at least every 36 months.

All children are provided with equal access to the curriculum. We aim to provide suitable learning opportunities regardless of gender, ethnicity or home background.

The impact of this policy on staff workload has been considered.

Signed

Ben McPherson
Headteacher

Sophie Warner
Chair of Governors

Date

24 November 2025

Separated Parents Policy

Review date: November 2025

Next Review Date: November 2028

Policy Statement

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 school staff.

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; or
- Any person who has care of a child i.e. a person with whom the child resides and who looks after the child irrespective of the relationship.

Rationale

Experience has shown that separated parents can work well together in the best interests of their children and can jointly play a role in their children's education. However, some parents become estranged and are unable to work together as effectively, compromising the best interests of their child/children.

Aims

- Some of the pupils in our care are members of families where parents have separated before they attended North Leigh Primary School, whilst many other pupils go through changes in family circumstances during their time here. We aim to support children wherever we can with the issues that a parental separation may bring.
- We will ensure the school continues to work with families and fully involve all those with parental responsibility in the life of the school, in the best interests of the child, after parents separate.
- We will remain neutral in difficult family circumstances and will not 'police' one parent for another. All children's welfare and well-being is central to all we do and if we have any such concerns about a child we will involve all adults with parental responsibility.

Lead Members of Staff

Whilst all staff have a responsibility to promote the wellbeing of students who may experience trauma due to their parents' relationship breakdown, staff with a specific, relevant remit include:

Mr Ben McPherson (Headteacher) - Designated Child Protection/Safeguarding Officer

Mrs Elizabeth Mason – Assistant Headteacher, Pastoral Lead – Deputy Designated Safeguarding Lead

Miss Emma Cuthbertson – SENDCo, Deputy Designated Safeguarding Lead

Parental Responsibility (The Children Act 1989)

At North Leigh Primary School, we recognise that while some parents may be divorced or separated, both have a right to be informed of, and involved in, their child's educational progress. In order to help us to look after children whilst they are in our care, North Leigh staff are required at the admissions stage to ask parents to provide certain information, such as the names of both parents, addresses, contact details etc. They are also required to ask who has Parental Responsibility for the child. This is

important because it allows the school to be sure who has the right to make decisions about a child's education and medical treatment. However, this is a very specific legal term and many parents may be unaware of how it is applied:

- All mothers automatically have Parental Responsibility.
- If a child's parents were married at the time of the birth, both parents automatically have Parental Responsibility. For children born from the 1st December 2003 where the father's name is on the birth certificate, the father and mother will both have Parental Responsibility.
- In all other cases, fathers are required to officially obtain Parental Responsibility.
- Parental Responsibility cannot be lost, except by legal adoption, although it does not guarantee contact. The information provided to school when the pupil was enrolled, detailing whether both parents have parental responsibility, will be presumed to be correct unless a court order or original birth certificate proving otherwise is provided to the school. It is the responsibility of parents to inform the school when there is a change in the family circumstances. We need to be kept up to date with contact details, arrangements for collecting children and emergencies.

Further guidance can be found here: www.gov.uk/parental-rights-reponsibilities

Parents as defined above are entitled to share in the decisions that are made about their child and to be treated equally by schools. In particular, these entitlements include:

- Appeal against admission decisions;
- Ofsted & school based questionnaires;
- Participation in any exclusion procedure;
- Attendance at parent meetings/school events;
- Access to school records and copies of school reports, newsletters, invitations to school events, school photographs relating to their child and information about school trips.

This entitlement cannot be restricted without a specific court order. The school does not have the power to act simply on the request of one parent to restrict another. The school will not seek to make judgements about individual circumstances but will treat both parents equally unless there is a specific ruling in existence. Staff will never pass judgement on either parent to the child. We will maintain our open door policy with all parents, and the class teacher, Head Teacher and/or HSLW will be available by appointment to discuss any issues. The school is under no obligation to inform the resident parent of the absent parent contacting the school. Any such information will be given at the discretion of the Head Teacher.

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

Court Orders

Upon receipt of any court order restricting access to a parent, the school retains the right to consult the Local Authority/Locality and Community Support Service before taking immediate action. The school is only obliged to comply with an order if it is properly notified and has received a copy for its files, and only to the extent that it relates to the school. In the event that the school is not informed of

the existence of such an order, neither parent will have rights superior to the other. Only a Court Order stating the arrangements is deemed to be valid; a letter from a solicitor is not sufficient.

Where court orders are in place, relevant staff will be made aware of stipulations of a court order.

Our Responsibilities

The school fully recognises its responsibilities, and it is our sole wish to promote the best interests of the child, working in partnership with all parents.

Parents are expected to resolve any issues around estrangement, contact and access to information without involving the 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. 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 relevant external providers to obtain advice as this may constitute a safeguarding concern. In any event whereby the parents being estranged is appearing to impact upon the health, wellbeing or safety of a child, the matter will be referred to LCSS (Locality and Community Support Service) for advice. If the impact is of an emergency safeguarding nature, staff may report their concerns to MASH (Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub).

School Communications

The school recognises that, while the parents of some pupils may be divorced or separated, both have a right to be informed of, and involved in, their child's education. However, we expect that parents, whatever the nature of their separation, will do all they can to communicate with each other and share information from and for the school, for the benefit of their child. It is assumed that the parent with whom the child principally resides will keep the other parent informed.

Emergency text messages, which give information on cancelled activities and reminders, will be sent to the parent we believe has main responsibility for the child at that time. All diary dates, newsletters and routine communications are generally emailed out to all parents and are available on our website at www.northleighprimaryschool.org.uk

Parents are responsible for providing a correct email address. Occasionally paper letters are sent home with pupils and we expect parents to communicate these messages to each other as and when appropriate.

Under normal circumstances, we will hold one parent's evening appointment per child, twice a year, where both parents are welcome and we expect parents to communicate with each other regarding these arrangements. Under certain circumstances, the school can offer a separate appointment for estranged parents, but this must be arranged by the parents via the school office.

We expect parents to liaise and communicate directly with each other in matters such as the ordering of school photographs, residential/school visits, tickets for performances and other instances.

Both parents are entitled to receive progress reports and review their child's pupil records. Progress reports will be sent to both parents as long as request has been submitted to the office by either

parent that two copies are needed. Should an un-named parent seek information or access to his/her child, the school will always inform the main carer of this to check Parental Responsibility and ensure no court order is in place. For the avoidance of doubt, we will seek written confirmation from the main carer. Proof of identity of the non-resident parent will always be required in these cases.

Disagreements between parents must be resolved between the parents and cannot be resolved by the school.

Collecting a Child from School

The school will release children to parents in accordance with arrangements notified to the school. If one parent seeks to remove the child from school in contravention of the usual arrangements and the parent to whom the child would normally be released has not notified the school of any change, the following steps will be followed:

- Where a separated parent, who has parental responsibility and no court order in place, wishes to take the child during or at the end of the school day, the resident parent will be contacted in order to ensure that they are in agreement with the arrangement. 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 orally. If the parent opposes the other parent wanting to take the child, then the school will advise that without a court order we cannot prevent them from doing so.
- In the event that the parent to whom the child would normally be released to cannot be reached, the Headteacher or staff member dealing with the issue will make a decision based upon all relevant information available to him/her.
- During any discussion or communication with parents, the child will be supervised by an appropriate member of school staff in a separate room.
- In extreme circumstances, if there is a belief that a possible abduction of the child may occur, we believe the child is at risk of serious harm or if the parent is disruptive, the police will be notified immediately.

Implementation

The Headteacher (Designated Safeguarding Lead) will familiarise themselves with this Policy and ensure all staff, governors and volunteers are aware of the procedures to follow if needed.

The Policy will be made available to parents and published on our school website.

Policy Review

This policy will be reviewed every 3 years as a minimum. It is next due for review in November 2028.

Additionally, this Policy will be reviewed and updated as appropriate on an ad hoc basis.