WORKING WITH SEPARATED PARENTS POLICY

Last Reviewed: 12 September 2025 by the DSL

Approved by the Headmaster

Next Review: 12 September 2027 by the DSL

Context

At Kew House School (KHS) we recognise that families come in many forms, and we are committed to ensuring that all children receive a warm, supportive, and consistent education regardless of their family structure. We believe that working collaboratively is the most effective way for separated parents to provide the best support for their children's educational and personal development. However, we are aware that separation can sometimes be challenging and may have emotional and practical impacts on children. This policy is designed to minimise any adverse effects, clarify the roles and responsibilities of separated parents, and set out what families can expect from our school in relation to their child's education and well-being.

This policy should be read alongside the school's Safeguarding & Child Protection Policy, Behaviour and Exclusions Policy, and Data Protection Policy, and with reference to *Keeping Children Safe in Education (2025)*.

Policy Aims

The aims of this policy are to:

- Ensure that children benefit from the shared involvement of both parents in their education, regardless of separation.
- Provide clear guidance on the responsibilities and expectations for separated parents in supporting their child's learning and well-being.
- Protect the child's interests by promoting consistent and open communication between the school and all parents holding parental responsibility.
- Outline procedures to be followed in situations where parental separation might impact school processes, including administration, communication, and the collection of children from school.

Key Policy Principles

- **Child-Centred Approach:** The well-being, safety, and educational progress of our children are paramount. All actions and decisions are made with the child's best interests at heart.
- **Equal Parental Responsibility:** In accordance with the Education Act 1996 and The Children Act 1989, all individuals with parental responsibility, whether natural parents, legally appointed guardians, or others with significant caregiving roles, are to be treated equally unless the school is provided with a Court Order limiting parental responsibility.
- **Collaborative Communication:** We expect separated parents to communicate with one another and with KHS to share important information regarding their child's education and welfare. In our view, clear, respectful dialogue benefits the child and supports a positive learning environment.
- **Confidentiality and Sensitivity:** While we encourage open communication, we also recognise the sensitive nature of family circumstances. The school will handle all information with the utmost confidentiality and care, sharing details only as required by law or with explicit parental consent. Staff cannot be asked to withhold information from one parent who has parental responsibility unless there is a valid Court Order to that effect.

- **Safe and Consistent Procedures:** From enrolment to daily school routines, procedures will be implemented in a manner that reflects the shared responsibilities of separated parents. This includes ensuring that school records, emergency contact information, and child collection arrangements are kept current and reflect the agreed-upon arrangements.

Definitions and Parental Responsibility

For the purposes of this policy, a "parent" is defined in line with the Education Act 1996 (section 576):

- All natural parents, whether married or not;
- Any person who has parental responsibility for a child or young person;
- Any person who has care of a child, i.e. lives with and looks after the child on a day-to-day basis.

Parental Responsibility: This encompasses all the rights, duties, and responsibilities a parent has under the law. It includes natural parents (whether married or not), legal guardians, and other individuals granted responsibility through legal means such as Residence Orders, Guardianships, or Adoption.

Having Care of a Child: A person who lives with the child and is actively involved in the child's daily care and education. Indicators of care include, but are not limited to:

  - Being listed on school records.
  - Attendance at school meetings and parent events.
  - Active participation in school communications.
  - Involvement in the child's day-to-day routines, such as drop-offs and collections.

This definition ensures that all individuals who significantly contribute to the child's upbringing are recognised and respected in our communications and decision-making processes.

Procedures and Expectations

Administration and Record Keeping

- **Updating Information:** It is the responsibility of parents to inform KHS of any changes in family circumstances, including updates to contact details, residential addresses, and changes in custody arrangements. Upon enrolment, parents are required to provide relevant legal documents (e.g. birth certificate, court orders, or other official documentation) to confirm details of parental responsibility.
- **Data Sheets:** Both parents' details should be provided and updated annually. Where only one parent accepts the offer of a school place, the school will still record the details of all individuals with parental responsibility (where known) and ensure that both are kept informed, unless restricted by a Court Order.

School Communication

- **Equal Access to Information:** The school will ensure that both parents are provided with equal access to school communications, including newsletters, event invitations, school reports, and emergency alerts. For example, medical alerts via our school app will be sent to both registered parents. Duplicate communications will be provided electronically where possible, in order to ensure equal access while managing administrative workload.
- **Information sharing:** Where information about the child, or a specific report, is requested by one parent, our default position will be to share this with both parents unless there are clear reasons why this should not be done (for example, a court order or an instruction from an external agency).
- **Parent Evenings**: At our calendared parent evenings, to ensure consistent messaging, parents will be expected to join the same parent meeting unless there is a court order that requires separate meetings. If one parent meets a member of staff independently of the other parent, the parent is expected to share a summary of the meeting with the parent who did not attend as per the parental contract.
- **Open-Door Policy:** Our teaching and support staff, including the Head of Year, the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL), the Deputy Head Pastoral and the Headmaster are available by appointment to discuss any issues related to a child's education. We encourage parents to resolve any interpersonal communication issues independently; however, should a dispute arise that affects the child's well-being, the school will arrange a meeting with all involved parties.
- **Conflict Resolution:** In circumstances where parents cannot agree on decisions concerning their child's educational programme or extra-curricular activities, the school will attempt to facilitate a joint meeting with all parents. If an agreement cannot be reached, the matter may be referred to the relevant department of the Local Authority for further advice. The school cannot mediate parental disputes beyond their impact on the child's education and welfare. Parents may need to seek external mediation or legal advice if disagreements persist.
- **Information log:** In complex cases, such as when the Family Court is involved, a formal communication log will be kept on MyConcern to ensure consistency and transparency for all parties involved.

Collection of Children from School

- **Collection Arrangements:** Parents are required to provide information to the school at the start of each academic year, detailing who is authorised to collect the child from school. This information must be updated promptly if there are any changes.
- **Safe Release Procedures:** When releasing a child, school staff will verify the identity of the person collecting the child, in line with the provided details. In the event of a dispute or if one parent wishes to deviate from the standard arrangements, the designated member of the Senior Leadership Team will:
    - Contact the parent who normally collects the child for confirmation.
    - Seek verbal confirmation if both parents agree to a change.
    - If no agreement is reached, follow the established safeguarding procedures and consult with the Local Authority if necessary.

  Where parents cannot agree on who should be collecting the child, the school will not release the child until clarity is provided. The school's safeguarding duty will always take precedence over parental preference and external agencies such as Hounslow Children's Services may need to be involved.
- **Court Orders:** Should a court order be in place restricting access to one parent, the school will adhere strictly to the order once it is provided in full, and will consult with the Local Authority to ensure the child's safety. Please note that only a Court Order stating the arrangements is deemed to be valid; a letter from a solicitor is not sufficient.

Management and Review

- **Responsibility:** The Deputy Head Pastoral and Designated Safeguarding Lead will ensure that this policy is well understood by all staff, governors, and volunteers. Updates will be provided to ensure that everyone is equipped to handle situations involving separated parents. All staff will receive periodic training on managing issues relating to separated parents, including safeguarding considerations and legal responsibilities.
- **Communication:** Parents should direct concerns regarding disputes or access arrangements to the Deputy Head Pastoral or Designated Safeguarding Lead in the first instance, rather than to individual class teachers.
- **Policy Availability:** This policy will be made available to all parents and published on the school website to ensure transparency.
- **Review Cycle:** The policy will be reviewed annually. The next scheduled review is in September 2026, with any necessary updates implemented promptly to reflect changes in legislation or school practice.

By adopting this policy, KHS reaffirms its commitment to ensuring that all parents, regardless of their personal circumstances, are supported in their shared responsibility for their child's education. We believe that through clear communication, consistent procedures, and a strong focus on the child's best interests, we can create a positive educational environment for every student.