



# ST. JOSEPH'S COLLEGE

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## Separated Parent Policy

St Joseph's College recognises 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.

### Parental Responsibility

To help us to look after children whilst they are in our care, St Joseph's College staff are required at the admissions stage to ask parents to provide certain information, such as the name of both parents, address, contact details, etc. They are also required to ask who else may have Parental Responsibility for the child. This is important because it allows the College to be sure who has the right to make decisions about a child's education and medical treatment.

'Parental Responsibility' is a very specific legal term encompassing the legal rights, duties, powers and responsibilities that parents have with regards to their child. We are aware that many parents may be unaware of how it is applied and have therefore set out some examples below:

- Natural mothers automatically have Parental Responsibility for their child from birth.
- If a child's parents were married at the time of the birth, both parents will automatically have Parental Responsibility and they will both retain Parental Responsibility if they subsequently divorce.
- For children born after 1 December 2003 to parents who are not married at the time of the birth, a natural father may gain Parental Responsibility by registering the child's birth jointly with the child's natural mother.
- Natural fathers may otherwise gain Parental Responsibility by subsequently marrying the child's mother or by getting a Parental Responsibility agreement with the mother or by obtaining a court order conferring Parental Responsibility on them.
- In the case of an adopted child, the adoption will confer Parental Responsibility on the adoptive parent(s). If, following adoption, the child will not reside with a natural parent, that parent will cease to hold Parental Responsibility.
- Where a surrogate is used, a child's parents can gain Parental Responsibility either through a parental order or through formal adoption after the child has been born.
- In the case of a same-sex parenting couples where the child is not adopted, both parents will have Parental Responsibility if they were civil partners at the time of the relevant treatment (e.g. insemination). If they are not civil partners, parents may gain Parental Responsibility by getting a Parental Responsibility agreement or by jointly registering the birth.
- Parental Responsibility cannot be lost, except where a child no longer resides with a natural parent following adoption, although this does not guarantee contact.



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The information provided to the College 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 College. It is the responsibility of parents to inform the College when there is a change in the family's circumstances (as outlined in the Parent Contract, clause 4.(c).(i)). We need to be kept up to date with contact details, arrangements for collecting children and emergencies.

Parents with Parental Responsibility are entitled to share in the decisions that are made about their child and to receive information about their child, including in relation to their child's education. In particular, these entitlements include the right to:

- to receive information about their child such as their College reports;
- give consent for, example, in relation to their child taking part in a particular educational visit; and
- be informed about meetings concerning the child such as those involving an exclusion or appeal.

This entitlement cannot be restricted without a specific Court Order. The College does not have the power to act simply on the request of one parent to restrict another. The College will treat both parents equally unless there is a specific ruling limiting a parent's ability to make decisions or participate in College life or receive information 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 tutor Deputy Head and the Head will be available by appointment to discuss any issues. The College is under no obligation to inform the parent with whom a child normally resides ("the resident parent") if a non-resident parent ("the non-resident parent") contacts the College. Any such information will be given at the discretion of the Head.

## Payment of Fees

Where both Parents have signed a Parental Agreement with the College, they will remain jointly and severally liable for the payment of fees, including any Fees in Lieu of Notice in the case of withdrawal. It is the responsibility of Parents to make arrangements for the payment of fees. The continuation of or applications for Financial Assistance will require both Parents to engage fully with the assessment process through Bursary Assessment Associates.

## Court Orders

Upon receipt of any Court Order restricting access to a child, the College retains the right to consult Reading Safeguarding Children Board before taking action. The College 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 directly to the College. In the event that the College 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 specific arrangements will be deemed to be valid. A letter from a solicitor is not sufficient.



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## College Communications

The College 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 College for the benefit of their child. It is assumed that the parent with whom the child principally resides will keep the other parent informed.

We would not expect to send emergency text messages to non-resident parents, which give information on cancelled activities and reminders. All diary dates and letters home are available on My School Portal.

College emails will be sent to both parents (unless one or other has notified the College that they wish to opt out of College communications). 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, where both parents are welcome. We expect parents to communicate with each other regarding these arrangements.

We expect parents to liaise and communicate directly with each other in matters such as the ordering of College photographs; the pupil's participation in residential/College visits; and any requests for tickets for performances or other events.

Both parents are entitled to receive progress reports and review their child's pupil records. Progress reports are electronic and can be found on My School Portal. Should an un-named parent contact the College to seek information or access to his/her child, the College will always inform the resident parent of this to check whether the un-named parent has Parental Responsibility and to ensure no Court Order is in place. For the avoidance of doubt, we will seek written confirmation from the resident parent as to the un-named parent's status and proof of identity of the un-named parent will always be required in these cases.

It is the responsibility of the resident parent to inform the non-resident parent if their child is absent from College for a prolonged period. Attendance information is available on My School Portal.

Any disagreements between separated or divorced parents must be resolved between the parents themselves and should not involve the College. Where disagreements or conflicts cannot be resolved between the parents, they should seek independent advice and / or pursue the matter through the Family Court.



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## Collecting a child from College

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

- Where a non-resident parent who has Parental Responsibility wishes to take the child during or at the end of the College day and there is no Court Order in place, the resident parent will be contacted to check that they are in agreement with the arrangement. If the resident parent agrees, the child may be released and the College will update its records to reflect that the permission was granted orally. Please note however, that where the resident parent opposes the non-resident parent wanting to take the child, the College cannot prevent them from doing so unless there is a valid Court Order in place. In such circumstances, the parents will be asked to resolve the matter between themselves.
- In the event that the resident parent cannot be reached for the purposes of confirming their agreement to the non-resident parent collecting their child, the Head or staff member dealing with the issue will make a decision based upon all relevant information available.
- During any subsequent discussion or communication with parents, the child will be supervised by an appropriate member of College staff in a separate room.
- In extreme circumstances, if there is a reasonable belief that a possible abduction of the child may occur or that the child may suffer harm or if the parent is disruptive and/or aggressive to any member of the College community, the College reserves the right to notify the police and/or seek advice from the Reading Borough Council Safeguarding Children Board immediately.

## Estrangement

The College recognises its responsibilities with regards to its pupils and it is our wish to promote the best interests of every child, working in partnership with all parents. Parents will be encouraged to resolve any issues around estrangement, contact and access to information without involving the College directly. Issues of estrangement are a civil/private law matter, and the College cannot be involved by, for example, providing mediation, helping an estranged parent to communicate with their child or children or allowing the College premises for purposes of contact. We recognise that a Court Order can restrict a parent from having contact with their child and/or limit their access to information and we may be bound by this. In this situation we will consult with the relevant external agencies to obtain advice as this may constitute a safeguarding concern.