

Separated Parent Policy

May 2022

Denstone 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, Denstone 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 School 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 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.

The information provided to the 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's circumstances (as outlined in the Parent Contract, clause 10.2.4). 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:

- receive information about their child such as their school 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 School does not have the power to act simply on the request of one parent to restrict another. The School will treat both parents equally unless there is a specific ruling limiting a parent's ability to make decisions or participate in school 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, Housemaster, Deputy Head and the Head will be available by appointment to discuss any issues. The School 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 School. Any such information will be given at the discretion of the Head.

Fee Liability

Who is responsible for payment?

Each of you who has signed the Acceptance Form is liable for and must ensure that all of the fees and supplemental charges due are paid to the School. This is because our contract applies to both of you together and each of you on your own. Each person who signs the Acceptance Form therefore has an individual responsibility to ensure that, between them, the fees and supplemental charges owing to the School are paid. In practice this means that if fees or supplemental charges have not been paid then in order to recover the outstanding payments, the School can, in its discretion, choose to seek payment of the amount outstanding from either parent or both parents. The only exceptions to this are set out in Clause 4.5 immediately below. Court orders (for example, where parents are separated or divorced) and other arrangements between parents or third parties relating to fees do not normally bind or apply to the School, and do not extinguish either parent's liability for the fees and supplemental charges due under this contract.

4.5 How one person can remove him/herself from their payment responsibility and circumstances where the School may agree to accept payment from a person who has not signed the Acceptance Form and is not a party to this contract.

A person who has signed the Acceptance Form may be removed from their payment responsibility under this contract by submitting a term's notice but that person must have obtained the prior written consent of both the School and the other person who has signed the Acceptance Form before submitting such notice. Separately, the School may (without obligation to do so) agree in writing with each of you to accept payment from a third party (for example, a grandparent or employer), but this will not discharge your payment responsibility under this contract, unless and until we agree otherwise in writing.

Court Orders

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

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.

All diary dates and letters home are available on our Parent Portal.

School emails will be sent to both parents (unless one or other has notified the School that they wish to opt out of School 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, once a year, where both parents are welcome. We expect parents to communicate with each other regarding these arrangements. Under certain circumstances, the School can offer a secondary appointment but this must be discussed with the child's tutor beforehand.

We expect parents to liaise and communicate directly with each other in matters such as the ordering of School photographs; the pupil's participation in residential/School 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 our Parent Portal. Should an un-named parent contact the School to seek information or access to his/her child, the School 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 unnamed 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 School for a prolonged period.

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

Collecting a child from School

The School will release children to parents in accordance with arrangements notified to the School in advance. 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 non-resident parent who has Parental Responsibility wishes to take the child during or at the end of the School 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 School 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 School 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 School 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 School community, the School reserves the right to notify the police and/or seek advice from the Staffordshire Safeguarding Children Board immediately.

Estrangement

The School 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 School directly. Issues of estrangement are a civil/private law matter and the School cannot be involved by, for example, providing mediation, helping an estranged parent to communicate with their child or children or allowing the School 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.

Finally

We recognise all family circumstances are different and that situations can change during the course of a child's time at Denstone College. Experience tells us that the happiness and success of children is enhanced when parents seek to support the efforts of the child in a supportive and loving manner irrespective of personal circumstances and trust our community to support our efforts to put the child first.