

# **St Bede's Catholic College**



## **Separated Parents Policy**

This policy takes into account the government's explanation of Parental rights and responsibilities and the Department for Education's (DfE) guidance Understanding and dealing with issues relating to parental responsibility.

Government guidance outlines what is parental responsibility and who can obtain it.

## **Introduction**

At St Bede's Catholic College, we aim to maintain contact with both parents in the best interests of their child(ren). This policy aims to minimise any impact and to clarify to all parties what is expected from separated parents and what can be expected from the college.

The basis of the advice within this policy is with regards to a child or children who have already been admitted to the college.

The person(s) with parental responsibility who applied for the child's admission should have involved all others with parental responsibility in making the decision to apply. They should have provided St Bede's Catholic College with details of all those with parental responsibility for a child. Where this has not happened, we welcome direct contact from those with parental responsibility providing their own details. However, we cannot be held responsible for excluding a parent or person with parental responsibility if the information has not been provided to them.

If parents separate whilst their child already attends St Bede's, the parents must notify us immediately so that we can ensure continuing contact with both parents and, in the event that the parents have separated on an acrimonious basis the college will endeavour to accommodate each parent separately in terms of communications and any attendances at the college.

## **Definition of "parent"**

The definition of a "parent" for School purposes is much wider than for any other situation. Section 576 of The Education Act 1996 defines a parent as:

- all biological parents, whether they are married or not
- includes any person who, although not a biological parent, has parental responsibility for a child or young person - this could be an adoptive parent, a step-parent, guardian or other relative
- any person who, although not a biological parent and does not have parental responsibility, has care of a child or young person.

A person typically has care of a child or young person if they are the person with whom the child lives, either full or part time and who looks after the child, irrespective of what their biological or legal relationship is with the child. For example, this may be a foster carer or family and friends carer who does not have parental responsibility but have been delegated the responsibility for taking day- to-day decisions about the child.

Parents, as defined above, are entitled to share in the decisions about the child's education and to be treated equally by Schools. In particular, these entitlements include, but are not limited to, the following:

- receiving copies of school reports
- having access to school records
- attending parent meetings
- receiving newsletters
- invitations to School events
- dealing with any medical issues that arise and/or vaccinations that may be offered.
- information about School trips
- School photographs relating to their child
- participation in any exclusion procedure

St Bede's recognises that whilst the parents of some pupils may be separated, divorced or estranged, they are still entitled to the above and this entitlement cannot be restricted without a Court order.

If the parents are involved in proceedings before the Court directly relating to the child(ren), the parents should seek the Court's permission to disclose the Court order(s) made to the college. In addition, and should the Courts so require, the Principal will be willing to provide a letter setting out any information that is specified in a Court order.

### **Parental responsibility**

Parental responsibility is defined in the Children Act 1989 and means the rights, duties, powers, responsibilities and authority that a parent has for their child. In addition to a child's natural parents, it can be acquired by Court order, being appointed a guardian, adopting a child or a formal agreement.

The information provided when the child was enrolled detailing who has parental responsibility for the child will be presumed to be correct unless a Court order or original birth certificate proving otherwise is provided. The college will be reliant on such information being provided as accurate and true. The information provided regarding the address(es) where the child lives will be presumed to be correct unless we are provided with a copy of a Court order setting out arrangements for where the child should live.

Every parent with parental responsibility for a child has an equal right to be engaged with decisions regarding their education. Unless there is a Court order limiting an individual's exercise of parental responsibility, all parents must be treated equally and must be provided with the same information.

Where contact has been limited by a Court order, the parent still has the right to receive information about the child and be involved in decisions regarding their education and welfare, unless a Court order restricts what information they can receive or removes their parental responsibility. We will not remove a parent's contact details without such a Court order being in place or a parent asks for their own contact details to be removed.

### **Court orders**

At St Bede's Catholic College, our sole wish is to promote the best interests of the child, working in partnership with all parents and/or those with parental responsibility. If there is a Court order in place, we will always act in ways to ensure, as best it can, that no Court order is breached. St Bede's can only be expected to comply with an order if it is properly notified and has received a sealed digital or paper copy for its files, and only to the extent that it relates to the college.

St Bede's Catholic College has no responsibility for enforcing any Court order but will endeavour to ensure that if there are restrictions in place with regards to the collection of a child, such restrictions are adhered to.

In the event that we are not informed of the existence of such an order, the parents will be treated equally. If there is an order in place and neither the parents and/or those with parental responsibility inform the college then if there is any breach of such order, the we cannot be held responsible and/or liable

### **Disputes and disagreements**

St Bede's hopes that parents and all those with parental responsibility will support the college in working together for the benefit of their children.

It is very important to note that any dispute between parents sharing these rights will need to be resolved between them. In all cases where parents and/or those with parental responsibility cannot agree on various issues, parents should seek independent legal advice as to the options available to resolve those issues, either by agreement or by obtaining a Court order.

Parents should seek to resolve contact issues without involving St Bede's. We will not mediate, "take sides" or act as an intermediary between parents who do not communicate with each other.

### **Changes in family circumstances**

We ask parents to inform us whenever something outside college – such as a change in family circumstances – occurs so that we can sensitively support the child in college. We expect parents to update the college whenever emergency contact details change for one or both parents and/or there is a new arrangement for collecting children at the end of the college day, in particular if there is any Court order that has been made.

We recognise the sensitivity of some situations and all staff are aware of the need for discretion and confidentiality. School staff will be informed on a strict need-to-know basis so that suitable support can be offered.

### **The release of child(ren)**

On being admitted to St Bede's, and unless notified to the contrary, children will be released to either or both parents and/or those with parental responsibility and/or those with care of the child. If one parent seeks to remove the child from St Bede's in contravention of the notified arrangements, and the parent to whom the child would normally be released has not consented, the following steps will be followed:

- The Principal or designated deputy will meet with the parent seeking to remove the child and then telephone the parent to whom the child would normally be released and explain the request.
- If the parent to whom the child would normally be released agrees (such agreement to immediately be confirmed by an email to ensure there is record on the students record), the child may be released and the records will reflect that the permission was granted.
- In the event that the parent to whom the child would normally be released to cannot be reached, the Principal or designated deputy dealing with the issue may make a decision based upon all relevant information available.
- The Principal or designated deputy may have to refuse permission if consent cannot be obtained.
- During any discussion or communication with parents and/or those with parental responsibility, the child may be supervised by an appropriate member of staff in a separate room.
- In extreme circumstances if there is a belief that a possible abduction of the child may occur or if the parent is disruptive, the Police will be notified immediately.

### **Communication between St Bede's and separated parents**

Bulletins, newsletters and general updates are sent via email to all parents and/or those who have parental responsibility for whom we have up-to-date contact details who are recorded as priority 1 (requests for both parents to be priority 1 contacts must be requested and checked when data sheets are distributed each year). These updates contain all the main class/School events, including parents' evenings, productions, sports days and class outings and events. On rare occasions information is sometimes sent home with the child and it is the child's responsibility to pass this information to the parent. Duplicates will be available upon request.

St Bede's Catholic College is able to deal with separate requests for invitations to events and performances made by separated, divorced or estranged parents who have parental responsibility. However, the we would be grateful if parents could communicate directly on such matters if they can although in some instances, we recognise that this may not be possible should there be a Court order in place preventing the parties from contacting each other. St Bede's will try to comply with requests; however, in certain circumstances, and as stated above, it will not always be possible, for example when a Court order preventing contact with the child or each other is in place.

In all circumstances, we aim to maintain our open-door policy with all parents.

Class/subject teachers and/or the Principal will be available by appointment to discuss any issues.

When one parent makes a request for a referral to an external agency (for example early help, mental health support team, CAMHS in relation to the child), the college will inform the other parent and request if relevant if they would like their details included and recorded.

Each parent can request that any personal details and information related to them be redacted before a copy is shared with the other parent this also applies should a parent request individual support for themselves, to an external agency.

A child also has the right to request that their personal information be redacted should they not wish for it to be shared with a parent. Should we feel that the sharing of information may result in a safeguarding issue this may be withheld and the advice of the Educational Safeguarding Team sought.

### **Parents' evening appointments**

Whenever requested, we will offer separate parents' evening appointments for separated, divorced or estranged parents who have parental responsibility. Where appointments are online dual appointments are available with both parents receiving the link and attending in separate locations.

### **Written pupil reports**

Any person who is known to St Bede's to have parental responsibility for a child has the right to receive written progress reports for their child. These will be provided to separated, divorced or estranged parents who have parental responsibility and for whom the college has up-to-date contact details.

### **Change of name**

A parent can only change their child's name (forename and/or surname) either by both parents providing a letter confirming such consent and bearing wet signatures or by an order of the Court. Unless either of the above are provided, the child will be known and addressed by their birth name as recorded on their birth certificate.

St Bede's Catholic College is under no obligation to do so but may effect an informal change of name, if that is requested by the parent(s) for example (a) verbally addressing a child (b) name on books etc. It is important to note that the college database, unless changed by an order of the Court, will reflect the child's name at birth. In addition, and as stated, any informal change of name addressing the child is at the college's complete discretion after all of the circumstances have been taken into account.

### **Access to School information**

Key information is available on the St Bede's website. Parents may also receive information via email.

For parents who do not have access to the internet paper copies of communications may be requested.

Agreed by governors November 2025  
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