



DULWICH PREP LONDON
Values & Academic Excellence since 1885

CHANGES TO FAMILY CIRCUMSTANCES POLICY

This is a whole school policy that applies to all sections of the School, including Early Years.



Persons responsible for this policy:

Head Master

Designated Safeguarding Lead

This policy was last reviewed in:

November 2023

CHANGES TO FAMILY CIRCUMSTANCES POLICY

Dulwich Prep London understands that not all family circumstances are the same and the potential stress and difficulty involved in bereavement, separation and divorce along with the impact that this can have on family life and children. We know how important it is for the welfare of children to have clear arrangements in place. We want to work with families to ensure that we know who to communicate with, pick-up arrangements and who will be attending events and functions. This guidance aims to minimise the impact on the children and to clarify to all parties what is expected from separated parents and what can be expected from Dulwich Prep London (henceforth referred to as 'the School') and our staff. This policy applies to all members (pupils, parents and staff) of the school community.

This document also sets out the School's approach to clarifying arrangements for all of those with parental responsibility for a child(ren), in circumstances where they are divorced, separated, co-parenting, where they are parenting their child(ren) separately of the other parent or where parental responsibility for a child has changed. In the best interests for their child(ren), the School aims to maintain contact with both parents where possible and/or those responsible for the child(ren).

Experience has taught us that whenever separated parents make a concerted effort to work together in a positive partnership with Dulwich Prep London staff to support their child both pastorally and academically, any potential negative impact on the child(ren)'s overall well-being and academic attainment can be reduced.

I. CHANGES IN FAMILY CIRCUMSTANCES AND CONTACT ARRANGEMENTS

In order to safeguard the welfare of children and maintain channels of communication between the School and home, we ask parents to inform the child's Head of Section whenever something occurs outside school, such as a change in family circumstances (e.g divorce, separation, bereavement) so that we can sensitively support their child(ren) in school. Many children find these changes incredibly difficult to cope with, especially in the first few weeks and months that follow. Children may struggle to manage their feelings and emotions and this, in turn, may have a detrimental impact upon their concentration, attitude, behaviour and learning. By communicating openly with the School, we can look to our support systems (mentoring, counselling, group support etc) to help our pupils and their families through this difficult time.

Parents are required to update their Section Secretary or use the parent portal 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 school day. We recognise the sensitivity of some situations and all staff are aware of the need for discretion and confidentiality. Dulwich Prep London staff will be informed on a strict need to know basis so that suitable support can be offered.

The School will not become involved in disputes between the parents of pupils following breakdowns in their relationships. Our aim is for school life to provide routine, stability and calm for children, whatever is happening elsewhere. The School asks that families keep us fully informed of what is happening and provide us with any court orders (where permissible) that may affect school life, such as child arrangement orders. It may be appropriate for the School to seek copies of court orders

(from the parents or their solicitors), so that school records can be kept up to date. If a parental dispute does arise, the School should obtain a copy of any relevant current order(s), together with an assurance that the relevant order(s) remains valid. The School will only have copies of court orders where this is permitted by the terms of that order. Copies of court orders will be kept securely on CPOMS, the School's password protected safeguarding storage system. Details of the court order which are relevant in order to protect the child or young person will also be entered onto iSAMS, the School's information management system. The School will comply with any court order where we are required to do so.

Where parents have separated or divorced, it is not up to the School to decide whether an absent parent should have contact with the child(ren) at school. Where a child arrangement order is in force, unless there is also a contact order dealing with the issue, it is for the child's designated primary carer to determine contact. Therefore, if an absent parent requests contact at school, the School will:

- always act in accordance with any court order;
- subject to any court order, seek written consent from the parent who is the designated primary carer for the child; and
- permit contact only if it is clear under the terms of an order or the designated primary carer consents and it is considered safe and reasonable to do so.

Any parental or child preferences as to who should be contacted cannot be accepted without the written agreement of all parties.

If the parents cannot agree, they should be invited to resolve their differences with legal advice rather than through the School.

Disagreements between parents must be resolved between the parents and cannot be resolved by the School. Dulwich Prep London staff cannot be used as a conduit of messages from one parent to the other; we have no interest in identifying the "good" or "bad" parent, and cannot mediate disputes. It is important that all those with parental responsibility understand that the School will maintain neutrality in its communications with both parties and this neutrality is paramount for the welfare of the child(ren) concerned. The School will maintain an open-door policy with both parents and will be available to discuss any issues. The School has a duty to protect staff welfare and so parents are reminded that they are required to behave in a courteous and polite manner to staff at all times. In extreme circumstances, if there is a belief that a possible abduction of the child(ren) may occur or if the parent is disruptive, the police will be notified immediately.

2. PUPIL REPORTS

Subject to any court order or other legal requirement, any person who has parental responsibility for a child(ren) has the right to receive the written reports for their child(ren). These will be provided to separated, divorced or estranged parents who have parental responsibility and for whom the School has up-to-date contact details.

3. ACCESS TO SCHOOL INFORMATION

All key school information is available on the School website and parents may receive additional information via the parent portal or mailings from the School. Alternatively, for parents who do not have access to the internet, paper copies of communications may be requested from the School office.

4. OBTAINING CONSENT

If consent is required for trips or activities, the School will refer to clause 8(d) of the Contract for Educational Services relating to the relevant child.

5. SUMMARY

If your family circumstances should change, Dulwich Prep London staff will work with you and support your child(ren). It is important that the School has clear instructions, agreed upon by all relevant parties, regarding who has parental responsibility for the child, who we should be contacting and for what, who we should share information, such as progress reports with and who to extend invitations to for events such as parents' evenings. If you choose not to provide clear guidance, the School cannot be held responsible for errors in communication.

Please keep your child(ren)'s Head of Section informed.

If you have any concerns and wish to discuss your circumstances, please contact the relevant Head of Section.