

Fulford School

Protocol for Communication with Parents

Context

Fulford school recognises the importance of working in partnership with parents* to secure the best academic progress and personal development of our students and to maximise standards in the school. We recognise the many benefits to be gained by involving all parents and carers in the education of their child and acknowledge the link between parental engagement and student achievement. We appreciate that parents have a major influence on the learning, behaviour, attitudes and aspirations of their child and that children benefit greatly from parental involvement and support. There are also many benefits we as a school can gain through strong partnerships with parents. We recognise that everyone who is a parent has a right to information and to participate in decisions about their child's education**. The progress and welfare of the child is the paramount consideration for us a school. We will seek to maintain effective channels of communication with all parents and to engage them in the life of the school. We recognise all people with parental responsibility for a child have rights, duties, powers, responsibility and authority in relation to that child and his/her property.

*As defined in the Education Act

**Please note where a child's father and mother were not married to each other at the time of the child's birth, and this birth was registered before December 1st 2003, where fathers have not acquired parental responsibility on the child's birth certificate, they do not automatically have parental responsibility. This means that legally they are not entitled to updates on a child's progress at school.

Parental responsibility can be gained by the father if—

- (a) he becomes registered as the child's father, e.g. by jointly registering the child's birth with the mother;
- (b) he and the child's mother make an agreement (a "parental responsibility agreement") providing for him to have parental responsibility for the child; or
- (c) the court, on his application, orders that he shall have parental responsibility for the child.

The Children Act 1989 section 4 (as above) was amended with effect from 01 December 2003 by the Adoption and Children Act 2002 (hence the date of 01 December 2003).

If the Father marries the Mother, then he automatically gains parental responsibility.

Aims

This policy supports the key messages in the Parental Involvement Act. It aims to help parents to be:

- Involved in their child's education
- Welcomed as active participants in the life of the school
- Encouraged to express views on school education

Communication

We will provide the following information *whilst the student is on the school roll* to all identified resident and non-resident parents unless they state that they do not want it:

- The results of any public examinations taken
- Notification to enable the parent to discuss the contents of the report with the pupil's teacher, if he/she so wishes (Parents' Evening details)
- Documents relating to special educational needs such as pen portraits and teaching and learning profiles
- Attendance records
- Individual progress reports
- The results of NC Key Stage 3 Teacher Assessment Levels
- Invitations to Information Evenings
- Meetings involving the child e.g. in the event of the child's exclusion
- Letters related to residential trips and visits
- Letters related to specific activities
- Communications which would involve parents being consulted or providing feedback on the school. For example the Ofsted Parent Survey, voting in the election of parent Governors or an invitation to join the Parent Council
- A copy of the school calendar

In addition information on school policies, issues of the Fulfordian, school newsletters and copies of letters sent home can be found on the school website.

In terms of day to day operational issues and low level concerns the student planner is the main format for on-going home school communication.

In the interests of economy and to avoid excessive production of paper based resources not all information will be sent in hard copy. Where resources are only available electronically, this will be communicated to both resident and non-residents parents via a text message directing them to the website. End of year and interim reports will be sent out in hard copy to both resident and non-resident parents as will items requiring an individual response such as surveys or information relating to formal opportunities to become involved in the school e.g. Governor vacancies. Password details for the SIMS Learning Gateway where reports can be viewed on-line are available for resident and non-resident parents. We hope to extend our use of this facility to move to paperless reporting at a future date. Copies of school letters will generally be available electronically to non-resident parents who will be sent details of these via a text message directing them to the school website. Any resident

or non-resident parent who wishes to have hard copies of all correspondence can access this by informing the school office.

Communicating with parents is essential to ensure that the key objectives of this policy are being met. We will use the following methods as appropriate to communicate with parents:

- Phone calls
- Letters and newsletters
- Face to face contact
- E-mail, website, text and fax
- Parents' Evenings and Information Evenings
- Meetings e.g. Progress Reviews

Non – Resident Parents

Fulford, as a school, is frequently faced with situations involving parental separation and where the child/children live with one parent, and the other parent is either in, or is seeking, contact with the child/children. In such cases, where Court Orders have been made, we must abide by their terms. However, in the majority of cases where there are no such Orders in place, we must treat each parent with parental responsibility in the same way, regardless of where the child lives. This includes, sending out copies of school reports and invitations to Parents' Evenings. We value the contributions of all parents equally and will actively seek to make non-resident parents feel that they are welcome participants in supporting their child's learning and in the general school community.

Problems can arise for schools in situations where there is animosity between the parents of a child and one seeks to prevent the other from exercising their parental responsibility by e.g. instructing the school not to let the non-resident parent collect the child from school, or not send out copies of school reports etc. However, the school cannot legitimately discriminate between the parents must treat both equally.

Parents should not attempt to draw the school into disputes between them. Where a parent's action, or proposed action, conflicts with the school's ability to act in the child's best interests, the school will try to resolve the problem with that parent but will avoid becoming involved in disputes between parents.

Parents should keep Fulford informed about any changes in their family circumstances (including any relevant Court Orders relating to the child). If we are told about the changes then we can make sure that we keep everyone up to date about the child's progress. This enables us to keep parents fully involved in their child's education.

We recognise and respect the rights of all parents, however for day to day purposes, the school's main contact is likely to be with the parent(s) with whom the child lives on school days or most school days. Non-resident parents, however, can take part in decision-making and request information by contacting the school. Where non-resident parents wish to provide us with their details they should complete the parental contact forms available on the school website and should return these to the school office.

Contact Details

As part of the admissions process, we will seek to identify details of resident parents and those parents who are non-resident using the school admissions form. We will also seek this information as part of our primary transition and school to school transfers. We will outline the school policy on communication with parents and non-resident parents as part of school induction. Information relating to parental communication will also be placed on the school website.

The Headteacher should:

- Ask parents or carers for the names and addresses of all parents when they register a pupil
- Ensure that names and addresses of all parents, where known, are included in the admission register and also in pupil records and are available to the pupil's teachers
- Ensure that names and addresses of all parents are forwarded to any school to which the pupil moves
- Ensure that details of Court Orders are noted in a pupil's record
- Where the address of a non-resident parent is unknown, tell the resident parent that the non-resident parent is entitled to be involved in their child's education and ask that information is passed on to them

When enrolling and updating information kept on a child, we will try wherever possible to establish the rights and responsibilities allocated to both sets of parents. We appreciate, however, that in some cases this may not always be an easy task or that some parents may withhold or may be reluctant to share such information. Advice from the DfE states that schools should take what a parent or parents say at face value, but if any new information comes to light, for example from another person claiming to have parental responsibility, the child's records should be updated accordingly. We may need to ask for proof in this situation.

It is the responsibility of the parent or carer to inform the school of their parental rights and responsibilities. If the resident parent or main carer has included the details of the non-resident parent in the contact records for a child then it will not be necessary to seek documentary evidence to substantiate this. However, if a non-resident parent approaches the school to claim parental rights and responsibilities and we have no record of this, the non-resident parent will be required to provide documentary evidence to verify this claim.

Consent

Consent for residential and non-residential trips and visits will be sought from the resident parent unless the non-resident parent informs the school that they wish to be approached for consent in all such cases. Where non-resident parents have requested to be asked for consent) we will consider it necessary to seek consent from both parents.

In regard to gaining consent for residential trips from all parents, we will provide a reasonable deadline for seeking consent and in the absence of any refusal will accept the consent of the resident parent. If there is any dispute between parents regarding consent for school activities, the school will usually assume that parental consent has not been given. It is to be hoped that parents will work together to reach an agreement when consent has been sought, for the benefit of their child.

Complaints

Where either resident or non-resident parents do have concerns relating to communication they are advised to contact the appropriate person in school in the first instance to try to resolve any issue informally or to make an appointment to discuss this. Should this contact fail to resolve the issue then full details of the Complaints Procedure are on the school website.

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