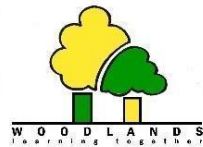


Woodlands Secondary School	Communication with Parents and Carers Policy	
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Date	Review Date	Author	Nominated Governors
January 2026	January 2028	Sandra Clarke	Headteacher
Website	Statutory Policy	Source	Ratification Date
Yes	No	The Key for School Leaders DfE Guidance – Understanding and dealing with issues relating to parental responsibility Aug 2023	January 2026

1. Introduction and aims

We believe that clear, open communication between the school and parents/carers has a positive impact on student learning because it:

- Gives parents/carers the information they need to support their child's education
- Helps the school improve, through feedback and consultation with parents/carers
- Builds trust between home and school, which helps the school better support each child's educational and pastoral needs

The aim of this policy is to promote clear and open communication by:

- Explaining how the school communicates with parents/carers
- Setting clear standards and expectations for responding to communication from parents/carers
- Helping parents/carers reach the member of school staff who is best placed to address their specific query or concern so they can get a response as quickly as possible
- In the following sections, we will use 'parents' to refer to both parents and carers

2. Definitions

The Department of Education considers **a parent**, under section 576 of the Education Act 1996, to be:

- **all biological parents**: all natural parents, married or not
- **any person with parental responsibility for the child**: individuals granted legal responsibility through court orders (e.g., adoption, special guardianship, residence orders).
- **any person who has care of the child but is not a biological parent and does not have parental responsibility** – usually the person with whom the child lives and who looks after them e.g. step-parents, a foster carer or relative, regardless of biological or legal relationship.

When parents separate, **the resident parent** is the parent the child lives with most of the time.

If a child lives with each parent for an equal amount of time, both parents count as resident parents.

A **non-resident parent** is a parent who does not live with their child, typically the parent with whom the child spends less than half their time.

Anyone who is a parent, as recognised under education law, can participate in their child's education.

This is supported by the duty on the Secretary of State for Education, when exercising or performing all of their respective powers and duties under the Education Acts, to have regard to the general principle that [pupils are to be educated in accordance with the wishes of their parents](#).

Under the [Education and Inspections Act 2006](#), governing bodies of maintained schools must also have regard to any views expressed by parents of registered pupils.

Under the [Education \(Pupil Information\) \(England\) Regulations 2005](#), all parents can also receive information about the child, even though the school's main contact is likely to be the parent with whom the child lives on school days.

Those who have parental responsibility for or care of a child have the same rights as biological parents to:

- receive information, such as school reports
- participate in statutory activities, such as voting in an election for parent governors
- be asked to give consent, such as to the child taking part in a school trip
- be informed about meetings involving the child, such as a governors' meeting on the child's exclusion from school

School and local authority staff must treat all parents equally, unless a court order limits a parent's ability to make educational decisions, participate in school life or receive information about their child. In most circumstances, the question a school must ask itself when making decisions is not just whether a parent holds parental responsibility but whether they are a parent under education law.

All parents also have legal obligations under [section 7 of the Education Act 1996](#) – for example, to ensure that a child of compulsory school age receives a suitable full-time education.

If a parent's action or proposed action contravenes the school's ability to act in the child's best interests, the school should try to resolve the problem with the parent but avoid becoming involved in any conflict. However, there may be occasions when a school needs to decline requests for action from one or more parents.

In cases where schools cannot resolve the conflict between separated parents, they should advise the aggrieved parent to pursue the matter through the family court.

For further information about Parental Responsibility, **see Appendix 1**

For further information about Information sharing with non-resident parents – **see Appendix 2**

2. Roles and responsibilities

2.1 Headteacher

The Headteacher is responsible for:

- Ensuring that the systems and processes used for all communications with parents are effective, timely and appropriate
- Monitoring the implementation of this policy
- Regularly reviewing this policy

2.2 Staff

All staff are responsible for:

- Responding to communication from parents in line with this policy and the school's ICT and internet acceptable use policy
- Working with other members of staff to make sure parents get timely information (if they cannot address a query or send the information themselves)

Staff will **aim** to respond to communication during core school hours 8.45am – 3.30pm or their working hours (if they work part-time).

In line with promoting staff wellbeing and helping our staff find a suitable work-life balance, staff may work around other responsibilities and commitments and respond outside of these hours, but they are **not expected** to do so.

2.3 Parents

Parents are responsible for:

- Ensuring that communication with the school is respectful at all times
- Making every reasonable effort to address communications to the appropriate member of staff in the first instance
- Respond to communications from the school (such as requests for meetings) in a timely manner
- Checking all communications from the school

Abusive or aggressive behaviour – in person, by phone or email – will not be tolerated. Any communication that is considered disrespectful, abusive or threatening will be treated in line with our Parent Code of Conduct, which can be found on our school website under 'School policies'. <https://www.woodlands.luton.sch.uk/school-policies/>

Parents should **not** expect staff to respond to their communication outside of core school hours (08.45 – 15:30 Monday to Friday, or during school holidays).

3. How we communicate with parents and carers

The sections below explain how we keep parents up-to-date with their child's education and what is happening in school.

Parents should monitor all of the following regularly to make sure they do not miss important communications or announcements that may affect their child.

3.1 Parentmail

We use Parentmail to provide parents with the following types of information:

- Upcoming school events and information
- Scheduled school closures (for example, for staff training days)
- Emergency school closures (for instance, due to bad weather)
- School surveys or consultations
- Payments
- Half Termly/ Termly Event Sheets

3.2 Email

We use email to keep parents informed about the following things:

- Class communications or teacher requests *
 - Information about meetings, following up on queries etc.
- *in some cases, families may request a physical home school book.*

The PMLD teachers will send home a daily email.

All other departments – one email** will be sent home on a Friday afternoon which will provide a generic reminder about upcoming events or requirements for the following week. The email may also include a brief personal note about each student.

****Some students may have additional communication for a specific agreed reason such as feeding/behaviour charts or toileting charts.**

Exceptional emails or phone calls may be made in relation to medical or behavioural issues

3.3 School calendar

Our school website includes a calendar of term dates.

It also includes a calendar highlighting events.

Half termly events communication is sent out via Parentmail and also paper copies are sent home.

3.4 Phone calls

Members of the wider school team may contact you by phone for a range of school related issues. Records of conversations with parent are added onto the school CPOMS system.

3.5 Letters

We may send the following letters home:

- Letters about trips and visits
- Consent forms
- Following up on meetings in school e.g. attendance, pastoral and behaviour related matters, including letters relation to suspensions or permanent exclusion decisions.

3.7 Reports

Parents receive reports from the school about their child's learning, including:

- Their Annual Review report, two weeks in advance of the EHCP meeting
- An End of Year report covering their achievement in each part of the curriculum, how well they are progressing, and their attendance
- Information about vocational qualifications gained (or credits gained towards these where appropriate)

3.8 Meetings

We offer three occasions for parents to meet to discuss their child's progress. These are two parents' evenings and the Annual Review meeting. During these meetings, parents can talk with teachers about their child's achievement and progress, the curriculum, their child's wellbeing, behaviour or any other area of concern.

The school may also contact parents to arrange meetings for a range of reasons which include, but are not limited to:

- To discuss concerns or how to support a young person in school or home
- Transition information meetings
- Collaborative working in line with therapy recommendations
- At the request of other professionals involved with your young person
- Attendance concerns
- Behavioural concerns
- Safeguarding concerns
- Reintegration meetings following suspensions

3.9 School website

Key information about the school is posted on our website, including:

- School times and term dates
- Important events and announcements
- Curriculum information
- Important policies and procedures
- Important contact information
- The local offer
- Emergency information is also added to the website – parents should check the website before contacting the school.

4. How parents and carers can communicate with the school

4.1 Email

For non-urgent issues, parents should always email the class team email or the appropriate member of staff, in the first instance

We aim to acknowledge all emails as soon as practicable and to respond usually within three working days.

If a query or concern is an emergency, parents should call the school office.

4.2 Phone calls

Parents and carers should call the school to report student absences before 9am and leave a message on the attendance line (option 1).

The office staff and family team are available to take your calls during the school day. Outside of the school day, messages can be left on the school answer machine.

Messages for class staff will be relayed outside of taught time.

If the issue is urgent, parents should call the school office.

Urgent issues might include things like:

- Family emergencies
- Safeguarding or welfare issues
- Changes to pick up and collection plans

For more general enquiries, please call the school office.

4.3 Meetings

If parents would like to schedule a meeting with a member of staff, they should email the appropriate email address (see **appendix 3**) or call the school office to book an appointment.

5. Inclusion

It is important that everyone in our community can communicate easily with the school.

Parents who need help to communicate with the school can request the following support:

- School announcements and communications translated into additional languages
- Interpreters for meetings or phone calls

We can make additional arrangements if necessary.

Please contact the school office or family workers to discuss these requests.

6. Monitoring and evaluating the policy

This policy will be reviewed every 2 years by the Headteacher, and should be updated with any changes as soon as reasonably practicable.

7. Links with other policies

The policy should be read alongside our policies on:

- Parent code of conduct
- Complaints procedure
- Attendance policy

The above policies can be found on our school website under 'School policies'.

<https://www.woodlands.luton.sch.uk/school-policies/>

Appendix 1: Understanding Parental Responsibility

In family law, under [section 3 of the Children Act 1989](#), parental responsibility means all the rights, duties, powers, responsibilities and authority that a parent has in relation to the child.

A person with parental responsibility can make decisions about the child's upbringing and is entitled to information about the child. For example, they can give consent to their medical treatment and make decisions about their education. They also have the right to receive information about their health and education.

There are specific examples in general principles for schools and local authorities.

Who has parental responsibility

A child's birth mother (the person who carried the child) has parental responsibility unless it has been removed by an adoption order or a parental order following surrogacy.

If a child's father and mother were married to each other at the time of the child's birth, they each have parental responsibility. If the parents were not married to each other at that time, the child's father can gain parental responsibility:

- by registering the child's birth jointly with the mother
- by subsequently marrying the child's mother
- through a 'parental responsibility agreement' between him and the child's mother that is registered with the court
- by obtaining a [court order](#) for parental responsibility

If two female parents have a child through fertility treatment, the mother's female partner is treated in the same way as a father. She has parental responsibility if she is married to or in a civil partnership with the mother at the time of the treatment (or if the two women agree in writing that she will be the child's second parent). She can also acquire parental responsibility in the same way that a child's father can.

People who are not the child's biological mother, father or second female parent can also acquire parental responsibility.

Civil partners have parallel rights to married people in terms of parental responsibility. The same provisions for married people apply to them in terms of:

- acquiring parental responsibility: adoption, agreement with their civil partner or by an order from the court
- holding parental responsibility

A local authority (the 'corporate parent') acquires parental responsibility under [section 33\(3\) of the Children Act 1989](#) if it is named when a care order is made in respect of a child.

Key effects of a father or second female parent acquiring parental responsibility

When a father or second female parent acquires parental responsibility, they:

- become a 'parent' for the purposes of adoption legislation and can therefore withhold consent to an adoption
- can object to the child being accommodated in local authority accommodation under [section 20 of the Children Act 1989](#) and remove them from such accommodation (unless the child is over 16 and agrees to be provided with accommodation)
- will automatically be a party to care proceedings
- can appoint a guardian

- can give valid consent for the child's medical treatment (subject to the competency of the child to give their own consent or object to the treatment being proposed)
- have the right of access to the child's health records
- can withdraw the child from sex education and religious education classes and make representations to their school concerning their education
- must give their consent if the child's other parent seeks to remove the child from the jurisdiction
- can sign the child's passport application and object to the granting of a passport
- has sufficient rights in relation to the child to invoke the international child abduction rules

Other ways to acquire parental responsibility

Parental responsibility can be acquired in other ways, including by:

- adoption, after which only the adoptive parents will hold parental responsibility
- prospective adoption, when parental responsibility is shared with other parties such as the local authority while the child is placed with the prospective adopter
- obtaining a parental order following surrogacy
- being a step-parent, through agreement with the child's mother and their other parent, if that person also has parental responsibility for the child, or as the result of a court order
- being granted a child arrangements order determining who the child should live with or that a parent should spend time with the child but the child should not live with them
- being appointed as a guardian or special guardian
- being named in an emergency protection order – although parental responsibility in such a case is limited to taking reasonable steps to safeguard or promote the child's welfare
- being the local authority named in the care order for a child

More than one person, and even several people, can hold and exercise parental responsibility for a child. The parental responsibility of one party does not necessarily stop simply because another person is also given it, although this can happen. Therefore, in some cases, several people may exercise parental responsibility on behalf of a child.

Parental responsibility is not given to a foster parent or a key worker in residential care, but it is essential that schools engage and work with these individuals, who are often the most influential and important people in the child's life. How a school engages with social workers and the birth parents of the child in each case needs to be defined locally, but it is an essential part of supporting the child's school and care environment.

Court orders and parental responsibility

Court orders under [section 8 of the Children Act 1989](#), often called section 8 orders (as amended by [section 12 of the Children and Families Act 2014](#)) settle areas of dispute in relation to the exercise of parental responsibility or a child's care or upbringing, and can limit how an individual exercises their parental responsibility.

There are different types of section 8 orders, which can be made to address particular issues.

Unless a court order states that the second parent cannot obtain any information about the child/children directly, indirectly or via a third party, information may still be shared. Parents will need to share the details of the court order with the school in order to restrict information sharing, if this has been decided by the court.

Prohibited steps order

A prohibited steps order imposes a specific restriction on the exercise of responsibility. This means that no step specified by the court that a parent could take in meeting their parental responsibility can be taken without the consent of the court.

Example One parent wants to take the child abroad for an extended period or prevent the child from attending a form of religious worship against the wishes of the other parent.

Specific issue order

A specific issue order gives directions for the purpose of determining a specific question that has arisen or may arise in connection with any aspect of parental responsibility.

Example An order allowing one parent to agree to a pupil moving school against the wishes of the other parent.

Child arrangements order

A child arrangements order sets out the arrangements for whom the child is to live with and when, and the arrangements for which parent they are to spend time or have contact with. It replaces the former residence and contact orders.

In line with their safeguarding duties, schools should ask parents to provide them with a copy of the most recent court order in place. However, a parent may first need to seek the permission of the court to share orders with a third party, including the school.

Care order

If a care order is in place, the role parents can play in their child's life and schooling may be limited by the local authority.

Schools should note that a court order limiting a parent's exercise of their parental responsibility does not necessarily prevent or restrict a school from carrying out its duties under education law.

Terminating parental responsibility

While such cases are rare, in very limited circumstances, the court can also make an order under [section 4\(3\) of the Children Act 1989](#) to terminate parental responsibility that has been acquired. The exception to this is where parental responsibility was acquired through the marriage of the father or second female parent to the child's mother.

Appendix 2: Information sharing with non-resident parents

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/dealing-with-issues-relating-to-parental-responsibility/understanding-and-dealing-with-issues-relating-to-parental-responsibility>

If a school does not know the whereabouts of a non-resident parent, it should make the resident parent aware that the other parent is entitled to be involved in their child's education and request that information is passed on.

If the resident parent refuses either to share information with the non-resident parent or to provide their contact details, if they have them, so the school can deal with them direct, the school can do nothing more. If the non-resident parent subsequently contacts the school and requests access to information, the school should provide it to that parent direct, after taking reasonable steps to satisfy itself that the individual is, in fact, the child's parent.

A school does not need to seek the consent of a resident parent before recording the contact details of the non-resident parent or sending them their child's educational information. It does not need to ask for a solicitor's letter from a non-resident parent as evidence that they are entitled to access this information. No court order is required before providing statutory information to any parent entitled to receive it.

Obtaining consent

If a school needs parental consent for extra-curricular visits and activities, a headteacher should seek the consent of the resident parent. Exceptions to this are when the decision is likely to have a long-term and significant impact on the child, or the non-resident parent has requested to be asked for consent in all cases.

If a school considers it necessary or has been asked to seek consent from both parents, it may wish to assume parental consent has not been given unless both agree. Such an approach ensures that the school has treated the views of each parent equally and will help safeguard its position in terms of exposure to any civil liability if, for example, the child is injured while on a school trip.

The school should avoid becoming involved in any disagreement between parents, but might want to suggest that, if they cannot agree, they seek independent legal advice about obtaining a prohibited steps order or specific issue order setting out exactly which decisions each parent can make in respect of their child.

Medical treatment: seeking consent following an accident or injury

A school may experience an issue when a child has had an accident and consent is needed for emergency medical treatment. [Section 3 of the Children Act 1989](#) states that a person who does not have parental responsibility but nonetheless has care of a child may:

...do what is reasonable in all the circumstances of the case for the purpose of safeguarding or promoting the child's welfare.

This allows a school to act 'in loco parentis' – that is, in place of a parent – or to seek consent from a parent who may not hold parental responsibility.

It would clearly be reasonable for a school to take a child who needs to have a wound stitched to hospital, but the parents – including the non-resident parent who has asked to be kept informed of events involving the child – should be informed as soon as possible.

Pupils moving schools

In the case of separated parents, case law states that all those with parental responsibility must be consulted before important decisions are made, such as removing a child from their school, when they should leave the school or which new school they should attend.

Schools must still comply with the [Education \(Pupil Registration\) \(England\) Regulations 2006](#) when they receive a request to remove a child from the school register. However, there is no statutory obligation on a

school to notify one parent if the other decides to remove their child – that responsibility rests solely with the separated parents.

Nonetheless, the child's welfare is paramount, so, if a school is aware that parents are separated and one parent decides to remove their child, staff may wish to ask that parent if the other has been informed and has agreed to this.

A school should avoid becoming involved in parental conflicts. If parents are unable to agree lines of communication between themselves on issues involving their child, they may wish to seek independent legal advice and explore other options. These might include referring the matter to non-court dispute resolution, such as mediation, or to the family court for adjudication.

Schools may consider it appropriate to make an early help referral. Early help means providing support as soon as a problem emerges at any point in a child's life. Where a child would benefit from co-ordinated early help, an early help inter-agency assessment should be arranged. [Working together to safeguard children](#) provides detailed guidance on the early help process.

Schools can also signpost parents to this guidance and other sources of support, such as [Citizens Advice](#) and [Coram Children's Legal Centre](#).

Changing a surname

A change of surname is a private family law matter and should be resolved between parents.

If one parent seeks to change the surname by which their child is known, a school should ensure it does not do so without written evidence that the other parent, or anyone else who has parental responsibility for the child, has given their consent. It should source this evidence independently of the parent seeking to make the change.

[Regulation 5\(1\)\(a\) of the Education \(Pupil Registration\) Regulations 2006](#) requires a school to record the full name of every pupil in alphabetical order in the admissions register. This means the child's full legal name and not any other name that the child is known by.

However, there may be circumstances where an informal name change has already been adopted in school and it would not be in the child's best interests to revert to a different name. In such circumstances, a school should decide what action to take, but the best interests of the child must be paramount.

Where a child is subject to a special guardianship order, there are particular considerations if a school receives a request to use a different surname. [Section 14C\(3\) of the Children Act 1989](#) states that:

While a special guardianship order is in force with respect to a child, no person may cause the child to be known by a new surname... without either the written consent of every person who has parental responsibility for the child or the leave of the court. Schools must therefore decline requests from special guardians for a child to be known by a different surname unless the above criteria are met.

Parent governors

Schools must not restrict eligibility to nominate, vote or otherwise participate in parent governor elections to parents holding parental responsibility. Under the [School Governance \(Constitution\) \(England\) Regulations 2012](#), a 'parent' includes not just those with parental responsibility but also biological parents and anyone who cares for a child.

Administration

In accordance with [Regulation 5\(1\)\(c\) of the Education \(Pupil Registration\) \(England\) Regulations 2013](#), a headteacher must ensure the:

- names and addresses of all parents are included in the admission register

- school register contains at least one telephone number by which to contact each resident parent in case of an emergency

Headteachers should therefore:

- ask parents or guardians for the contact details – including names, addresses, telephone numbers and email addresses – of all parents when they register a pupil
- ensure they note the details of any court order in a pupil's educational record

Such information will be necessary when decisions need to be made about who can give parental consent for an extra-curricular visit or should be contacted if the child is ill, as well as what to do in more difficult situations.

Schools should be mindful to protect parents' private data from any other party and to avoid accidental disclosure. This is particularly important, given that a parent may have been, or be at risk of being, a victim of domestic violence.

Appendix 3: School Contact list

Who should I contact?

If you have questions about any of the topics in the table below, or would like to speak to a member of staff:

- Email the most appropriate address and include your child's full name in the subject line
- The format for school email addresses is:
Person: name.surname@woodlands.luton.sch.uk or
Class: classnameschoolyear@woodlands.luton.sch.uk The school year is written with an underscore i.e. 2025_2026 or 2026_2027
e.g. 3sy2025_2026@woodlands.luton.sch.uk or lincoln2025_2026@woodlands.luton.sch.uk
 - The main school phone number is: **01582 572880**
 - The main office email is: schooloffice@woodlands.luton.sch.uk
 - The family workers email is: family.workers@woodlands.luton.sch.uk

We aim to respond to all emails as soon as practicable

You will be informed of your child's class email address when they join a new class.

I HAVE A QUESTION ABOUT...	WHO YOU NEED TO TALK TO
My child's learning/class activities/lessons	Your child's class email
My child's wellbeing/pastoral support	Your child's class email or family workers
My child's Annual Review meeting	EHCP administrator – Fabeha Alam or the SENCo – Nicole Tulloch
Payments	School office or family workers
School trips	Your child's class email or trip organiser
Uniform/lost and found	Your child's class email
Attendance and absence requests	Report your child's absence: Call - 01582 572880 Requesting approval for term-time absence, download the relevant form from the website https://www.woodlands.luton.sch.uk/letters-and-forms/ Return it to Shazmeen Malik (family worker). Requests for part time attendance or discussions about school refusal - contact Lindsey Lucas (Assistant Headteacher)
Bullying and behaviour	Your child's class email or the department leader (initially)
School events/the school calendar	Class email or the office
Special educational needs (SEN)	The class teacher or SENCO – Nicole Tulloch
Transport issues	School contact – Janet Kay (family worker) PTU – 01582 547219
Support with applications for travel assistance	Family work team
Hiring the school premises	School office

I HAVE A QUESTION ABOUT...	WHO YOU NEED TO TALK TO
Governing board	See website for up to date information on the Governing Body
Catering/meals	The school office

Complaints

Please follow the procedure set out in our Complaints policy which can be found on our school website under 'School policies'. <https://www.woodlands.luton.sch.uk/school-policies/>