



Pound Hill Junior School

PARENTAL DISPUTES: ACCESS, CONTACT AND RESIDENCE POLICY

3 Reasons to Read This Policy

1. To understand the school's neutral position – The policy explains why the school cannot take sides in disagreements between parents about residence, contact or access.
2. To know what information the school can provide – It sets out the difference between factual information the school may provide, and letters or opinions intended to support one parent against another.
3. To understand how disputes and court orders are handled – The policy explains the school's approach when parents disagree, including what happens when a court order or safeguarding concern is involved

Adopted: Autumn 2026

Review date: Autumn 2029

1. Purpose

The school's primary responsibility is the education, welfare and safeguarding of the child. The school will remain impartial in private disputes between parents and will not act as an advocate for one parent against another.

The school recognises that parents and carers may, from time to time, disagree about arrangements concerning a child, including where the child lives, contact arrangements and collection from school.

2. School Neutrality

The school will not take sides in disputes between parents or carers concerning:

- ✓ the child's residence or living arrangements;
- ✓ parental access or contact;
- ✓ collection and drop-off arrangements;
- ✓ how much time a child spends with either parent;
- ✓ parental responsibility or disagreements about the exercise of parental responsibility; or
- ✓ applications or proceedings relating to these matters.
- ✓ Any other matter at the discretion of the school

The school will not express an opinion as to which parent should have residence, contact or access.

3. Requests for Letters or Statements

The school will not provide a letter, statement, reference or other document intended to support one parent or carer against another in relation to a dispute concerning access, contact or residence.

This includes requests for a letter:

- ✓ confirming that one parent is the child's "main" or "primary" parent;
- ✓ supporting one parent's proposed living or contact arrangements;
- ✓ commenting on the suitability of either parent to care for the child;
- ✓ recommending that a child should live with or spend more time with one parent;
- ✓ intended to be submitted to a solicitor or court to support one parent's position; or
- ✓ intended to influence a dispute between parents.

This policy will be applied consistently regardless of which parent makes the request.

4. Factual Information

The school may provide factual information where appropriate and where it is lawful to do so. For example, the school may provide information from its records concerning matters such as:

- ✓ attendance
- ✓ punctuality

- ✓ authorised or unauthorised absence
- ✓ educational progress
- ✓ relevant school records; and
- ✓ factual records of communications or incidents held by the school.

Any information provided will be limited to matters within the school's knowledge and records. Staff must not add personal opinions, assumptions or recommendations about parental arrangements.

Where a request is made for information in connection with court proceedings or a legal dispute, the school may require the request to be made through a direct and appropriate formal or legal process.

5. Parental Responsibility

The school will deal with parents and carers in accordance with applicable law concerning parental responsibility. Where more than one person has parental responsibility, the school will not make a determination about which parent should have greater involvement in the child's life simply because the parents disagree. The school will, however, comply with any valid court order or other legal requirement of which it has been properly notified.

6. Court Orders

Where the school receives a valid court order concerning a child's residence, contact, collection arrangements or other relevant matters, the school will follow the requirements that apply to the school.

Parents should provide the school with a copy of any relevant court order and inform the school promptly of any subsequent order or variation.

The school will not interpret or adjudicate upon disagreements between parents about the meaning or application of a court order. Where clarification is required, parents should obtain appropriate legal advice.

7. Safeguarding

Nothing in this policy prevents the school from taking action where there is a safeguarding concern.

Where information received by the school raises a concern about a child's safety or welfare, the school will follow its safeguarding procedures and may share relevant information with appropriate agencies where required or permitted by law.

Safeguarding decisions will be based on the child's welfare and the information available to the school, rather than on either parent's position in a private dispute.

8. Requests Made by Solicitors or Other Professionals

A request from a solicitor, court or other professional does not automatically require the school to provide an opinion or supporting statement. The school will consider such requests in accordance with its legal obligations, relevant court orders, safeguarding duties, data protection requirements and the circumstances of the individual case. Where the school is legally required to provide information, it will provide appropriate factual information within the scope of that requirement.

9. Staff Guidance

Staff should not become involved in disagreements between parents or make comments that could reasonably be interpreted as supporting one parent's position. Requests for letters, statements or opinions relating to parental access, contact or residence should be referred to the Headteacher or an appropriately designated member of the senior leadership team. Staff should not provide informal letters or statements on their own behalf for use in parental disputes.

10. Equal and Consistent Treatment

The school will seek to ensure that its approach is consistent and fair to all parents and carers. The school's refusal to support one parent's position does not indicate support for the other parent. It reflects the school's responsibility to remain neutral in private parental disputes and to focus on the child's education, welfare and safeguarding.

11. Review

This policy will be reviewed periodically and amended where necessary to reflect changes in legislation, statutory guidance, safeguarding requirements or relevant case law.