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# The British School of Gran Canaria

## **Separated Parents**

### Policy Document

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# THE BRITISH SCHOOL OF GRAN CANARIA

## SEPARATED PARENTS POLICY

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### 1. Scope

At BSGC, we endeavour to promote the best interests of the child and to work in partnership with our parents where possible. This policy clarifies expectations for separated or divorced parents and what can be expected from the school and its staff.

### 2. Parental Responsibility

For the school to care for children safely and appropriately we require on a child's admission to the school personal details of both parents, such as their names, addresses, contact details, etc. 'Parental responsibility' for the child also needs to be identified. This is fundamental as the school needs to know who has the legal right to make decisions about a child's education and medical treatment. Similarly, specific information about adults authorised to collect children from school is required and can be added and amended through the school's Parents Portal. All data must be maintained and updated on the portal by parents/carers during the student's school career.

Parents, as identified on school admission, are entitled to share in the decisions made about their child and to be treated equally by the school. These entitlements include:

- Attendance at parent meetings/school events;
- Access to school records and copies of school reports, newsletters, invitations to school events, school photographs relating to their child and information about school trips;
- School questionnaires;
- Participation in any exclusion procedure.

This entitlement cannot be restricted without a specific court order. The school does not have the power to act simply on the request of one parent to restrict another.

BSGC has an open-door policy for all parents, and staff are available by appointment to discuss issues. These appointments are coordinated by the school upon request of both or either parent, taking account of the school's parent/teacher meeting schedule, teacher availability and the seriousness of the matter or situation.

### 3. Court Orders

Parent separations are part of life, and the school should be kept as informed as possible in such cases so that appropriate care and attention can be given to the child. The school does not make judgements about individual circumstances and will treat all parties equally, unless there is a specific court ruling to the contrary. Staff will never pass judgement on either parent to the child.

Disagreements between parents must be resolved between the parents; the school will neither intervene nor take sides. If a disagreement were to occur at school or its surrounds, school staff will take steps to avoid a child from watching, taking them to a safe place until the end of the dispute. During any discussion or communication with parents, an appropriate member of staff will supervise the child in a separate room/area.

If a separation results in the issuing of a Court Order defining parental rights and responsibilities, then it is extremely important that the school has copies of such papers; parents are responsible for the prompt delivery of such information. Upon receipt of a Court Order, the school retains the right to consult its legal advisor before taking immediate action. The school is only obliged to comply with an order if the school has received a copy of the order and its authenticity has been confirmed and only to the extent that it relates to the school. If the school is not informed of the existence of such an order, neither parent will have rights superior to the other. Only a Court Order is deemed a valid document; a letter from a legal representative is not sufficient.

All official documents relating to custodial arrangements will be verified with both parents by the school.

#### **4. Shared Custody**

Many separation agreements involve shared custody of a child/ren. At start of school year, basic daily arrangements must be shared with the school by the parents.

Parents with shared custody who wish to make changes to set routines must inform the school via email. The parent who has custody on that day or during that week may authorise these changes. The other parent should be copied into the email for their information.

The school will not interpret copying the other parent as requiring their agreement, nor will the school seek additional confirmation, provided the change has been authorised by the parent who has custody at that time. Written communication will serve as proof of authorisation.

#### **5. School communications**

The school recognises that divorced or separated parents have equal rights to be informed of, and involved in their child's education. In the same vein, we expect parents, despite their separation, will communicate with each other and share school information for the benefit of their child. We assume that the parent with whom the child principally resides will keep the other parent informed.

However, we do recognise that communication between parents is not always possible. Therefore, the school will provide the same information and level of communication to both parents following instructions established by the *Gobierno de Canarias*, unless otherwise stated in a Court Order.

When writing an email to parents, staff shall always blind copy (bcc) to both parents, and ensure that any previous correspondence in the chain of emails does not contain the email address of either parent.

## **6. School Requested Authorisation**

When parents are separated, and unless otherwise stated in a Court Order, the school requires authorisation from both parents for residential trips, activities that incur a cost and other school events where parental permission is sought.

## **7. Collecting a child from school**

The collection of a child from school by separated parents is usually organised and agreed between both parties and notified to the school. In most cases, this daily organisation is conducted amicably, with minor issues readily resolved.

In cases where a Court Order has been issued pertaining to the collection of a child from school, the school will release children only to parents in accordance with the Court Order. If one parent seeks to remove the child from school in contravention of the established Court arrangements, and the parent to whom the child would normally be released has not notified the school of any change, the following steps will be followed: Where a separated parent, who has parental responsibility and no court order in place, wishes to take the child during or at the end of the school day, the resident parent will be contacted in order to ensure that they are in agreement with the arrangement.

- If the parent to whom the child is normally released, agrees and names another person to collect the child in an email, then the other person may collect the child. School records will reflect that permission was granted.
- If the parent authorised to collect the child on a given day does not agree to the other parent's collection request, then the school is bound by the court order and cannot release the child to the other parent. The school will inform both parents and ask that the authorised parent collect the child.
- In the event of a parent not arriving to collect a child, and being uncontactable, the school will call the police so that they can decide what to do with the child.
- In the event of an unresolvable dispute, the Policia Nacional will be summoned for guidance and intervention. The school shall not permit the child to leave with a parent who is not authorized to collect them. The school is obliged to follow the Court Order; in cases where this is not possible or difficult, the school will call the *Policia Nacional*.

## **Appendix 1 – Access to School Information for Separated or Divorced Parents**

### **Access to Parents' Portal**

- By default, the school issues one login account per student but the other parent may request access as well.
- Under the instruction of a Court Order, or at the specific request of a parent and with the agreement of one of the school's senior managers, a restricted access mode can be activated to limit access to certain information on the portal. In restricted mode, a parent will not be able to view the other parent's personal contact details. All other information will continue to be accessible and shared.

### **Emails**

- Standard school informative emails are sent to both parents, unless restricted by a court order.
- Daily emails from parents informing the school about daily routines are responded to in the following way.

| <b>Reason for Parent Email</b>          | <b>Sender</b> | <b>Confirmation required from parent responsible that day</b> |
|---|---------------|---|
| Change of bus route                     | x             | x   |
| Change of pick-up arrangements          | x             | x   |
| Lunch arrangements                      | x             |   |
| Change of clubs                         | x             |   |
| No clubs                                | x             | x   |
| Early pick-up (returning to school)     | x             |   |
| Early pick-up (not returning to school) | x             | x   |
| Late entry                              | x             |   |
| Uniform order                           | x             |   |

Some identified students require confirmation from Primary Heads or Secondary Head of Key Stage before responding. A list of these students will be provided to the office.