

## AMBROSE TREACY COLLEGE

### SEPARATED PARENTS POLICY

At Ambrose Treacy College we recognise that parents are the primary educators of their children and we are committed to support and assist parents in this role. Our experience and research shows that the education of a child will be best achieved when both parents work within a consistent framework to support their child. The College understands that separated parents can become estranged and in some circumstances have the potential to have a negative impact on the education of the children involved. The aim of this policy is to try and minimise this potential impact to children and clarify for all parties what is expected from separated parents with regards to the College and what parents can expect from Ambrose Treacy College.

At Ambrose Treacy College we recognise that although parents of some students may be divorced or separated, both have a right to be informed of and involved in, their son's education. Subject to any court orders to the contrary, each parent has parental responsibility towards their children which includes having the opportunity to participate in decisions that affect their children. Despite any estrangement, both parents are welcome and encouraged to participate in their child's education.

In meeting its obligations to students and parents, the College, while committed to the underlying philosophy of the Family Law Act, relies on the following principles:

- The education of a child is the primary responsibility of the child's parents;
- Generally it will be assumed that both parents are involved in any decisions made concerning major long term issues impacting on the school;
- The Principal should make decisions based primarily on what he or she considers to be in the best educational interests of the child;
- Where parents cannot agree what is in the child's best interests, it is the role of the Court, not the school, to determine those interests;
- The College is not the appropriate place for family disputes to be resolved nor is it appropriate for the College staff to resolve such issues;
- Any decisions should be made in an unbiased manner and as far as reasonably practicable, without favour to either parent;
- Where doubt arises in resolving any issues, the educational interests, safety and welfare of the student are to be the paramount consideration.

The College requests that a copy of any court orders in place concerning a child or his parents is provided to the College at the time of enrolment, or the time the order is made. If any orders are subsequently made by a Court during the period of a student's enrolment at the College, the College should be promptly provided with a copy of these orders. It is noted that these court orders will only be used by the College to ensure that the educational interests, safety and welfare of the student are properly addressed.

#### ENROLMENT

Enrolment in a school is regarded as a major long term educational issue for a student. In the absence of any court orders to the contrary, any decision about enrolment should be made jointly by both parents and the College would seek to have a relationship with both parents in supporting the education of their son. However there is no requirement for the College to independently establish that any decision has been jointly made by parents to enroll their son at the College. In the absence of written advice from another parent objecting to the enrolment of their son at the College, an enrolment will be accepted even though only one parent has signed the College enrolment application form.

In enrolling a student at the College, it is a requirement that the student is enrolled in the name that appears on their birth certificate. In absence of a birth certificate a different name can only be used on an enrolment form if one of the following conditions apply:

- A court order is provided authorising the use of a new name;
- A birth certificate has been issued in a new name;
- Proof of adoption authorising the new name is provided.

A child's first name, like his surname, is regarded as a major long term issue. It is not unusual however for children to use alternative first names or nicknames at school. The College believes that it is appropriate that staff may use these alternative first names even though all official documentation at the College and issued by the College may be in the name recorded on the birth certificate. Care should always be taken to ensure that the child consents to the use of the alternative name, and that it is not likely to cause offense. Whether or not an alternate first name is used by College staff when addressing individual students it is a decision to be made by the staff based on the circumstances of the specific case. Generally these circumstances would consider the following points:

- The views of the student;
- The views of both parents;
- The name used by fellow students when interacting with the student concerned;
- The potential problems arising from using a name to which he child may not or will not respond to;
- What is in the best educational interests of the child.

#### **CONFIRMATION OF A CHILD'S ENROLMENT AT THE COLLEGE**

Unless the College is aware that there are court orders that deny a particular parent any parental responsibility for the child, generally confirmation will be provided to a parent that their son is enrolled at the College. This confirmation will be only that the child is enrolled at the College and under no circumstances will the address or contact details of a child or a parent be given to the other parent without the first mentioned parent's consent.

Where a person asserts that he or she is the parent of a child at the College, but is not known to College staff, the College Principal or his or her delegate reserves the right to ask the person for proof of identification before releasing any information confirming the child's enrolment at the College. Failure to provide proof of identity will result in the College denying such a request. In general this information will only be given following a written request or the request is made in person by the child's parent to the Principal or delegate.

#### **PARENTAL ACCESS TO SCHOOL DOCUMENTATION**

In many instances parents who have separated will both seek to play an active part in the education of their son. Sometimes a parent will not agree that the other parent has a right to receive information about their children's education. In the absence of a court order, each parent has equal obligations, duties and responsibilities in respect of their children. To fulfil those obligations, duties and responsibilities, it is reasonable that each parent is able to access relevant information that may be issued from a school concerning their children's education.

Where the parents have separated and the child lives with one parent, by virtue of a court order or otherwise, all school documentation will be by default forwarded to or access will be provided to the parent with whom the child is living. In the case where a child resides with both parents, all school documentation will be sent to and access provided to both parents.

Upon a written request for a copy of or access to school documentation by the non-residential parent, copies of or access to the material will be provided unless there are orders to the contrary. Documents of a minor administrative nature such as notices that the school tuckshop will be closed or that specific minor school activities are cancelled will not be included in the material sent to non-residential parents. Publications produced by various agencies within the College e.g. the P&F Association, the music or sports departments will be distributed in accordance with the intended purposes of the publication.

The material provided to non-residential parents will include copies of or access to documentation that is considered significant by the College and which is ordinarily provided to the parent with whom the child lives. This includes school reports, school welfare and discipline documentation, school newsletters, and notices regarding major excursions and major school activities such as school plays, presentation nights or parent teacher nights. If a court order is made that denies parental responsibility for the long term care of a child or gives sole responsibility for educational matters to one parent, the other parent is not entitled to any documentation or information about their child from the school.

It is understood that permission notes for participation in school activities, such as excursions, can be an area of dispute between parents. Many excursions and other off-site school activities are organised well in advance. In general, permission notes will be obtained from the parent the school usually contacts regarding day to day issues and where the student normally resides. If parents disagree about a student's participation in an excursion or other school activity, they will be encouraged to resolve the dispute away from the school. If the parents cannot agree, the Principal or his or her delegate reserves the right make a decision based on the specific circumstances, with particular emphasis on the educational value from participating in the activity and the interests of the student generally. The College Principal will also take into account the views of the student.

#### **PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN SCHOOL ACTIVITIES**

Where court orders have not been made, both parents may attend school organised activities. Each parent maintains parental responsibilities and is able to visit the school and speak to the Principal and teachers about their child's education and participate in all activities in which parents are normally involved. It is only when a parent causes a disturbance, interferes with the good management of the College or refuses a reasonable request to leave that a Principal will act to exclude that parent from the school.

Where court orders have been made, parents will not be excluded from school activities unless there is a specific order which makes their attendance inappropriate.

The College Principal will always have regard to any known history of animosity between the parents before deciding whether both parents should participate at the same time in the school activity. The primary concern must always be the prevention of disputes which will impact on the efficient and effective operation of the school and jeopardise the safety and wellbeing of their son or other persons on the site.

The College Principal will make reasonable attempts to arrive at a compromise position so that both parents can actively participate in school activities.

#### **DEALING WITH PERSONS OTHER THAN PARENTS**

The College recognises the right of children to maintain on-going relationships with people significant to their care, welfare and development. The College also recognises that this may result in conflict at school between parents and other family members e.g. Grandparents. In enrolling a student at the College the official relationship is between the school and the parents, while other persons such as grandparents may wish to maintain a close involvement with children attending the College, they cannot rely on any formal relationship

with the school. Subject to any Court Order which requires such, the College will not agree to any requests from any other persons outside the parents to have copies of or access to any official school documentation. While step-parents often are closely involved in school related matters pertaining to their step-sons, any such involvement is always with the consent (either expressed or implied) of the step-parent's spouse or partner, who is a parent of the child.