



ODYSSEY HOUSE SCHOOL - BLOOMSBURY

# Complaints Procedure

Odyssey House School, Bloomsbury is part of Odyssey Education Services.

Odyssey Education Services is Registered in England and Wales, company number 1162321, registered at 224 Venture House, Arlington Square, Downshire Way, Bracknell, RG12 1WA.

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**Date:** September 2025

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**Review:** September 2026

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## 1. Aims

Our school aims to meet its statutory obligations when responding to complaints from parents/carers of pupils at the school and others.

Contentious issues can arise in any organisation, and this includes schools. A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction with a real or perceived problem. It may be made about the school, about a specific department or about an individual member of staff. The Odyssey complaints procedure is in place to provide a clear, fair and efficient procedure for dealing with any complaints relating to the school, so that they can be dealt with swiftly, fairly and effectively.

The complaints procedure is available to parents of current and prospective pupils on the Odyssey website and can be obtained as a paper copy from the school reception. The website also contains up-to-date information on how many formal complaints there have been in the preceding year. All concerns and complaints will be treated confidentially, with related paperwork kept in a secure place. Records will be kept for at least three years. If a complaint regards child protection or safeguarding, the issue will be immediately referred to the school's Designated Safeguarding Lead and referred to the Multi-Agency Safeguarding team as necessary.

When responding to complaints, we aim to:

- Be impartial and non-adversarial
- Facilitate a full and fair investigation by an independent person or panel, where necessary
- Address all the points at issue and provide an effective and prompt response
- Respect complainants desire for confidentiality
- Treat complainants with respect and courtesy
- Make sure that any decisions we make are lawful, rational, reasonable, fair and proportionate, in line with the principles of administrative law
- Keep complainants informed of the progress of the complaints process
- Consider how the complaint can feed into school improvement evaluation processes

We try to resolve complaints by informal means wherever possible. Where this is not possible, formal procedures will be followed.

Throughout the process, we will be sensitive to the needs of all parties involved, and make any reasonable adjustments needed to accommodate individuals.

## 2. Legislation and guidance

This document meets the requirements of section 35 of the schedule to the [Education \(Non-Maintained Special Schools\) \(England\) Regulations 2011](#), which states that non-maintained special schools must have and make available a written procedure to deal with complaints relating to their school. It also refers to [good practice guidance on setting up complaints procedures](#) from the Department for Education (DfE).

## 3. Scope

This policy does **not** cover complaints procedures relating to:

- Admissions
- Statutory assessments of special educational needs (SEN)
- Safeguarding matters
- Suspension and permanent exclusion
- Whistleblowing
- Staff Grievances
- Staff Disciplinary

Please see our separate policies for procedures relating to these types of complaint.

Complaints about services provided by other providers who use school premises or facilities should be directed to the provider concerned.

## 4. Roles and responsibilities

### 4.1. The complainant

The complainant will get a more effective and timely response to their complaint if they:

- Follow these procedures
- Co-operate with the school throughout the process, and respond to deadlines and communication promptly
- Ask for assistance as needed

- Treat all those involved with respect
- Do not approach individual governors about the complaint
- Do not publish details about the complaint on social media

## **4.2. The investigator**

An individual will be appointed to look into the complaint and establish the facts. They will:

- Interview all relevant parties, keeping notes
- Consider records and any written evidence and keep these securely
- Prepare a comprehensive report to the headteacher or complaints committee, which includes the facts and potential solutions

## **4.3. The complaints co-ordinator**

The complaints co-ordinator can be:

- The headteacher
- The designated complaints governor
- Any other staff member providing administrative support
- The complaints co-ordinator will:
  - Keep the complainant up to date at each stage in the procedure
  - Make sure the process runs smoothly by liaising with staff members, the headteacher, chair of governors, and clerk
- Be aware of issues relating to:
  - Sharing third-party information
  - Additional support needed by complainants; for example, interpretation support or where the complainant is a child or young person
- Keep records

## **4.4. Committee chair**

The committee chair will:

- Chair the meeting, ensuring that everyone is treated with respect throughout
- Make sure all parties see the relevant information, understand the purpose of the committee, and are allowed to present their case

# **5. Principles for investigation**

When investigating a complaint, we will try to clarify:

- What has happened
- Who was involved
- What the complainant feels would put things right

## **5.1. Timescales**

The complainant must raise the complaint within 3 months of the incident. If the complaint is about a series of related incidents, they must raise the complaint within 3 months of the last incident.

We will consider exceptions to this timeframe in circumstances where there were valid reasons for not making a complaint at that time and the complaint can still be investigated in a fair manner for all involved.

When complaints are made out of term time, we will consider them to have been received on the first school day after the holiday period.

If at any point we cannot meet the timescales we have set out in this policy, we will:

- Set new time limits with the complainant
- Send the complainant details of the new deadline and explain the delay

## 6. Stages of complaint (not complaints against the Headteacher)

We have adopted a 3-stage process for dealing with complaints:

- Stage 1 – informal resolution
- Stage 2 – formal investigation
- Stage 3 – review panel

### 6.1. Stage 1 Informal resolution

Our school will take informal complaints seriously and make every effort to resolve the matter quickly. It may be the case that the provision or clarification of information will resolve the issue.

The complainant should raise the complaint as soon as possible within the timescales set out in section 5.1.

The complaint should be addressed to the relevant member of school staff or the Headteacher, either in person or by letter, telephone or email. If the complainant is unclear who to contact or how to contact them, they should contact the school reception, [rsreception@odysseyeducation.org.uk](mailto:rsreception@odysseyeducation.org.uk) or 020 3336 3593.

The school will acknowledge informal complaints within 5 school days, which will confirm how the school intends to proceed, including an indication of the anticipated timescale.

The informal stage will involve a meeting between the complainant and the Headteacher or subject of the complaint. A written response will be provided by the school within 10 school days following the informal meeting.

If the complaint is not resolved informally, it will be escalated to a formal complaint.

### 6.2. Stage 2: formal

The formal stage involves the complainant putting the complaint to the Headteacher and/or the subject of the complaint:

- In a letter or email (this is preferred)
- Over the phone
- In person
- Through a third party acting on their behalf

The complainant should provide details such as relevant dates, times and the names of witnesses of events, alongside copies of any relevant documents. The complainant should also state what they feel would resolve the complaint.

If complainants need assistance raising a formal complaint, they can contact the reception [rsreception@odysseyeducation.org.uk](mailto:rsreception@odysseyeducation.org.uk) or 020 3336 3593.

The Headteacher will record the date the complaint is received and will acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within 5 school days.

The Headteacher (or other person appointed by the Headteacher for this purpose) will then conduct their own investigation. The written conclusion of this investigation will be sent to the complainant within 15 school days.

### **How to escalate a complaint**

If the complainant wishes to proceed to the next stage of the procedure, they should put their complaint in writing to the CEO & Co-Founder within 10 school days. Requests received outside of this timeframe will be considered in exceptional circumstances.

Complaints can be escalated by contacting the CEO by letter or email.

The information should contain the details of the complaint as set out above, as well as details from the complainant on how they feel the previous stage of the procedure has not addressed their complaint sufficiently, and what they feel would resolve the complaint.

## **6.3. Stage 3: Appeals panel**

If parents seek to move to Stage 3 following failure to reach an earlier resolution as indicated above, they must put their complaint in writing to the CEO & Co-Founder.

The matter will then be referred to the Complaints Appeal Panel. The Panel will consist of three people not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint and one of who is independent of the management of the running of the school.

### **The Panel**

The panel will have access to the existing record of the complaint's progress (see section 10).

The complainant must have reasonable notice of the date of the review panel. The clerk will aim to find a date within 10 school days of the request, where possible.

If the complainant rejects the offer of 3 proposed dates without good reason, the panel will set a date. The hearing will go ahead using written submissions from both parties.

Any written material will be circulated to all parties at least 5 school days before the date of the meeting. If the Panel deems it necessary, it may require that further particulars of the complaint or any related matter be supplied in advance of the hearing. Copies of these particulars shall be supplied **not later than five working days prior to the hearing**. The complainant/s may attend the hearing and be accompanied by one other person if they wish.

The panel will ensure that the hearing is properly minuted.

### **At the meeting**



The meeting will be held in private. Electronic recordings of meetings or conversations are not normally permitted unless required as part of reasonable adjustments. Prior knowledge and consent of all parties attending will be sought before meetings or conversations take place. Consent will be recorded in any minutes taken.

At the appeal meeting, the complainant will have the opportunity to present their written or oral submissions. The Panel will then meet with representatives from the school as appropriate to give them an opportunity to present their submission. Further witnesses will be called as appropriate.

We don't encourage either party to bring legal representation, but will consider it on a case-by-case basis. For instance, if a school employee is called as a witness in a complaint meeting, they may wish to be supported by their union.

Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.

At the meetings, each individual will have the opportunity to give statements and present their evidence, and witnesses will be called, as appropriate, to present their evidence.

Once the complainant and school representative(s) have presented their cases, they will be asked to leave and evidence will then be considered.

The panel may need further time to investigate any queries.

### **The outcome**

The committee can:

- Uphold the complaint, in whole or in part
- Dismiss the complaint, in whole or in part

The Panel will issue findings and may make recommendations based on all the evidence presented. Within **5 school days** of the Panel hearing, these will be sent by electronic mail or by letter to the complainant/s, and, where relevant, the person complained about. A copy will also be sent to the CEO and Co-Founder, SLT and Headteacher assuming s/he is not the subject of the complaint. The findings and recommendations will also be available for inspection on the school premises by the CEO and Co-Founder, Headteacher, SLT and Independent School Inspectorate (ISI) as appropriate.

If the complainant/s is/are unhappy with the outcome, they may refer the complaint to the Secretary of State. Complaints can be submitted online at <https://www.gov.uk/complain-about-school>.

If you wish to make a complaint directly to ISI about the school, you can contact their general helpline on 0207 600 0100; or request advice by email on [concerns@isi.net](mailto:concerns@isi.net).

Complaints regarding the Headteacher should be submitted to the CEO at all stages.

## **9. Unreasonable and persistent complaints**

### **9.1 Unreasonable complaints**

Most complaints raised will be valid, and therefore we will treat them seriously. However, a complaint may become unreasonable if the person:

- Refuses to articulate their complaint or specify the grounds of a complaint or the outcomes sought by raising the complaint, despite offers of assistance

- Refuses to co-operate with the complaints investigation process
- Refuses to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of the complaints procedure
- Insists on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the complaints procedure or with good practice
- Introduces trivial or irrelevant information which they expect to be taken into account and commented on
- Raises large numbers of detailed but unimportant questions, and insists they are fully answered, often immediately and to their own timescales
- Makes unjustified complaints about staff who are trying to deal with the issues, and seeks to have them replaced
- Changes the basis of the complaint as the investigation proceeds
- Repeatedly makes the same complaint (despite previous investigations or responses concluding that the complaint is groundless or has been addressed)
- Refuses to accept the findings of the investigation into that complaint where the school's complaint procedure has been fully and properly implemented and completed
- Seeks an unrealistic outcome
- Makes excessive demands on school time by frequent, lengthy and complicated contact with staff regarding the complaint in person, in writing, by email and by telephone while the complaint is being dealt with
- Uses threats to intimidate
- Uses abusive, offensive or discriminatory language or violence
- Knowingly provides falsified information
- Publishes unacceptable information on social media or other public forums

**Please note:** the above list is not intended to be exhaustive and is for guidance purposes only. It is at the discretion of the school what is deemed to be unreasonable.

Complainants should try to limit their communication with the school while the complaint is being progressed. It is not helpful if repeated correspondence is sent (either by letter, phone, email or text), as it could delay the outcome being reached.

### Steps we will take

We will take every reasonable step to address the complainant's comments, and give them a clear statement of our position and their options. We will maintain our role as an objective arbiter throughout the process, including when we meet with individuals. We will follow our complaints procedure as normal (as outlined above) wherever possible.

Whenever possible, the headteacher will discuss any concerns with the complainant informally before applying an 'unreasonable' marking. If the behaviour continues, the headteacher will write to the complainant explaining that their behaviour is unreasonable, refer them to this policy and remind them to act in accordance with it. For complainants who excessively contact the school causing a significant level of disruption, we may:

- Give the complainant a single point of contact via an email address
- Limit the number of times the complainant can make contact, such as a fixed number per term
- Ask the complainant to engage a third party to act on their behalf, such as [Citizens Advice](#)
- Put any other strategy in place as necessary

In response to any serious incident of aggression or violence, we will immediately inform the police and communicate our actions in writing. This may include barring an individual from school premises and ensuring appropriate measures of support are provided to staff where they are the subject of aggression and/or violence.

## 9.2 Serial/persistent complaints

If the complainant contacts the school again on the same issue, the correspondence may then be viewed as 'serial' or 'persistent'. We may stop responding to the complainant when the following conditions are met:

- We have taken every reasonable step to address the complainant's concerns
- The complainant has been given a clear statement of our position and their options
- The complainant contacts the school repeatedly, making substantially the same points each time

The case to stop responding is stronger if:

- The complainant's communications are often or always abusive or aggressive
- The complainant makes insulting personal comments about or threats towards staff
- We have reason to believe the individual is contacting the school with the intention of causing disruption or inconvenience

Where we decide to stop responding, we will inform the individual that we intend to do so. We will also explain that we will consider any new complaints they make provided the concerns raised are materially different to those raised previously and/or are unconnected to the previous concern.

## 9.3 Duplicate complaints

If we have resolved a complaint under this procedure and receive a duplicate complaint on the same subject from a partner, family member or other individual, we will assess whether there are aspects that we hadn't previously considered, or any new information we need to take into account.

If we are satisfied that there are no new aspects, we will:

- Tell the new complainant that we have already investigated and responded to this issue, and that the local process is complete
- Direct them to the appropriate external body if they are dissatisfied with our original handling of the complaint

If a duplicate complaint is raised which in the view of the school warrants further consideration, the procedure outlined in section 6 or 7 (as appropriate) will be repeated.

## 9.4 Complaint campaigns

Where the school receives a large volume of complaints about the same topic or subject, especially if these come from complainants unconnected with the school, the school may respond to these complaints by:

- Publishing a single response on the school website
- Sending a template response to all of the complainants

If complainants are not satisfied with the school's response, or wish to pursue the complaint further, the normal procedures will apply.

## 10. Recording complaints and use of personal data

Following resolution of a complaint, the school will keep a written record of all complaints and whether they are resolved at the informal stage, the formal stage or proceed to a panel hearing and the action taken by the school as a result of these complaints regardless of whether they are upheld.

The school processes data in accordance with its Privacy Notice, a copy of which is available on the school website. When dealing with complaints, the school (including any Panel member appointed under the Stage 3 process) may process a range of information, which is likely to include the following:

- Date when the issue was raised
- Name(s) of parent(s)
- Name of pupil
- Description of the issue
- Records of all the investigations (if appropriate)
- Witness statements (if appropriate)
- Name of member(s) of staff handling the issue at each stage
- Copies of all correspondence on the issue (including emails and records of phone conversations)
- Notes/minutes of the hearing
- The Panel's written decision

This may include 'special category personal data' (as further detailed in the School's Privacy Notice, but potentially including sensitive data such as information relating to physical or mental health) where this is necessary owing to the nature of the complaint.

The school will keep records of formal complaints and Complaints Panel hearings, as required by regulation. It will do so in accordance with its Privacy Notice, but in most cases for a period of at least six years after the pupil leaves the school (subject to the supervening requirements of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse set out in Appendix 2).

Correspondence, statements, and records relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 109 of the Education and Skills Act 2008 requests access to them or where any other legal obligation prevails.

## 11. Monitoring arrangements

The Headteacher and CEO will monitor the effectiveness of the complaints procedure in making sure that complaints are handled properly. The Headteacher will track the number and nature of complaints, and review underlying issues as stated in section 11.

The complaints records are logged and managed by the Headteacher.

This policy will be reviewed by the Headteacher and CEO every 2 years.

At each review, the policy will be approved by the CEO.

## 13. Links with other policies

Policies dealing with other forms of complaints include:

- Child protection and safeguarding policy and procedures
- Admissions policy
- Staff grievance procedures
- Staff disciplinary procedures
- Special educational needs policy and information report
- Privacy notices

<b>Number of formal complaints made to Odyssey House School – Bloomsbury in the previous academic year: 2024- 2025</b>	0
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<b>Outcome:</b>	0
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