



ODYSSEY HOUSE SCHOOL

Complaints Procedure Policy

Odyssey House School is part of Odyssey Education Services.

Odyssey Education Services is Registered in England and Wales, company number 1162321, registered at 329 Doncastle Road, Bracknell, RG12 8PE.

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This policy applies to the Odyssey Education Group of Schools –

Odyssey House School, Bloomsbury;

Odyssey House School, Wokingham

- hereafter referred to as "the School".

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1. Purpose and Aims

Odyssey House School - Wokingham aims to resolve concerns and complaints fairly, promptly and respectfully. This procedure explains how parents may raise concerns or complaints and how the school will consider, investigate, record and respond to them.

The school recognises that complaints can provide important information about the quality, consistency and impact of its provision. Leaders will use complaint outcomes and themes to strengthen school improvement, safeguarding, welfare, communication and provision for pupils.

When responding to complaints, the school will:

- act impartially and avoid an adversarial approach;
- seek early resolution where this is appropriate and safe;
- investigate the points raised and consider relevant evidence;
- provide clear written responses within published timescales;
- make reasonable adjustments where a parent needs support to use the procedure;
- keep appropriate records and maintain confidentiality; and
- ensure safeguarding concerns are acted on immediately through the school safeguarding procedures.

2. Regulatory Basis

This policy is written to meet the requirements of the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, Schedule, Part 7, paragraph 33, which sets out the standard for the manner in which complaints are handled by independent schools.

It also supports the school's responsibilities under Part 6 of the Independent School Standards to make details of the complaints procedure and the number of formal complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year available to parents of pupils and prospective pupils.

This procedure should be read alongside the school's safeguarding, admissions, behaviour, exclusions, SEND, whistleblowing, staff grievance, staff disciplinary, privacy notice and data protection arrangements.

3. Availability of the Procedure and Complaint Numbers

This policy is available to parents of current pupils and prospective pupils on the school website.

A paper copy is available free of charge from the school reception on request.

The number of formal complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year will be published or otherwise made available to parents and prospective parents.

Number of formal complaints registered under the formal procedure in the preceding school year 2024-2025: 2.

This figure must be checked against the school's complaints register before publication and updated annually.

4. Scope

This procedure applies to complaints from parents of pupils registered at Odyssey House School - Wokingham. The school may also choose to consider concerns raised by prospective parents, former parents, pupils or other stakeholders where this is appropriate, but the Independent School Standards require the procedure to cover complaints from parents of current pupils.

This procedure does not replace separate statutory or school procedures for:

- admissions decisions;
- statutory assessment, amendment or content of an Education, Health and Care Plan;
- suspension, permanent exclusion or removal from roll, where a separate procedure applies;
- staff grievance or disciplinary matters;
- whistleblowing disclosures by staff or others;
- subject access requests or other data rights requests; and
- services provided by third parties using school premises, where the complaint relates solely to that provider's service.

Where a complaint raises a safeguarding concern, the safeguarding concern will be referred immediately to the Designated Safeguarding Lead or a deputy DSL and managed under the school's safeguarding procedures. Where appropriate, this may include referral to children's social care, the local authority designated officer, the police, or other agencies.

A complaint about the school's handling of a safeguarding matter may still be considered under this complaints procedure once immediate safeguarding action has been taken, unless doing so would prejudice a safeguarding, police, local authority or regulatory process.

5. Roles and Responsibilities

5.1 The complainant

The complainant is expected to:

- raise the concern or complaint as soon as reasonably possible;
- explain the issue clearly and identify the outcome sought where possible;
- provide relevant information or evidence when requested;
- engage respectfully with staff and the complaints process;
- avoid approaching individual governors, proprietors or panel members outside the procedure; and
- avoid publishing confidential details of the complaint or individuals involved on social media or other public forums.

5.2 The complaints coordinator

The Headteacher will normally act as complaints coordinator unless the complaint is about the Headteacher or there is another conflict of interest. The Clinical & Operation Director or proprietor may appoint another suitable person to coordinate the complaint where needed.

The complaints coordinator will:

- acknowledge complaints and keep the complainant informed;
- ensure reasonable adjustments are considered;

- arrange investigation, meetings and correspondence;
- maintain the complaints record;
- protect confidential information and third-party data; and
- ensure outcomes and actions are tracked.

5.3 The investigator

An investigator will be appointed where a formal complaint requires investigation. The investigator may be the Headteacher, a senior leader, the Clinical & Operation Director, proprietor, or another suitably independent person, depending on the nature of the complaint.

The investigator will:

- clarify the complaint and outcome sought;
- review relevant records and evidence;
- speak with relevant staff, pupils or witnesses where appropriate;
- keep accurate notes and records;
- consider whether safeguarding, SEND, welfare, equality or data protection issues are engaged; and
- prepare a clear written outcome or report.

5.4 The panel chair

The panel chair will ensure that the panel hearing is fair, properly minuted, focused on the complaint and conducted respectfully. The chair will ensure that both the complainant and the school are able to present their case and that the panel reaches findings and, where appropriate, recommendations.

6. Timescales

Complaints should be raised within three months of the incident or, where the complaint relates to a series of linked incidents, within three months of the final incident.

The school may consider a complaint outside this timeframe where there is a good reason for delay and the matter can still be investigated fairly.

Complaints received during school holidays will normally be treated as received on the first school day after the holiday period.

If the school cannot meet a published timescale, it will tell the complainant in writing, explain the reason for the delay and provide a revised deadline.

7. Stage 1: Informal Resolution

The school will take informal concerns seriously and will seek to resolve them promptly where possible. Many concerns can be resolved through clarification, a meeting, an apology, an agreed action, or a review of communication.

A parent should raise an informal concern with the relevant member of staff, the Headteacher, or school reception. Concerns may be raised in person, by telephone, by email or by letter.

The school will acknowledge an informal concern within five school days and explain how it intends to proceed.

Where a meeting is needed, the school will arrange this as soon as reasonably practicable. A written response will normally be provided within ten school days after the informal meeting or, where no meeting is needed, within ten school days of acknowledgement.

If the parent remains dissatisfied, they may escalate the matter to Stage 2.

8. Stage 2: Formal Written Complaint

A formal complaint must be made in writing. This may be by letter, email, complaint form, or written record prepared by the school with the parent's agreement where the parent needs help to put the complaint in writing.

The written complaint should include the key dates, people involved, relevant evidence, the outcome sought and why the parent remains dissatisfied after Stage 1, where Stage 1 has taken place.

Formal complaints should be sent to the Headteacher unless the complaint is about the Headteacher, in which case it should be sent to the Clinical & Operation Director. If the complaint is about the Clinical & Operation Director, it should be sent to the CEO as Chair of the proprietor body or an appointed independent complaints coordinator.

The school will acknowledge receipt in writing within five school days.

The Headteacher, Clinical & Operation Director, CEO, proprietor or appointed investigator will investigate the complaint. The investigator may meet or speak with the complainant, staff, pupils or other relevant people and may review records, policies, correspondence, SEND information, safeguarding records or other evidence where relevant and lawful.

The school will send a written outcome within fifteen school days of acknowledging the formal complaint. The outcome will normally summarise the complaint, investigation steps, findings, decision, any action to be taken and the complainant's right to request a Stage 3 panel hearing.

9. Stage 3: Panel Hearing

If the parent remains dissatisfied following Stage 2, they may request a panel hearing. The request must be made in writing within ten school days of the Stage 2 outcome and should explain why the Stage 2 response has not resolved the complaint and what outcome is sought. Requests should be sent to the Clinical & Operation Director unless the Clinical & Operation Director has been directly involved in the matter or is the subject of the complaint. In that case, the request should be sent to the CEO as Chair of the proprietor body or an appointed independent complaints coordinator.

9.1 Panel membership

The panel will be appointed by or on behalf of the proprietor. It will consist of at least three people who were not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint.

At least one panel member will be independent of the management and running of the school.

This means the independent member must not be a member of the school workforce, a member of the governing or proprietorial body, or otherwise involved in the management of the school.

The school will check and record whether panel members have any conflict of interest before the hearing.

9.2 Arranging the hearing

The complaints coordinator will offer reasonable notice of the hearing date and will aim to arrange the hearing within ten school days of the Stage 3 request where practicable.

The parent may attend the panel hearing and may be accompanied by one other person if they wish. The accompanying person may provide support but will not normally act as a legal advocate unless the panel agrees this is appropriate.

If the parent rejects three reasonable proposed dates without good reason, the panel may set a date and proceed based on written submissions from both parties.

Written material will be circulated to the panel, the parent and the school at least five school days before the hearing, unless the panel directs otherwise.

9.3 Conduct of the hearing

The hearing will be held in private. The panel chair will explain the process, ensure each party can present their case, ask questions and respond to relevant evidence.

The panel may invite witnesses where appropriate. The panel will consider the complaint, the Stage 2 response, relevant records, written submissions and oral evidence.

Electronic recording of the hearing is not normally permitted unless required as a reasonable adjustment and agreed in advance by the panel. The hearing will be minuted.

9.4 Findings and recommendations

The panel may:

- uphold the complaint in whole or in part;
- dismiss the complaint in whole or in part;
- make findings;
- make recommendations; and
- identify actions for the school where appropriate.

The panel's findings and any recommendations will be sent in writing within five school days of the hearing to the complainant and, where relevant, the person complained about.

A copy of the findings and recommendations will be available for inspection on the school premises by the proprietor and the Headteacher. The school will also make records available to the Secretary of State or an inspection body conducting an inspection under section 109 of the Education and Skills Act 2008 where requested.

10. Complaints About the Headteacher, CEO or Proprietor

Complaints about the Headteacher should be sent to the Clinical & Operation Director. The Clinical & Operation Director will arrange investigation and will ensure that any Stage 3 panel members have not been directly involved in the matter.

Complaints about the Clinical & Operation Director should be sent to the CEO (Chair of Propriety Body) to coordinate the complaint. The complaint will be investigated by a suitably independent person wherever practicable.

Where a complaint concerns the proprietor body or creates a conflict of interest for the proprietor, the proprietor will appoint a suitably independent complaints coordinator or investigator. Any Stage 3 panel will include at least one person independent of the management and running of the school and will exclude anyone directly involved in the matters complained about.

11. Safeguarding, Welfare and External Agency Matters

All safeguarding concerns identified through a complaint will be acted on immediately and will not wait for completion of this complaints process.

Where a complaint indicates that a child may be at risk of harm, the matter will be referred to the Designated Safeguarding Lead or deputy DSL. The DSL will decide whether referral is needed to children's social care, the local authority designated officer, the police, the placing local authority or another agency.

Where external agencies are involved, the school may pause or adapt the complaints process to avoid prejudicing safeguarding, police, local authority or regulatory action. The school will tell the complainant where this affects timescales, unless it is not appropriate or lawful to do so.

The school will keep a clear record of safeguarding decisions, referrals, advice received and actions taken.

12. Data Protection Complaints

The school is a data controller and will handle data protection complaints in line with the Data Protection Act 2018, UK GDPR and the school's privacy notice.

Where a complaint is also a data protection complaint from a data subject, the school will facilitate the complaint, acknowledge it within 30 days, investigate without undue delay and communicate the outcome promptly.

The school may use this complaints procedure to consider data protection complaints where appropriate, but will ensure that doing so does not conflict with statutory data protection duties or Information Commissioner's Office expectations.

13. Unreasonable, Vexatious, Serial or Duplicate Complaints

The school will treat complaints seriously and will not mark a complaint as unreasonable simply because the complainant is persistent or dissatisfied.

A complaint or pattern of communication may be treated as unreasonable where the complainant:

- refuses to specify the complaint or outcome sought despite support;
- refuses to cooperate with the procedure;
- repeatedly raises substantially the same matter after the procedure has been completed;
- makes excessive demands on school time through frequent, lengthy or complex contact;

- uses abusive, offensive, discriminatory or threatening language or behaviour;
- knowingly provides false information; or
- publishes unacceptable or confidential information about the complaint, staff or pupils.

Before applying communication restrictions, the school will normally explain the concern to the complainant and give them an opportunity to adjust their communication, unless immediate action is needed to protect pupils, staff or the orderly running of the school.

Where proportionate, the school may:

- identify a single point of contact;
- set reasonable limits on the frequency or method of contact;
- require communication to be in writing;
- decline to respond to repeated points already answered; or
- take appropriate action where there is aggression, harassment or risk to safety.

The school will still consider any new complaint that is materially different from previous complaints or raises new evidence.

14. Recording, Confidentiality and Retention

The school will keep a written record of all formal complaints made under Stage 2 and Stage 3.

The record will state whether the complaint was resolved following the formal procedure or proceeded to a panel hearing, and will record action taken by the school as a result of the complaint, whether or not the complaint was upheld.

Complaint records will normally include:

- date the complaint was raised;
- name of complainant and pupil, where relevant;
- summary of the complaint and outcome sought;
- stage reached and key dates;
- records reviewed and investigation notes;
- correspondence, meeting notes and witness information where relevant;
- outcome, findings and recommendations;
- actions taken, owner and completion date; and
- any safeguarding, SEND, equality or data protection issues identified.

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 another legal obligation requires disclosure.

Formal complaint records and panel records will be retained for at least six years after the pupil leaves the school, unless a longer retention period is required because of safeguarding, legal, regulatory, insurance or inquiry-related requirements.

15. Monitoring, Quality Assurance and Learning

The Headteacher and Clinical & Operation Director will monitor the operation and effectiveness of this procedure. Monitoring will include complaint numbers, themes, stages reached,

timeliness, outcomes, actions, repeat issues and any implications for safeguarding, SEND, behaviour, attendance, communication, curriculum, welfare or leadership practice.

Complaint themes and actions will be reviewed at least annually and more frequently where there is a significant complaint, pattern or potential compliance risk.

Leaders will ensure that actions arising from complaints are assigned to an owner, completed within a defined timescale and checked for impact.

16. External Escalation

If a complainant remains dissatisfied after the school procedure has been completed, they may contact the Department for Education. The Secretary of State cannot normally overturn the school's decision on an individual complaint, but may consider whether the school has met the Independent School Standards.

Complaints may be submitted online at: <https://www.gov.uk/complain-about-school>

Concerns may also be raised with the Independent Schools Inspectorate where relevant to inspection or regulatory compliance. ISI can be contacted through its published website and contact routes.

17. Links With Other Policies

- Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy
- Admissions Policy
- Behaviour Policy
- Suspension and Exclusion Policy
- SEND Policy and Information Report
- Privacy Notice and Data Protection Policy
- Staff Code of Conduct
- Whistleblowing Policy
- Staff Grievance Procedure
- Staff Disciplinary Procedure

Appendix 1: Complaint Handling Checklist

This checklist should be used by the complaints coordinator to check that the process is properly evidenced.

- Complaint acknowledged within the published timescale.
- Formal complaint received or recorded in writing.
- Safeguarding, SEND, equality and data protection issues considered.
- Investigator appointed with no inappropriate conflict of interest.
- Relevant records reviewed and notes retained.
- Outcome letter issued within the published timescale or delay explained.
- Stage 3 panel members checked for independence and direct involvement.
- Parent given reasonable notice of the panel and right to be accompanied.
- Panel findings and recommendations issued in writing.
- Actions recorded, assigned, completed and reviewed for impact.
- Complaint log updated and complaint number included in annual publication data.