



ODYSSEY HOUSE SCHOOL

Critical Incident Policy

Odyssey House School, Wokingham 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, Wokingham
- hereafter referred to as "the School".

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1. Policy Statement

Odyssey House School is a specialist independent school for pupils aged 7 to 18 who may experience barriers to learning including SEND, SEMH needs, autism, anxiety, EBSA, demand avoidance profiles and trauma histories. The school recognises that a critical incident can have a disproportionate impact on pupils who rely on predictable routines, trusted relationships, sensory regulation, therapeutic support and carefully planned communication.

The school will respond to any critical incident in a calm, coordinated and proportionate way. The first priorities are to preserve life, protect pupils and staff from harm, secure the site or location, meet safeguarding duties, communicate accurately, maintain safe supervision, and provide continuing support to those affected.

Compliance is demonstrated not by the existence of this policy alone, but by records showing that the arrangements are known, tested, implemented, monitored and reviewed.

2. Scope

- incidents on the school site, during the school day, before or after school, and during school events;
- educational visits, transport, alternative provision, outreach, work experience and other off-site activity;
- incidents affecting pupils, staff, governors/proprietors, volunteers, contractors, visitors, families or the wider school community;
- incidents occurring during school holidays or out of hours where the school community is affected;
- online, media or community incidents that create a safeguarding, welfare, reputational or operational risk for the school.

3. Compliance Framework

This policy is written for an independent specialist school in England and should be read alongside:

- Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, particularly Parts 3, 4, 5, 6 and 8;
- DfE Independent school standards guidance, April 2026;
- Keeping Children Safe in Education 2025 and Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023;
- DfE Emergency planning and response for education, childcare and children's social care settings;
- DfE Protective security and preparedness for education settings;
- SEND Code of Practice, Equality Act 2010 and the school's duties to make reasonable adjustments;
- Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974, Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 and RIDDOR reporting requirements;
- UK GDPR and Data Protection Act 2018;

- the school's Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy, Health and Safety Policy, Educational Visits Policy, Attendance Policy, Behaviour and Relationships Policy, SEND Policy, Supporting Pupils with Medical Conditions Policy, Online Safety Policy, Complaints Policy, Business Continuity Plan and relevant risk assessments.

4. Definition of a Critical Incident

A critical incident is any sudden, unexpected or escalating event that causes, or is likely to cause, serious harm, trauma, disruption or risk to pupils, staff or the school community, and which requires a coordinated response beyond normal day-to-day procedures.

Examples include, but are not limited to:

- death, life-threatening injury or serious illness of a pupil, staff member or member of the school community;
- missing pupil, child abduction, pupil absconding where risk is high, or child missing from education concern;
- serious safeguarding allegation, peer-on-peer abuse incident, serious self-harm, suspected suicide, attempted suicide or risk of suicide cluster;
- fire, flood, gas leak, structural failure, utility failure, environmental hazard or serious premises risk;
- lockdown, intruder, weapon, violent incident, terrorism-related threat, bomb threat, cyber incident or malicious communications;
- serious transport incident, educational visit incident or off-site emergency;
- serious infectious disease, public health incident, contamination or severe weather emergency;
- major data breach, media/social media event or community incident that materially affects pupil safety, welfare or school operation.

5. Principles

1. Life, safety and safeguarding come first.
2. The response will be led by trained senior staff with clear roles and a single source of verified information.
3. The school will communicate promptly, factually and sensitively, while protecting confidentiality and not prejudicing police, safeguarding or regulatory enquiries.
4. Pupils' SEND, communication, sensory, medical, mental health and trauma-related needs will be considered in every stage of the response.
5. Staff will not improvise outside their role unless immediate action is needed to prevent harm.
6. All significant decisions, actions, communications and referrals will be recorded in a live incident log.
7. The proprietor/governing body will maintain oversight and test whether the response, records and follow-up actions are effective.

6. Critical Incident Management Team

The Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT) is activated by the Headteacher or, in their absence, the Deputy Headteacher or most senior member of staff on site. The role holder may delegate tasks, but remains accountable for ensuring that actions are completed and recorded.

Role	Core responsibilities
Headteacher - Incident Lead	Activates the plan; makes strategic decisions; liaises with emergency services, proprietor/governors and placing authorities; approves parent and staff communications; ensures the incident log is maintained.
Deputy Headteacher - Operational Lead	Coordinates site or off-site operations; maintains safe supervision and staffing; organises evacuation, invacuation or lockdown arrangements; deputises for the Headteacher.
DSL or Deputy DSL - Safeguarding Lead	Assesses safeguarding risk; records on safeguarding systems; makes referrals to children's social care, police, LADO or other agencies; oversees vulnerable pupil support and information sharing.
SENCO - SEND and Communication Lead	Identifies pupil-specific adjustments; advises staff on communication, sensory regulation and EHCP needs; supports adapted scripts and reintegration plans.
Health and Safety Lead	Coordinates dynamic risk assessment, premises safety, first aid, RIDDOR/HSE considerations, evacuation records and site recovery checks.
Business/Site Lead	Maintains emergency contact lists, grab pack, premises documents, utilities information, transport contacts, visitor records and business continuity arrangements.
Communications Lead	Manages incoming calls, parent updates, website/text/email notices, media enquiries and social media monitoring in line with approved messages.
Proprietor/Governor Link	Provides strategic oversight, challenge and support; ensures statutory and regulatory notifications are considered; monitors post-incident review and completion of actions.

7. Preparation Before Any Incident

The Headteacher must ensure the following arrangements are in place and evidenced.

Requirement	Minimum evidence expected
Emergency contact information	Termly check of pupil, parent/carer, staff, governor/proprietor, contractor, emergency service, local authority, placing authority and key agency contacts. The operational contact list is held securely and separately from this public policy.
CIMT readiness	Named staff for each role, induction for new senior leaders, annual tabletop exercise and record of lessons learned.
Staff awareness	Annual briefing for all staff, induction for new staff and supply staff briefing covering immediate actions, reporting routes, lockdown/evacuation/invacuation and safeguarding escalation.

Requirement	Minimum evidence expected
Pupil planning	Individual risk assessments, PEEPs, medical plans, positive behaviour support plans, communication passports and regulation plans are current and accessible to relevant staff.
Off-site arrangements	Educational visits and off-site provision include emergency contacts, pupil medical/SEND information, communication plans and escalation routes.
Emergency equipment and information	Grab pack containing site plans, registers, key contacts, first aid information, incident log templates, scripts and critical pupil risk information.
Testing and monitoring	Fire drills and lockdown/invacuation practice are recorded; annual critical incident exercise is reviewed by SLT and governance/proprietor oversight.
Data and cyber resilience	Back-up access to critical records, emergency communication methods and procedures for reporting data breaches.

8. Activation and Immediate Response

When a possible critical incident occurs, the first member of staff aware of the incident must take immediate protective action and inform the most senior member of staff available.

1. Preserve life and prevent further harm. Call 999 where there is immediate danger, serious injury, fire, crime in progress or urgent medical need.
2. Remove pupils and staff from danger where safe to do so. Initiate evacuation, invacuation or lockdown if required.
3. Notify the Headteacher, Deputy Headteacher and DSL as soon as practicable.
4. Start the Critical Incident Initial Report and Running Log. Record time, location, people involved, actions taken, decisions made and information source.
5. Establish a command point and, where appropriate, a supervised quiet/recovery area for pupils and staff.
6. Account for pupils, staff, visitors and contractors using registers, signing-in records and off-site lists.
7. Gather facts from reliable sources only. Separate confirmed information from unconfirmed reports.
8. Agree initial internal briefing, parent/carers communication and external notifications.
9. Preserve evidence where a police, safeguarding, health and safety or insurance investigation may follow.

9. Safeguarding Response

The DSL must assess whether the incident raises a safeguarding concern, child protection concern, allegation against an adult, low-level concern, peer-on-peer abuse concern, missing child concern, online safety concern or risk of significant harm. Safeguarding action must not wait for completion of the wider incident review.

- Where a child may be at risk of significant harm, the DSL will contact children's social care and/or police without delay.

- Where an allegation may meet the harm threshold for an adult working with children, the Headteacher or Clinical & Operations Director will contact the LADO in line with the Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy.
- Where the concern involves the Headteacher, the Clinical & Operations Director will lead and seek LADO advice.
- All safeguarding records will be made on the school's safeguarding system and cross-referenced to the critical incident log.
- Information will be shared on a need-to-know basis in line with KCSIE, data protection law and the safeguarding principle that fears about sharing information must not stand in the way of protecting children.
- Pupil voice will be sought sensitively where appropriate, using communication methods matched to the pupil's needs.

10. SEND, SEMH and Specialist Provision Response

Because the school works with pupils who may be highly vulnerable to sudden change, perceived threat, sensory overload, bereavement, anxiety, shame, separation or uncertainty, the CIMT must consider specialist adjustments from the outset.

Area	Required action
Communication	Use concise, factual and developmentally appropriate language. Avoid figurative language where this may confuse. Provide visual supports, social stories or trusted adult explanation where needed.
Regulation	Maintain access to known regulation strategies, safe spaces, sensory supports, movement breaks and trusted adults. Avoid unnecessary group announcements for pupils who require individual preparation.
Risk	Review pupil risk assessments for absconding, self-harm, aggression, shutdown, panic, eating distress, trauma responses or unsafe online behaviour.
EHCP and provision	Check whether the incident affects delivery of EHCP provision and record any temporary changes, mitigation and communication with parents or placing authorities.
Attendance and EBSA	Monitor absence, refusal, lateness and reduced engagement following an incident. Record support and reintegration planning.
Therapeutic/pastoral support	Coordinate pastoral, therapeutic, safeguarding and academic responses so that pupils receive consistent messages and support.

11. Communication

The Headteacher or delegated Communications Lead is responsible for ensuring that all communication is accurate, timely, proportionate and recorded. Staff must not speak to the media, post about the incident online, or share unapproved messages.

11.1 Staff

- Staff will be briefed as soon as practicable using confirmed facts and clear instructions.

- Briefings will include what is known, what is not yet known, what staff should say to pupils, how to report concerns and what support is available.
- Absent, part-time, agency and off-site staff will be informed where they need to know.

11.2 Pupils

- Pupils will be told information that is necessary, confirmed and appropriate to their age, understanding and needs.
- Where possible, pupils will be informed by familiar staff using agreed wording.
- The school will consider whether some pupils need individual preparation, small-group explanation or adapted communication.
- Staff will monitor pupil responses and report any safeguarding, mental health or behaviour concerns immediately.

11.3 Parents and Carers

- Parents/carers of directly affected pupils will be contacted individually as soon as information is verified and it is safe and appropriate to do so.
- Wider parent communication will be approved by the Headteacher and recorded.
- Communication will include factual information, immediate arrangements, support available, who to contact and any actions parents/carers need to take.
- Where pupils are placed by local authorities, placing authorities will be informed where the incident affects safeguarding, attendance, provision, risk or placement stability.

11.4 Media and Social Media

- All media enquiries will be directed to the Headteacher or nominated spokesperson.
- No staff member should provide comment, photographs, pupil information or speculation.
- The Communications Lead will monitor misinformation where proportionate and advise the Headteacher on corrective communication.
- The school will protect confidentiality, bereaved family wishes and any police, coroner, safeguarding or regulatory process.

12. Notifications and External Liaison

The CIMT must consider which external notifications are required. The decision and rationale must be recorded even where no notification is made.

Potential notification	When to consider
Emergency services	Immediate risk to life, serious injury, fire, crime, missing child, violent incident, intruder, terrorism-related concern or urgent medical need.
Children's social care / MASH	Safeguarding concern, risk of significant harm, missing child concern, serious self-harm, family crisis or child protection concern.
LADO	Allegation or concern that an adult working with children may have harmed, may pose a risk of harm, or may have behaved in a way indicating unsuitability.
Police	Crime, missing child, child sexual/criminal exploitation concern, serious violence, online abuse, sudden death or where police advice is needed before communication.

Potential notification	When to consider
Placing local authorities	Incident materially affects a placed pupil's safeguarding, EHCP provision, attendance, risk assessment or placement stability.
DfE / relevant inspection or regulatory contact	Where required by the nature of the incident, by registration expectations, or following advice from the proprietor/governing body or legal adviser.
HSE / RIDDOR	Reportable work-related death, specified injury, dangerous occurrence or relevant occupational disease.
UKHSA / local public health team	Infectious disease, outbreak, contamination or public health incident.
ICO	Personal data breach likely to result in a risk to individuals' rights and freedoms.
Insurers / legal advisers	Serious injury, property damage, transport incident, potential claim, media risk or complex regulatory issue.

13. Death, Serious Injury or Suspected Suicide

- The school will confirm facts through reliable sources before making announcements.
- In the case of sudden death, staff will avoid stating cause of death unless this has been formally confirmed and it is appropriate to share.
- Where suicide is suspected, the school will seek specialist advice, avoid detailed description of method or location, and monitor vulnerable pupils for contagion risk.
- The DSL will ensure immediate safeguarding assessment for any pupil expressing suicidal ideation, self-harm risk or trauma response.
- Funeral, memorial and anniversary arrangements will be risk assessed, discussed sensitively with the family, and planned with pupil welfare as the primary consideration.

14. Continuity, Closure and Recovery

The school will maintain normal routines where this supports safety and stability. Temporary closure, partial closure, remote learning, relocation or timetable changes may be used where needed to protect pupils and staff or restore safe operation.

- Any closure decision will be made by the Headteacher in consultation with the proprietor/governing body and relevant agencies where practicable.
- Parents/carers, staff, transport providers, placing authorities and relevant agencies will be informed of arrangements and expected timescales.
- The school will consider continuity of EHCP provision, attendance coding, safeguarding contact, food/medication needs, therapy/pastoral support and safe reintegration.
- Premises must not be reoccupied until relevant safety checks are completed and recorded.

15. Recording and Information Management

A live incident log is mandatory for every activated critical incident response. Records must be factual, timed, attributable and securely stored.

- The Incident Lead appoints a Log Keeper as soon as practicable.

- The log records decisions, actions, information sources, communications, referrals, risk assessments, pupil/staff accounting, and follow-up tasks.
- Safeguarding information is recorded on the safeguarding system and referenced in the incident log without unnecessary duplication of sensitive detail.
- Medical, accident, premises, data protection, behaviour and attendance records are completed where relevant.
- Records are retained in line with the school's retention schedule and made available to inspectors, regulators or agencies where lawful and appropriate.

16. Support After the Incident

The recovery phase may last days, weeks or longer. Leaders must not assume that impact has ended because normal routines have resumed.

- The Pastoral Lead, DSL and SENCO will identify pupils and staff requiring follow-up support.
- Support plans will be recorded for pupils showing distress, trauma response, self-harm risk, increased absence, behaviour change or reduced engagement.
- Parents/carers and placing authorities will be involved where support affects provision, attendance, risk or placement planning.
- Staff welfare will be reviewed, including supervision, debriefing, occupational health or counselling signposting where appropriate.
- Anniversaries, inquests, court proceedings, media coverage and memorial events will be anticipated and risk assessed.

17. Governance, Monitoring and Review

- The proprietor/governing body will receive assurance that the policy is current, staff are briefed, contact lists are checked, exercises are completed and actions are closed.
- After any critical incident or annual exercise, the CIMT will complete a post-incident review within 10 school days unless there is a clear reason to extend.
- The review will test what happened, what worked, what failed, whether safeguarding and SEND needs were met, whether records are complete, and what must change.
- Actions will be assigned to named owners with deadlines and reported to SLT and the proprietor/governing body until complete.
- This policy will be reviewed annually and sooner after any incident, exercise, statutory guidance change or inspection finding.

Appendix 1: Critical Incident Activation Checklist

Action	Owner	Completed / time
Ensure immediate safety and call 999 if required.	First responder / Incident Lead	
Activate CIMT and allocate Log Keeper.	Incident Lead	
Account for pupils, staff, visitors and off-site groups.	Operational Lead	
Start live incident log and preserve evidence.	Log Keeper / Incident Lead	
Assess safeguarding risk and make urgent referrals.	DSL	
Review SEND, medical, communication and regulation needs.	SENCO / Pastoral Lead	
Agree staff briefing and pupil communication script.	Incident Lead / DSL / SENCO	
Contact parents/carers of directly affected pupils.	Incident Lead / delegated senior staff	
Consider statutory, agency and placing authority notifications.	Incident Lead / DSL / H&S Lead	
Establish recovery area and staff rota.	Operational Lead	
Approve wider parent, media or website communication.	Headteacher / Communications Lead	
Set next CIMT briefing time and review risks.	Incident Lead	

Appendix 2: Initial Report and Running Log

Field	Record
Date and time incident identified	
Location / off-site venue	
Person completing report	
Incident Lead	
Brief factual description	
People directly involved	
Immediate risks identified	
Emergency services contacted - time, reference, advice	
Safeguarding action taken	

Field	Record
SEND/medical adjustments required	
Parent/carer communication completed	
External notifications considered and made	
Evidence preserved / documents attached	
Next review time	

Running log entries should include time, person making entry, information source, action/decision, owner and completion status.

Appendix 3: Vulnerable Pupil and Staff Support Checklist

Consideration	Record action / named owner
Pupils directly affected, witnesses, close friends, siblings or known trauma links	
Pupils with self-harm, suicidal ideation, anxiety, EBSA, absconding or aggression risk	
Pupils requiring adapted communication, visual explanation, sensory support or trusted adult	
EHCP provision temporarily affected and mitigation agreed	
Parents/carers and placing authorities updated where required	
Staff directly affected, first responders or those with known vulnerability	
Follow-up review dates set	

Appendix 4: Communication Approval Template

Prompt	Agreed wording / decision
What facts are confirmed?	
What facts are not yet confirmed?	
Who needs to know now?	
What must not be shared?	

Prompt	Agreed wording / decision
Any police, LADO, coroner, family, legal or safeguarding restriction?	
Approved wording for staff	
Approved wording for pupils	
Approved wording for parents/carers	
Approved holding statement for media, if needed	
Approved by and time	

Appendix 5: Post-Incident Review Template

Review question	Evaluation / evidence / action
Was the plan activated promptly and by the right person?	
Were pupils, staff and visitors accounted for?	
Were safeguarding actions timely and correctly recorded?	
Were SEND, medical, communication and regulation needs met?	
Were communications accurate, timely and controlled?	
Were statutory and agency notifications considered and completed?	
Were records complete, factual and securely stored?	
What worked well?	
What was weak or delayed?	
What policy, training, risk assessment or resource change is required?	
Action owner, deadline and governance reporting route	

Appendix 6: Operational Contact List

The live operational contact list is held securely in the critical incident grab pack and secure digital location. It must include emergency services, local safeguarding partners, LADO, children's social care/MASH, local authority emergency planning contacts, placing authorities,

transport providers, utilities, insurers, legal advisers, public health contacts, proprietor/governor contacts and staff emergency contacts. It is not reproduced in this policy because it contains personal and operationally sensitive information.

Reference Sources

- DfE, Emergency planning and response for education, childcare and children's social care settings, current GOV.UK guidance.
- DfE, Keeping Children Safe in Education 2025.
- DfE, Independent school standards guidance, April 2026.
- DfE, Protective security and preparedness for education settings.

Independent Schools Inspectorate, Framework for the inspection of association independent schools and Inspection