



**OAKTREE**  
EDUCATION SERVICES  
— O E S —

## **Complaints Policy**



## Document History

Version	Comments/Amendments	Name	Date
1	First Issue	Chris Kelly	30/04/2025

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### 1. Introduction

Oaktree Education welcomes feedback on all aspects of our provision. Such feedback is invaluable in helping us evaluate and improve our practice.

It is essential that we have a clear and easily accessible procedure for complaints (informal and formal) to be raised and responded to.

### 2. Aims

Our college aims to meet its statutory obligations when responding to complaints from parents of students at the college, and others.

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 points at issue and provide an effective and prompt response
- Respect complainants' desire for confidentiality
- Treat complainants with respect and courtesy
- Ensure that decisions are lawful, rational, reasonable, fair and proportionate in line with principles of administrative law
- Keep complainants informed of the progress of the complaints process
- Consider how the complaint can feed into the college's improvement evaluation processes

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

The college will give the complainant the opportunity to complete the complaints procedure in full.

To support this, we will publicise the existence of this policy and make it available on the college website.

Throughout the process, we will be sensitive to the needs of all parties involved and make any reasonable adjustments needed to accommodate individuals. In line with our commitment to trauma-informed and inclusive practice, we will ensure that our

complaints process is accessible and sensitive to the emotional and communication needs of all individuals involved. This includes offering support with articulation of complaints and ensuring meetings take place in a supportive environment.

### 3. Legislation and Guidance

This document meets the requirements set out in Part 7 of the Schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, which states that we must have and make available a written procedure to deal with complaints from parents of students at the college.

It is also based on guidance published by the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) on creating a complaints procedure that complies with the above regulations and refers to good practice guidance on setting up complaints procedures from the Department for Education (DfE).

This document also meets the requirements of Section 35 of the Schedule to the Education (Non-Maintained Special Schools) (England) Regulations 2011.

### 4. Definitions and Scope

#### 4.1 Definitions

DfE guidance explains the difference between a concern and a complaint:

- A concern is an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered important for which reassurances are sought
- A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action

#### 4.2 Scope

The college aims to resolve complaints informally where possible and at the earliest possible stage.

There may be occasions when complainants would like to raise concerns formally. This policy outlines the procedure for handling such complaints.

This policy does not cover complaints procedures relating to:

- Admissions
- Statutory assessments of special educational needs (SEN)
- Safeguarding matters

- Exclusion
- Whistleblowing
- Staff grievances
- Staff disciplines

Please refer to our separate policies for these types of complaints.

Complaints about services provided by other providers using the college premises or facilities should be directed to the provider concerned.

This policy applies to complaints made by or on behalf of parents of current students. Complaints from parents of students who have recently left the college may be considered if submitted within 3 months of the student's departure.

## 5. Roles and Responsibilities

### 5.1 The Complainant

The complainant will receive a more effective and timely response if they:

- Follow these procedures
- Co-operate with the college and respond to deadlines and communication promptly
- Treat all those involved with respect
- Do not publish details about the complaint on social media

### 5.2 The Investigator

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

- Interview all relevant parties and keep notes
- Consider records and any written evidence and keep these secure
- Prepare a report for the Principal or Complaints Committee, which includes facts and potential solutions

### 5.3 Principal

The Principal will:

- Chair meetings, ensuring everyone is treated with respect throughout

- Make sure all parties see relevant information, understand the purpose of the Committee and are allowed to present their case

### 6. Principles for Investigation

We will clarify:

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

### 7. Timescales

The complainant must raise the complaint within 3 months of the incident. For a series of related incidents, the complaint must be raised within 3 months of the last incident.

We will consider exceptions if there were valid reasons for not raising the complaint earlier and the matter can still be fairly investigated.

Complaints made out of term time will be considered received on the next working day.

If we cannot meet the stated timescales, we will:

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

### 8. Stages of Complaint (excluding complaints against the Principal)

#### 8.1 Stage 1: Informal

The college will take informal concerns seriously and attempt to resolve them quickly.

The complainant should raise the issue with the relevant staff member or the Senior Leadership Team, in person or by letter, telephone or email.

We will acknowledge informal complaints within 3 working days and provide a response within 5 working days.

If unresolved, the complaint will progress to the formal stage.

#### 8.2 Stage 2: Formal

The complainant can raise a formal complaint with the Principal:

- In writing (letter or email), by phone, in person or through a third party

Details such as dates, names of witnesses and relevant documents should be provided, along with what the complainant feels would resolve the issue.

The Principal (or a designated investigator) will investigate and respond in writing within 10 working days.

If unresolved, the complainant should notify the Principal in writing within 10 working days.

Formal complaints must be notified to Oaktree Education's insurers within 3 days of being raised.

### **8.3 Stage 3: Review Panel**

If still dissatisfied, the complaint progresses to a panel hearing.

The Panel, appointed by or on behalf of the Directors, will include at least three people not involved in the complaint, one of whom must be independent of the management and running of the college.

The panel will convene within 15 working days of the request being acknowledged, where practicable.

The complainant will be notified of the date with reasonable notice and may attend and be accompanied if they wish. Each party will have the opportunity to present evidence and ask questions.

The Panel will prepare findings and recommendations, and provide copies to the complainant, the subject of the complaint (if applicable), the Principal and the Directors. The outcome will be communicated in writing within 10 working days.

## **9. Complaints Against the Principal**

### **9.1 Stage 1: Informal**

Raise complaints with the college office: 02380 018006

### **9.2 Stage 2: Formal**

If unresolved informally, the Director of Education/Proprietor will carry out the formal stage investigation.

## **10. Referring Complaints to the DfE**

If the complainant believes the college is not meeting regulatory standards, they may refer the complaint to the DfE. The DfE will review serious failures and may initiate an inspection.

More information: <https://www.gov.uk/complain-about-school>

### 11. Persistent Complaints

#### 11.1 When Complaints Become Unreasonable

Complaints may be considered unreasonable if they:

- Have been previously resolved
- Are obsessive, harassing, repetitive or defamatory
- Include false information
- Are unfounded or out of scope
- Pursue valid concerns in an unreasonable manner
- Change the complaint's basis during the process
- Are designed to cause disruption
- Seek unrealistic outcomes

#### 11.2 Steps We Will Take

We will:

- Provide clear responses
- Act as an objective arbiter
- Introduce communication strategies if disruption continues

This may include:

- A single point of contact
- Limits on frequency of contact
- Use of a third party such as Citizens Advice

#### 11.3 Stopping Responding

We may stop responding if:

- We have taken all reasonable steps

- Our position is clear
- Contact continues with the intention to disrupt

We will notify the complainant and continue to consider new complaints.

Aggressive or violent behaviour will result in notifying the police and potentially barring individuals from the college site.

### 12. Duplicate Complaints

Duplicate complaints from others on the same issue will be assessed to determine whether new aspects are raised. If not, we will:

- Confirm previous investigation and outcome
- Refer them to the DfE if dissatisfied

### 13. Complaint Campaigns

If the college receives a large volume of complaints on the same topic, especially from unconnected individuals, we may:

- Publish a single response on our website
- Send a standardised response

### 14. Record Keeping

We will record:

- All stages and outcomes of complaints
- Related documents and correspondence

Records will be kept confidentially, in line with data protection law.

Details will not be shared with the full Directorship unless necessary for a Review Panel.

An Independent Panel will be arranged where prior knowledge exists or if bias is likely.

Action and information related to specific individuals will not be shared without consent, in compliance with the General Data Protection Regulation.

### 15. Monitoring Arrangements

The Principal will monitor the effectiveness of the complaints procedure and track trends and themes. Records are managed by the College Administration Manager.

This policy will be reviewed at least every 2 years by the Principal and Senior Leadership Team.

### 16. Policy Review

- This policy will be reviewed **annually** (or sooner, if required by legislative changes or significant developments in best practice).
- The review process will involve **teaching staff, support staff, senior leaders, and governors**, alongside student representatives (where appropriate).

### Approval and Signature

- **Principle of Head of College:**  
*Chris Kelly, 22/04/2025*
- **Chair of Governors/Trust Board:**  
*Name, Signature, Date*