



# Oakswood College

Empowering Through Education



## Equal Opportunities, Diversity and Inclusion

### *Policy*

PROMOTING EXCELLENCE • ENSURING COMPLIANCE  
SUPPORTING OUR COMMUNITY



GOVERNANCE



QUALITY



COMPLIANCE



EXCELLENCE



# Oakwood College

Empowering Through Education

*(Trading name of Oakwood Group Ltd)*

## EQUALITY, DIVERSITY & INCLUSION (EDI) POLICY

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### Contents

|                            |   |
|----------------------------|---|
| 1. Purpose and scope ..... | 3 |
|                            | 1 |

|   |   |
|---|---|
| 2. Legal and regulatory framework .....                                     | 3 |
| 3. Equality and equity .....  | 3 |
| 4. Principles of equality, equity, diversity and inclusion .....            | 4 |
| 5. Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs) and Reasonable Adjustments .....      | 4 |
| 6. Freedom of speech, academic freedom and Prevent .....                    | 5 |
| 7. Responsibilities .....   | 6 |
| 8. Inclusive culture, training and support .....                            | 7 |
| 9. Sexual misconduct, harassment, bullying and unacceptable behaviours..... | 7 |
| 10. Complaints, reporting and Prevent related concerns .....                | 8 |
| 11. Investigations, disciplinary procedures and Prevent processes .....     | 9 |
| 12. Data, monitoring and review .....                                       | 9 |

## EQUALITY, DIVERSITY & INCLUSION (EDI) POLICY

### 1. Purpose and scope

This Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Policy sets out Oakwood College's commitment to providing an environment in which all members of its community are treated with dignity and respect, and where unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation are not tolerated. It applies to all students, staff, governors, applicants, contractors, visitors and partners, across all institutional activities in the UK and overseas.

### 2. Legal and regulatory framework

Oakwood College will meet its duties under the Equality Act 2010, including the Public Sector Equality Duty, and other relevant legislation such as the Human Rights Act 1998, the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015 (Prevent Duty), and data protection law. It will also comply with the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023 and OfS regulatory requirements, including duties to protect freedom of speech and academic freedom within the law.

The Prevent Duty will be discharged in a proportionate and fair way that is aligned with equality and human rights obligations and does not unlawfully discriminate against or stigmatise particular groups. Please see the College's Prevent & Safeguarding Policy for the respective procedures via which the College manages Prevent-related concerns.

### 3. Equality and equity

**Equality** means treating everyone with fairness and respect, removing the barriers that prevent people from participating and achieving their potential, and recognising and responding to individual needs.

**Equity** involves recognising that each person has different circumstances and allocating resources and opportunities to address disadvantage and achieve fair outcomes.

Oakwood College promotes both equality and equity by:

- Eliminating unlawful discrimination and addressing systemic barriers based on protected characteristics.
- Providing targeted support, adjustments and opportunities for under-represented or disadvantaged groups.
- Ensuring decisions on admissions, progression, employment and services consider both equality of process and equity of outcome.

#### **4. Principles of equality, equity, diversity and inclusion**

Oakwood College is committed to:

- Promoting equality of opportunity and inclusive practices in recruitment, teaching, assessment, research and services.
- Valuing diversity of background, belief, identity and perspective, and removing barriers to participation and success for under-represented groups.
- Preventing and tackling discrimination, bullying, harassment and victimisation on any protected or other unjustified ground.
- Using equality data and feedback to identify gaps, set objectives and monitor progress, including through periodic EDI action plans.
- Integrating equality and human rights considerations into Oakwood College's approach to the Prevent Duty, including risk assessments and staff training.

#### **5. Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs) and Reasonable Adjustments**

As part of its commitment to embed inclusive practices and remove barriers to participation, Oakwood College undertakes Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs) to identify potential or actual barriers and to proactively consider what reasonable adjustments may be needed. This supports the College in meeting its anticipatory duty under the Equality Act 2010. EIAs are completed where students are affected, where staff are affected, or both. Areas where the College undertakes EIAs include:

- Key policies and procedures affecting the student contract and/or student experience
- Key policies and procedures affecting staff
- Major events held by the College (e.g. student induction, employability/careers fairs)
- Some minor events held by the College (e.g. masterclasses, guest lectures)

##### ***Reasonable adjustments***

Where an EIA identifies a potential barrier, as part of fulfilling the anticipatory duty under the Equality Act (2010), the College will proactively consider what reasonable adjustments can be put in place. For students, this may include alternative assessment formats, adapted learning materials, Learning Support Plans, or flexibility in attendance and submission arrangements. For staff, this may include modifications to duties, working arrangements, equipment, or workplace processes.

In addition to the College's proactive approach to EIAs and reasonable adjustments, students and staff are actively encouraged to disclose any additional needs, disabilities, conditions or other requirements so that reasonable adjustments can be made by the College in line with our legal, statutory and regulatory obligations.

All requests for reasonable adjustments will be considered individually and documented. Students should contact Student Services or their Personal Tutor; staff should contact the Head of Operations and HR.

As a small institution, requests can be raised relatively informally in the first instance and will subsequently be referred into relevant processes to ensure requests are properly considered and documented, and decisions regarding reasonable adjustments are clear for all parties. For students, reasonable adjustments put in place by the College will normally be recorded, managed and monitored under our informal or formal Support Through Studies procedures. For staff, agreed reasonable adjustments will be recorded on their HR file and line managers (and other staff as necessary and relevant) will be appropriately informed of any adjustments in place.

**Notification of a reasonable adjustment to staff will be issued on a 'need to know' basis and will not include the reason/rationale for the adjustment being made unless the individual concerned consents (i.e. a condition requiring a reasonable adjustment will not automatically be disclosed).**

#### ***Equality Impact Assessments – Practical Application***

Two EIA templates are provided with this policy to support consistent practice:

- **Appendix A — Academic EIA Template:** for use when assessing curriculum design, teaching and learning strategies, assessment practices and student-facing activities
  - **Appendix B — General EIA Template:** for use when assessing policies, procedures, HR practices, operations, events and governance activities
- ❖ **The EIA templates can be obtained from the Head of Governance, Quality, Compliance & Information Systems.**

## **6. Freedom of speech, academic freedom and Prevent**

Oakwood College affirms that robust protection of lawful freedom of speech and academic freedom is integral to EDI, the Prevent Duty, and our academic mission. In line with the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023 and the Prevent Duty guidance, as well as our respective policies on these matters, we will:

- Take reasonably practicable steps to secure lawful freedom of speech for staff, students and visiting speakers, including on controversial or unpopular issues.
- Maintain and periodically review a Code of Practice on Freedom of Speech, setting out processes for events, speakers, and decision-making.
- Protect academic freedom, including the right of academic staff to question and test received wisdom and put forward new ideas and controversial or unpopular opinions, without risk to their jobs or privileges, within the law.

- Implement the Prevent Duty as part of its broader safeguarding and wellbeing arrangements in a way that respects equality, human rights, freedom of speech and academic freedom.

Freedom of speech does not protect unlawful speech such as incitement to violence, terrorism, harassment or hate crime; such behaviour will be addressed under relevant conduct, Prevent-related and disciplinary procedures.

## 7. Responsibilities

**The Board of Governors** is responsible for ensuring Oakwood College has due regard for the Public Sector Equality Duty when carrying out its functions, including:

- decision-making, policy development and service delivery;
- overseeing compliance with equality, Prevent and free speech duties;
- setting EDI and Prevent-related objectives, including staff training requirements and expectations;
- approving this policy; and
- monitoring performance indicators and progress against EDI objectives.

**The CEO and Senior Management Team** are responsible for:

- implementing the policy;
- taking action to meet EDI and Prevent-related objectives;
- allocating resources;
- ensuring Equality Impact Assessments are completed where required; and
- ensuring related strategies (e.g. HR, Access and Participation, Safeguarding/Prevent) align with EDI commitments.

**Designated leads** (e.g. EDI Lead, Prevent SPOC, Designated Safeguarding Lead) are responsible for:

- coordinating activity;
- maintaining risk assessments and action plans;
- reporting to governance committees; and
- advising on the applicable equality impact assessment.

**Managers** are responsible for:

- role-modelling inclusive leadership;
- responding to concerns raised (including Prevent-related concerns); and
- ensuring staff complete relevant training.

**All staff and students** are responsible for:

- treating others with dignity and respect;
- complying with this policy and related codes; and
- reporting concerns where appropriate.

## **8. Inclusive culture, training and support**

Oakwood College will provide mandatory induction and periodic refresher training on EDI, including bystander awareness, consent, harassment and sexual misconduct, freedom of speech, academic freedom and the Prevent Duty, tailored to staff roles and student needs.

Key policies as well as this one, including Policy on Sexual Misconduct, Harassment & Unacceptable Behaviours, Code of Practice on Freedom of Speech, Personal Relationships Policy, and staff and student Codes of Conduct, set out the College's clear expectations and standards for behaviour that will engender the inclusive and safe institutional culture we seek to maintain for all members of our community.

Additional training will be provided for managers, investigators, panel members, Prevent contacts and students in representative roles.

Support for students and staff affected by discrimination, harassment, sexual misconduct, unacceptable behaviours, freedom of speech related incidents or Prevent related concerns will be available through student support services, HR, Safeguarding/Prevent leads and external specialist services where appropriate. Tailored support for students may be put in place under the Support Through Studies Policy.

## **9. Sexual misconduct, harassment, bullying and unacceptable behaviours**

Oakwood College has zero tolerance for harassment, bullying, sexual misconduct and other unacceptable behaviours, whether by staff, students or third parties, on or off campus, including online. Relevant definitions and processes are set out in the Policy on Sexual Misconduct, Harassment & Unacceptable Behaviours, the Staff Disciplinary Procedure and the Student Conduct Code Policy, which sit alongside this EDI Policy.

Sexual misconduct, harassment and unacceptable behaviours include, but are not limited to, unwanted sexual advances, sexual comments or jokes, image-based abuse, stalking, and any unwanted conduct that violates a person's dignity or creates an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment, including on the basis of a protected characteristic. Oakwood College expressly prohibits the use of non-disclosure agreements in cases involving harassment, sexual misconduct or other unacceptable behaviours, recognising their potential silencing effect.

Concerns about harassment of any kind, sexual misconduct or unacceptable behaviours can be raised to any member of staff initially and will normally be referred in the first instance into the Stage 1 Disclosure Procedure under the Policy on Sexual Misconduct, Harassment & Unacceptable Behaviours. Whilst concerns and complaints can also be initially raised through formal complaint or disciplinary procedures as described below, they will normally subsequently be referred into that Stage 1 Procedure for initial handling, to ensure that a trauma-informed approach is applied.

## 10. Complaints, reporting and Prevent related concerns

### 10.1 Students

Students who believe they have experienced or witnessed discrimination, harassment (including sexual harassment), sexual misconduct, unacceptable behaviours, victimisation, undue restriction of their lawful freedom of speech, or inappropriate application of the Prevent Duty may:

- Seek confidential advice from Student Support staff, tutors, Safeguarding/Prevent contacts, or other nominated contacts as per Oakwood College published information (e.g. in Student Handbooks) where applicable.
- Raise a concern under Stage 1 of the Policy on Sexual Misconduct, Harassment and Unacceptable Behaviours, or under the informal stage (Stage 1) of the Student Complaints Procedure.
- Make a formal complaint under the Student Complaints Procedure.

Complaints will be considered in line with published procedures, which specify timescales, stages, possible outcomes and links to related processes (e.g. Student Conduct Code Policy, fitness to study/practise, Prevent referrals). Students retain the right to escalate eligible complaints to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA) once internal procedures are exhausted.

### 10.2 Staff

Staff may raise concerns about discrimination, harassment (including sexual harassment), sexual misconduct, unacceptable behaviours, bullying, victimisation, restrictions on academic freedom or freedom of speech, or the application of the Prevent Duty by:

- Seeking advice from HR, a trade union representative, a designated harassment contact, or the Prevent Lead.
- Using informal resolution processes where appropriate.
- Submitting a formal grievance under the Staff Grievance Procedure, or reporting conduct under the Staff Disciplinary Procedure or the Policy on Sexual Misconduct, Harassment & Unacceptable Behaviours where another staff member is alleged to have breached expected standards.

### 10.3 All parties:

#### ***Safeguarding and Prevent-Related Concerns***

Concerns relating to Safeguarding and/or Prevent (such as, for example, concerns that an individual may be vulnerable, susceptible to radicalisation or is being radicalised) can be highly sensitive and reporting parties may need support from Oakwood College, which we will put in place.

- **Students** should relay concerns to a trusted member of staff.
- **Staff** should consult the Prevent and Safeguarding Policy and follow the procedures set out in that policy for raising such concerns.

### ***Complaints Relating to Freedom of Speech***

Complaints relating to freedom of speech/academic freedom should be raised by both students and staff under the Freedom of Speech Complaints Procedure, although students can initially use Stage 2 (Formal Stage) of the Student Complaints Procedure for this purpose, or Stage 1 of the Policy on Sexual Misconduct, Harassment & Unacceptable Behaviours. Such complaints if raised under other policies will normally be referred into the processes under the Freedom of Speech Complaints Procedure to be addressed and managed.

In addition, staff and others (including members of the public) may submit complaints relating to freedom of speech and academic freedom to the Office for Students (OfS) under its free speech complaints scheme, in accordance with the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023 and OfS procedures.

## **11. Investigations, disciplinary procedures and Prevent processes**

All formal complaints and reports of discrimination, harassment, sexual misconduct, unacceptable behaviours, bullying, alleged infringement of freedom of speech, or Prevent-related concerns will be taken seriously and handled sensitively, fairly and promptly. Investigations will follow relevant procedures (Policy on Sexual Misconduct, Harassment & Unacceptable Behaviours, Student Conduct Code Policy, Staff Disciplinary Procedure, safeguarding/Prevent processes or other appropriate routes), ensuring impartiality, the opportunity for parties to be heard, and protection against victimisation for those who raise concerns in good faith.

Where misconduct is upheld, sanctions will be applied proportionately and may include educational interventions, conditions, suspension or dismissal/expulsion, as detailed in the relevant disciplinary policies and the Policy on Sexual Misconduct, Harassment & Unacceptable Behaviours. Oakwood College will provide signposting to support for all parties involved in investigations or Prevent-related processes, recognising potential impacts on wellbeing.

## **12. Data, monitoring and review**

Oakwood College will collect, analyse and use equality and safeguarding data (including, where appropriate, data on complaints, disciplinary cases, Prevent-related referrals and freedom of speech-related cases) to identify trends and inform action. Data will be managed in line with data protection legislation and internal information governance policies.

The Board of Governors will approve this policy and monitor its effectiveness, including through receipt of regular reports on EDI performance, equality data analysis, and due regard to the Public Sector Equality Duty. This policy will normally be reviewed every year, or sooner if there are significant changes in legislation or regulatory requirements (including in relation to the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023, Prevent Duty guidance, OfS guidance,



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or sector best practice). Updates will be approved by the Board of Governors through Oakwood College's governance structures and communicated to staff and students.