



Oakswood College

Empowering Through Education



Ethics and Values

Policy

PROMOTING EXCELLENCE • ENSURING COMPLIANCE
SUPPORTING OUR COMMUNITY



GOVERNANCE



QUALITY



COMPLIANCE



EXCELLENCE



Oakswood College
Empowering Through Education

(Trading name of Oakswood Group Ltd)

Ethics and Values Policy

Document Control & Version History

Document Title	Ethics and Values Policy
Document Type	Governance Policy
Policy Owner	Head of Governance, Quality, Compliance & Information Systems
Accountable Officer	Chief Executive Officer
Approved By	Board of Governors
Approval Date	18 March 2026
Effective From	18 March 2026
Review Cycle	Annual
Next Review Date	18 March 2027
Applies To	Board of Governors, Board Committees, Chief Executive Officer, Senior Leadership Team, Academic Board, all staff (permanent, temporary, contractor/freelance, volunteer), students, and individuals representing or acting on behalf of Oakswood College
Version	1.0
Supersedes	New Policy
Related Policies	Corporate Governance Framework; Staff Code of Conduct; Student Code of Conduct; Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Policy; Prevent and Safeguarding Policy and Procedure; Whistleblowing Policy; Complaints Policy and Procedure; Risk Management Policy
Document Location	Oakswood College Policy Repository
Regulatory Reference	Office for Students (OfS) Conditions of Registration; Equality Act 2010; UK higher education governance good practice

Table of Contents

INSTITUTIONAL ETHICS, VALUES AND PRINCIPLES	4
1. Introduction and Scope	4
2. Core Values and Principles.....	4
2.1 Empowerment Through Education.....	4
2.2 Academic Excellence & Research Integrity	4
2.3 Integrity, Ethics & Transparency	5
2.4 Student-Centred Commitment	5
2.5 Accountability & Good Governance	5
2.6 Financial Responsibility & Sustainability.....	5
2.7 Equality, Diversity & Inclusion	6
2.8 Continuous Quality Enhancement.....	6
2.9 Professionalism.....	6
2.10 Innovation & Future Readiness	6
2.11 Safeguarding & Student Protection	6
2.12 Community Engagement & Social Responsibility	6
2.13 Respect & Dignity	7
2.14 Ethical Decision-Making Framework	7
MANAGEMENT	8
3. Governance and Oversight	8
4. Allied Policies and Regulatory Context	8
5. Ethical Funding and Partnerships	9
6. Collaboration, Competition and Sector Conduct.....	9
PEOPLE	10
7. Ethical Engagement with Students	10
8. Ethical Conduct and Protections for Staff.....	10
9. Community Responsibility and Public Transparency	10
OPERATIONS	11
10. Professional Standards in Operations.....	11
11. Prevention of Financial Irregularities.....	11
12. Confidentiality and Data Protection	11
ACADEMIC MATTERS	12



Oakswood College
Empowering Through Education

13. Ethical Teaching, Learning and Assessment	12
14. Freedom of Expression and Academic Freedom	12
15. Agents and Representatives	12
POLICY IN PRACTICE	12
16. Implementation, Training and Culture.....	12
17. Raising Concerns and Queries	12
18. Monitoring and Review	13

INSTITUTIONAL ETHICS, VALUES AND PRINCIPLES

1. Introduction and Scope

Oakswood College is committed to *Empowerment Through Education* and to conducting all institutional activity with integrity, transparency, professionalism, and respect.

This Policy establishes the ethical framework guiding academic, operational, financial, and governance decisions across the College. It aligns with relevant UK legislation and regulatory expectations, including:

- Office for Students (OfS) Conditions of Registration
- Equality Act 2010
- UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR)
- Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) guidance
- Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998

This Policy applies to:

- All staff (permanent, temporary, visiting)
- Students
- Governors
- Agents and representatives
- Contractors and suppliers
- Strategic partners

It operates alongside allied policies and forms part of the College's governance and quality assurance framework.

2. Core Values and Principles

The following values underpin behaviour, decision-making, and institutional culture:

2.1 Empowerment Through Education

We equip students with knowledge, skills, and confidence to succeed.

Expected behaviours:

- Supporting student progression and employability
- Delivering inclusive and accessible learning
- Providing accurate information to enable informed choice

2.2 Academic Excellence & Research Integrity

We uphold high academic standards and responsible scholarship.

Expected behaviours:

- Evidence-based teaching and research
- Fair and robust assessment processes
- Zero tolerance for academic misconduct

2.3 Integrity, Ethics & Transparency

We operate with honesty and responsible stewardship.

Expected behaviours:

- Accurate public communication
- Transparent decision-making
- Proper management of conflicts of interest

2.4 Student-Centred Commitment

Students are at the heart of our mission.

Expected behaviours:

- Fair admissions and recruitment practices
- Accessible financial and welfare support
- Protection of student interests in decision-making

2.5 Accountability & Good Governance

We maintain effective oversight and compliance.

Expected behaviours:

- Clear policy ownership
- Regulatory compliance
- Strong internal controls and audit assurance

2.6 Financial Responsibility & Sustainability

We safeguard the long-term financial sustainability of the College and ensure responsible stewardship of public and student funds.

Expected behaviours:

- Prudent budgeting and risk oversight
- Responsible use of public and student funds
- Transparent financial reporting
- Robust business planning and financial forecasting to ensure institutional sustainability
- Alignment of strategic planning, investment decisions, and resource allocation with the College's mission and student interests
- Safeguarding public funds through effective financial management, internal controls, and oversight by the Board of Governors

2.7 Equality, Diversity & Inclusion

We promote fair treatment and inclusive opportunity.

Expected behaviours:

- Removing barriers to participation
- Respecting diverse backgrounds and perspectives
- Inclusive curriculum and service design

2.8 Continuous Quality Enhancement

We pursue ongoing improvement.

Expected behaviours:

- Data-informed decision-making
- Regular review and evaluation
- Reflective professional practice

2.9 Professionalism

We maintain high standards of conduct and competence.

Expected behaviours:

- Respectful communication
- Timely and responsible performance of duties
- Adherence to institutional policies

2.10 Innovation & Future Readiness

We embrace responsible innovation and digital advancement.

Expected behaviours:

- Ethical use of emerging technologies
- Continuous development of digital capability
- Preparing students for a changing global environment

2.11 Safeguarding & Student Protection

We prioritise welfare and academic continuity.

Expected behaviours:

- Early identification and intervention for Safeguarding risks (including Prevent)
- Compliance with validator student protection plans/mechanisms
- Responsible escalation of academic/pastoral concerns with appropriate triage, and referral into Support Through Studies for structured additional support

2.12 Community Engagement & Social Responsibility

We contribute positively to society.

Expected behaviours:

- Widening participation initiatives
- Ethical partnerships
- Consideration of civic impact

2.13 Respect & Dignity

We foster a culture of mutual respect and academic freedom.

Expected behaviours:

- Professional and courteous interaction
- Lawful freedom of expression
- Protection from harassment or discrimination

2.14 Ethical Decision-Making Framework

To support consistent and transparent decision-making, staff, leaders, and governors should consider the following questions when making significant institutional decisions:

1. Legality and Compliance

- Does the decision comply with relevant legislation, regulatory obligations, and institutional policies?

2. Student Interest

- Does the decision prioritise and protect the interests, welfare, and academic success of students?

3. Integrity and Transparency

- Can the decision be clearly explained and justified to students, regulators, staff, and the public?

4. Equality and Fairness

- Does the decision treat individuals and groups fairly and support equality, diversity, and inclusion?

5. Financial Responsibility

- Does the decision demonstrate responsible stewardship of institutional and public funds?

6. Reputation and Public Trust

- Would the decision maintain the College's reputation and public confidence in the integrity of its operations?

7. Long-Term Impact

- Does the decision support the long-term sustainability and mission of the College?

Where uncertainty exists, advice should be sought from relevant senior leaders and/or governance bodies (Board of Governors or its sub-Committees; Academic Board or its sub-Committees). The Head of Governance, Quality, Compliance & Information Systems (Head of GQC & IS) can be approached for an ‘in principle’ conversation or advice on which governance body to consult before the implementation of any decision.

MANAGEMENT

3. Governance and Oversight

- The Board of Governors is responsible for setting the ethical tone of the institution, ensuring compliance with regulatory requirements, safeguarding public funds, and maintaining effective oversight of institutional governance, risk management, and financial sustainability.
- The Academic Board oversees academic integrity, standards, and academic freedom.
- The Executive ensures operational implementation.
- The Head of Governance, Quality, Compliance & Information Systems provides policy oversight, monitoring, and review coordination.
- Serious ethical concerns, breaches, or systemic risks may be escalated to the Board of Governors or relevant governance committee as appropriate.

The Board of Governors ensures that the College operates in accordance with the **Office for Students (OfS)** public interest governance principles and conditions of registration, including **conditions E7–E9**, which relate to effective governance, management and financial sustainability. The Board maintains ultimate responsibility for ensuring the College operates in the interests of students and the public.

4. Allied Policies and Regulatory Context

Many Oakswood College policies and processes fall within the scope of this Policy or are at least adjacent to it. Below is a list of policies that are particularly allied to this one, however this list is not exhaustive, and decision-makers of the College should regularly consult this Policy to ensure that they are operating at all times in accordance with its principles. This Policy should be read alongside the following policies in particular:

- Academic Integrity Policy

- Student Code of Conduct
- Staff Code of Conduct
- Support Through Studies Policy
- Social Media and IT Acceptable Use Policy
- Non-Academic Misconduct Policy (for students)
- Disciplinary Policy (for staff)
- Code of Practice on Freedom of Speech
- Policy on Sexual Misconduct, Harassment & Unacceptable Behaviours
- Student Complaints Procedure
- Staff Grievance Procedure
- Conflicts of Interest Policy
- Whistleblowing Policy
- Data Protection Policy
- Financial Regulations
- Prevent & Safeguarding Policy

This document sets the general principles for how the College operates; specific procedural guidance is contained within the above policies.

5. Ethical Funding and Partnerships

All funding, donations, sponsorships, and partnerships are subject to due diligence.

The College will not enter relationships that:

- Compromise academic independence
- Create unacceptable reputational risk
- Conflict with legal or regulatory obligations

Higher-risk and strategic partnerships require Board approval and documented risk mitigation.

6. Collaboration, Competition and Sector Conduct

The College promotes ethical collaboration with providers, employers, and community organisations, but also with our students and applicants.

We commit to:

- Accurate marketing
- Fair recruitment practices
- No misleading or disparaging conduct
- Transparent competition

Commercial objectives must not override or compromise student interest, student protections, legal, statutory and regulatory compliance or sector integrity.

PEOPLE

7. Ethical Engagement with Students

Across the student lifecycle, the College will ensure:

- Honest marketing and admissions information
- Fair and transparent assessment
- Accessible complaints processes
- Student-centred academic and pastoral support
- Compliance with CMA, OfS and OIA expectations

Breaches and/or failures of any of the above will be investigated under established procedures with appropriate safeguards in place to ensure such investigations are conducted in accordance with the principles of this Policy (eg independence where necessary, decision-makers being protected from any undue influence etc).

Student-related procedures are all built upon and embed the principles of the OIA Good Practice Framework, which states that good processes are accessible and clear, fair, independent and confidential, inclusive, flexible, proportionate and timely, and that they improve the student experience.

8. Ethical Conduct and Protections for Staff

Staff must adhere to anti-fraud, anti-bribery, and conflict of interest standards.

Staff raising concerns are protected under the Whistleblowing Policy.

Confidentiality agreements shall not prevent lawful disclosures relating to misconduct or welfare risks.

9. Community Responsibility and Public Transparency

The College recognises its civic role and public accountability.

Significant institutional decisions affecting students or partners will be communicated clearly.

Stakeholder feedback mechanisms will be proactively used by the College in reviews to inform improvement.

OPERATIONS

10. Professional Standards in Operations

All operational functions must embed ethical standards and regulatory compliance.

Examples include:

- Fair procurement processes
- Data minimisation in IT systems
- Accessible student services
- Lawful financial management

Operational compliance is monitored through internal audit and quality assurance processes.

11. Prevention of Financial Irregularities

The College maintains formal arrangements to detect, prevent, and investigate fraud, bribery, financial irregularity, and misuse of public funds. These arrangements include, but are not limited to:

- Segregation of financial duties to ensure appropriate checks and balances
- Formal financial regulations and delegated authority limits
- Independent internal audit and periodic external audit review
- Robust procurement and supplier due-diligence procedures
- Clear financial approval and authorisation processes
- Monitoring of financial transactions and budget variance reporting
- Fraud prevention, anti-bribery and corruption procedures
- Whistleblowing mechanisms allowing confidential reporting of concerns
- Oversight by the Board of Governors and relevant governance committees

Suspected irregularities will be investigated promptly and, where appropriate, reported to relevant regulatory or law-enforcement authorities.

12. Confidentiality and Data Protection

The College processes personal data lawfully, fairly, and transparently.

All staff must:

- Complete mandatory data protection training
- Report data breaches promptly
- Follow Records Retention and Privacy Notice requirements

The College will balance confidentiality obligations with safeguarding, Prevent, welfare, and legal reporting duties under the UK DPA and GDPR (2018) where required.

ACADEMIC MATTERS

13. Ethical Teaching, Learning and Assessment

Teaching and assessment must reflect academic integrity and inclusivity.

The College will ensure:

- Research-informed curriculum design
- Fair marking and moderation
- Clear academic misconduct procedures
- Timely and constructive feedback

14. Freedom of Expression and Academic Freedom

The College upholds lawful freedom of speech and academic freedom; how it does this is set out in our Code of Practice on Freedom of Speech.

Competing rights will be balanced in accordance with legislation and institutional policy.

Event approvals and sensitive matters will be documented and subject to review.

15. Agents and Representatives

All agents (if used) acting on behalf of the College must comply with ethical standards set out in the Agent Recruitment, Selection and Monitoring Policy.

Requirements include:

- Due diligence and contractual compliance
- Regular monitoring and review
- Training on ethical recruitment
- Clear consequences for misconduct, including termination

POLICY IN PRACTICE

16. Implementation, Training and Culture

This Policy is embedded through:

- Staff and Governor induction
- Annual refresher training
- Inclusion in performance review
- Communication via intranet and student handbook

Leaders are responsible for modelling ethical behaviour.

17. Raising Concerns and Queries

Concerns and queries regarding any matters that fall within the scope of this Policy may be raised through:

- Line managers
- Head of GQC & IS
- Whistleblowing channels
- Student complaints procedures

All concerns will be triaged, investigated proportionately, and used to inform organisational learning.

18. Monitoring and Review

This Policy is reviewed annually by the Head of Governance, Quality, Compliance & Information Systems and approved by the Board of Governors.

Anonymised data relating to any concerns raised that fall within the scope of this Policy will be reported to the Board of Governors for monitoring and review purposes.