



# Fitness to Study Policy

**Review: June 2021**  
**Revise: June 2022**

This policy should be read in conjunction with the OxSFC COVID-19 policy that overrides the guidelines/procedures in this policy, where appropriate. The guiding principle will always be to maintain the health and safety of all stakeholders.

## **1. Introduction**

Oxford Sixth Form College is committed to meeting the individual needs of students and promoting inclusion.

The College endeavours to make *reasonable adjustments* for students when required to enable access to the curriculum and its assessment.

This policy is consistent with:

- the Equality Act 2010;
- the Children and Families Act 2014;
- Keeping Children Safe in Education 2021
- Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018.

It is important to be transparent about what is reasonable in an educational context and the parameters to the individual support that can be provided at the College.

Though staff do their utmost to support students, there will be times when a student's physical or mental health are so adversely affected that they are no longer able, regardless of internal and external support, to sustain sufficient academic progress:

1. The College is not a distance-learning provider, and though on a temporary basis it is reasonable for subject teachers and support staff to be flexible with attendance due to ill health, protracted periods of absence are not viable.
2. There may be occasions when the nature of a student's ill health can necessitate support beyond the capability or capacity that the College can reasonably supply.
3. Occasionally a student's ill health may present a health and safety threat to either themselves or those around them that is unmanageable in a mainstream educational context.

The situation may arise when, for one or more of the reasons above, in the judgement of the College it is not feasible for a student to continue their studies.

## **2. Aims**

This policy aims to provide:

1. A framework for decision-making in complex student welfare cases;
2. A set of parameters for the minimum level of academic progress;
3. Stages for reviewing a student's place at the College;
4. A list of minimum expectations of students who are offered the chance to restart their studies at the College.

They have been developed to work in conjunction with other key College procedures and policies:

- Safeguarding & Child Protection policy

- Medical Needs policy

### **3. Joining the College**

Students are required to disclose any physical or mental health need as part of their application. This disclosure will in no way prejudice any decision about the application – on the contrary, it is used to establish how best we can respond to the individual need and what reasonable adjustments can be made. If the College is not made aware of a student's particular needs during the admissions process, then appropriate supported cannot be provided.

In cases where a complex or significant physical or mental health condition is disclosed, it may be appropriate that further information is sought from health professionals supporting a student to be able to formulate a support plan. In addition, a transition meeting may be called to discuss and agree details of the support plan, the appropriate programme to be studied and any reasonable adjustments that we will commit to making. We also need to recognise that adjustment to a sixth form college environment can be challenging for students with such circumstances. For this reason, student attendance to the Admissions Interview, Enrolment and Induction are compulsory and crucial to making the transition from schools and other institutions. We may also require attendance at a familiarisation day or part day to help ensure the foundations are firm for sixth form success.

In these cases, the Individual Education Plan (IEP) will require formal medical paperwork to be provided and students will be allocated oversight of a Senior Tutor, SENDCO and / or a member of the Safeguarding Team, where appropriate.

The Individual Education Plan (IEP) will be reviewed on at least a monthly basis by the Senior Tutor, SENDCO and / or a member of the Safeguarding Team, where appropriate. Consent will be sought to share with subject teachers and the key relevant information so that they can best make adjustments. Without this consent, the College is unable to provide reasonable adjustments.

The Education & Healthcare Plan (EHCP) will be reviewed termly by the SENDCO, and a member of the Safeguarding Team, where appropriate. Consent will be sought to share with subject teachers and the key relevant information so that they can best make adjustments. Without this consent, the College is unable to provide reasonable adjustments.

### **4. Studying at the College**

If a student does not disclose a pre-existing physical or mental health condition on application, then it is unlikely that they will receive support or reasonable adjustment unless the condition becomes clear to a member of staff. Early disclosure of issues is therefore vital to allow us to assess how best to accommodate students and also to avoid exacerbating the issue through a lack of knowledge on the part of subject teachers and tutors.

Students who have been through the *Fitness to Study* process who successfully enrol at the College will automatically be FTS Stage One. Any students who have not disclosed health issues which may prevent attending lessons who are identified with 'Fitness to Study' within the first two weeks of term will proceed straight to FTS Stage One. On occasion the College may deem the student unfit to continue studying at the College. In this instance the final decision will be at the discretion of the Principal (Stage 3).

Students are made aware of the range of student services at the College both at induction and as part of the ongoing PSHE programme delivered in tutorials with their Senior Tutor. All staff at the College have a duty of care to students and can be approached with any concern, however seemingly minor. The main staff likely to be consulted by students are:

- Vice Principal
- Assistant Principal (Academic Administration) & SENDCO
- Senior Tutors
- Safeguarding Team
- College Matron
- Curriculum Managers
- Subject teachers

The member of staff consulted will seek consent from the student to share with subject teachers and the tutor the key relevant information so that they can best make adjustments. In exceptional circumstances confidentiality may need to be broken without the student's consent. If the nature of the medical condition requires support or reasonable adjustment needs to be applied to a student's studies, then the College Matron will be asked to meet with and assess the student. This may lead to a support plan being agreed and other staff in the College, such as the Safeguarding Team, becoming involved in providing support. Consent will always be sought from the student to involve parents and carers in these decisions, however in certain extreme cases confidentiality will need to be respected if the student requests it in writing.

The support plan may also involve referral to outside agencies, such as CAMHS or the student's GP. This is particularly true where the health condition causes significant concern, since the expertise and capacity of the College in providing medical support is finite and the responsibility for medical support lies with the external services. In crisis situations, where there are immediate and grave concerns for a student's health or well-being, the staff will judge how best to provide first aid and whether emergency services should be called. We will always endeavour, in these situations, to contact parents and carers as soon as possible.

## **5. Limits to support**

Whether medical conditions are raised before a student joining the College or whilst at the College, there need to be reasonable limits

set to the support that can be offered. These include both the flexibility the College should show around academic progress (attendance and meeting assessment expectations) and the support (type, location and frequency) that is needed for a student to remain at College. Clearly it is difficult to set non-negotiable limits for academic progression and support and there needs to be judicious professional judgement in each case. Furthermore, physical and mental health conditions may be temporary or permanent, short or long-term, stable or prone to remission. As a guide therefore, the following minimum expectations should be set:

- **Academic progress**

Each case needs to be considered on its merits, but it is clear that a minimum level of attendance needs to be maintained overall that will allow a student to realistically achieve. Academic success depends on engagement in classroom activity, so excessively long periods of complete absence or very poor attendance will make a student's studies untenable. With regards to coursework and homework, if students fall significantly behind with their deadlines, despite extensions being offered, then there comes a point at which catching up is not viable. The specific expectations regarding attendance and assessment will be set in each case depending on the circumstances.

- **Support**

It is reasonable for teaching staff, on a short-term temporary basis, to liaise with students by emailing them work **via Senior Tutors and NOT directly to students**. This cannot continue long-term as we do not offer distance-learning courses at the College. In this context short term means no more than 4 weeks.

The College can provide a general level of support and encouragement to students but does not provide psychological therapies or other therapeutic interventions of any sort. Where such therapies or interventions are required, they must be provided external by suitably qualified professional with recognised, appropriate, valid and current accreditations. Welfare support available at the College is necessarily limited and needs to be available for all students to ensure fairness.

## **6. Fitness to Study**

The College wants all students to complete their courses successfully and achieve their potential. However, there are times when physical or mental health issues are so complex or severe that this is not realistic. Such cases must be evaluated on a case-by-case basis and the College needs to ensure it is fully appraised of the relevant medical evidence together with the wishes of the student and parents or carers. Preferably, a clear consensus would emerge about the best solution, but this will not always be the case. There will be situations here the College believes that it has exhausted the available support options, has made reasonable adjustments, but the student is still unable to uphold their fitness to study.

These situations negatively affect the student, since their welfare is at risk, and the College, since there is an excessive burden on resources. For the student, who has struggled to maintain their academic progress with much difficulty and for whom the structure of College life has been supportive in their returning to health, there comes a point at which trying to catch up after a prolonged absence is even more stressful than ending their studies. To continue this situation would place the College in breach of its duty of care to students

If the College, medical & others professionals, the student and the parents or carer agree that a student should withdraw then this will be processed. In such situations, the College would always assure students and their parents or carers that the best interests of each student and their welfare are at the hub of decisions. Where there is no consensus that withdrawal is the most appropriate outcome, then the stages below will be followed:

#### **Pre-Stage 1 Senior Tutor**

A Pre-Stage 1 email is sent home along with a copy of these procedures outlining concerns and seeking improvement. The situation is reviewed 2 weeks later.

#### **Stage 1 Senior Tutor**

A Stage 1 letter is sent home outlining concerns and setting targets. The situation is reviewed 2 weeks later.

#### **Stage 2 Vice Principal**

A Stage 2 letter is sent home firmly outlining concerns and re-setting target. The situation is reviewed 2 weeks later.

#### **Stage 3 Principal**

A case conference reviews the situation and provides guidance to the Principal, who will require the student to leave or, in exceptional cases, reinitiate Stage 2.

### **7. Restarting studies at College**

In some situations it may be appropriate to offer a conditional restart of studies. A case-by-case approach will be adopted taking into account all relevant evidence. For a re-start programme it may be necessary to reduce the number of subject studied if this in the best interests of the student.

The following are examples of potential re-start options and **not** a definitive list:

- Joining a January-start programme;
- Switching to a more suitable programme (e.g. A level to BTEC; A level to IFY);
- A complete re-start from the beginning of the next academic year;

The above are just examples and possibilities will always be based on the existence of suitable classes, class size limits and other operational and financial factors. The age of the students must also

to be considered as the College is registered to teach 15-to 19-year-old students. As a general rule, students can only ever restart once, unless there is an exceptional reason which has been approved by the Principal.

In cases where the student withdraws from the College of their own accord, has put in place appropriate medical support outside College and has time before the restart to respond to this support (typically 6 months), then the restart has a good chance of being successful. In cases where there is no clear commitment to following prescribed medical support and there is less time to respond to this support, then the restart is unlikely to work. The College will not allow a restart where a student was required to leave at Stage 3.

Where the College offers the opportunity of a restart, the onus is on the student and their parents or carers to ensure that they are sufficiently recovered for the restart to be effective. Further relapses would not be in the interests of the student. When the student withdraws from studies, guidance will be given as to what support might be appropriate to ensure fitness to study on their return, but also on what evidence will be expected at enrolment or re-enrolment to support this. Students will be added to the College's restart list.

In August of each year the Senior Tutor will write to all parents or carers of students on the restart list confirming the date and time of enrolment / re-enrolment and what medical documentation will be required. The letter will also ask for formal written confirmation that the student still intends to restart. Since the exact programme of courses will be agreed at enrolment / re-enrolment, it is not straightforward to expect students to prepare for their restart, for example by re-reading texts or completing summer timetable work. It is expected therefore that students will have a period of private study or study support added to their timetable to allow for time to catch up any missing work. Restarters will automatically be monitored by their Senior Tutor and will move straight to Stage 1 of these procedures if concerns resurface.