



Oakridge Schools Federation Confidentiality Policy

Approved by:	Full Governing Body
Review frequency:	Every 2 years
Date last approved:	Spring 2025
Next review date due:	Spring 2027

Rationale

At Oakridge Schools Federation we believe that the safety, well-being and protection of our pupils are the paramount consideration in all decisions staff at this school make about confidentiality. The appropriate sharing of information between school staff is an essential element in ensuring our pupils well-being and safety.

Factors of confidentiality embedded in the federation:

- It is an essential part of the ethos of our federation that trust is established to enable pupils, staff, and parents/carers to seek help both within and outside the federation and minimise the number of situations when personal information is shared to ensure pupils, staff are supported and safe
- Pupils, parents/carers and staff need to know the boundaries of confidentiality in order to feel safe and comfortable in discussing personal issues and concerns, including sex and relationships
- The federation's attitude to confidentiality is open and easily understood and everyone should be able to trust the boundaries of confidentiality operating within the school
- Issues concerning personal information including sex and relationships and other personal matters can arise at any time
- Everyone in the federation's community needs to know that no one can offer absolute confidentiality
- Everyone in the federation's community needs to know the limits of confidentiality that can be offered by individuals within the federation so they can make informed decisions about the most appropriate person to talk to about any health, sex and relationship or other personal issue they want to discuss

Involvement of the staff, pupils, parents and the wider community in developing this confidentiality policy

A working group consisting of representatives of staff, pupils, parents and governors established the draft of this policy. A wide consultation has taken place with the whole school community, including our partner agencies and their feedback taken on board. The final policy was agreed by the Senior Leadership Team and the federation's Governing body, and has been widely disseminated to staff, pupils, parents and carers and partner agencies. It forms part of the induction of all new staff, including volunteers, and is reviewed every 2 years.

Definition of Confidentiality

The dictionary definition of confidential is 'something which is spoken or given in confidence; private, entrusted with another's secret affairs'.

When speaking confidentially to someone the confider has the belief that the confidant will not discuss the content of the conversation with another. The confider is asking for the content of the conversation to be kept secret. Anyone offering absolute confidentiality to someone else would be offering to keep the content of his or her conversation completely secret and discuss it with no one.

In practice there are few situations where absolute confidentiality is offered within Oakridge Schools Federation. We have tried to strike a balance between ensuring the safety, well-being and protection of our pupils and staff, ensuring there is an ethos of trust where pupils and staff can ask for help when they need it and ensuring that when it is essential to share personal information child protection issues and good practice is followed.

This means that in most cases what is on offer is limited confidentiality. Disclosure of the content of a conversation could be discussed with professional colleagues but the confider would not be identified except in certain circumstances. The general rule is that staff should make clear that there are limits to confidentiality, at the beginning of the conversation. These limits relate to ensuring children's safety and well-being. The pupil will be informed when a confidence has to be broken for this reason and will be encouraged to do this for themselves whenever this is possible. Different levels of confidentiality are appropriate for different circumstances.

1. In the classroom in the course of a lesson given by a member of teaching staff or an outside visitor, including health professionals. Careful thought needs to be given to the content of the lesson, setting the climate and establishing ground rules to ensure confidential disclosures are not made. It should be made clear to pupils that this is not the time or place to disclose confidential, personal information. (See setting ground rules and working agreements). When a health professional is contributing to a school health education programme in a classroom setting, s/he is working with the same boundaries of confidentiality as a teacher.
2. One to one disclosure to members of federation staff (including volunteers). It is essential all members of staff know the limits of the confidentiality they can offer to both pupils and parents/carers (see note below) and any required actions and sources of further support or help available both for the pupil or parent/carer and for the staff member within the federation and from other agencies, where appropriate. All staff within the federation encourage pupils to discuss difficult issues with their parents or carers, and vice versa. However, the needs of the pupil are paramount and federation staff will not automatically share information about the pupil with his/her parents/carers unless it is considered to be in the child's best interests.

(Note: That is, that when concerns for a child or young person come to the attention of staff, for example through observation of behaviour or injuries or disclosure, however insignificant this might appear to be, the member of staff should discuss this with the designated Child

Protection Liaison Officer (Headteacher) as soon as is practically possible. More serious concerns must be reported immediately to ensure that any intervention necessary to protect the child is accessed as early as possible. Please see the school Child Protection Policy).

3. Disclosures to a counsellor, school nurse or health professional operating a confidential service within the federation's schools. Health professionals such as school nurses can give confidential medical advice to pupils provided they are competent to do so and follow the Fraser Guidelines (guidelines for doctors and other health professionals on giving medical advice to under 16s). School nurses are skilled in discussing issues and possible actions with young people and always have in mind the need to encourage pupils to discuss issues with their parents or carers. However, the needs of the pupil are paramount and the school nurse will not insist that a pupil's parents or carers are informed about any advice or treatment they give.

Contraceptive advice and pregnancy

The DoH has issued guidance (July 2004 supplemented 2010) which clarifies and confirms that health professionals owe young people under 16 the same duty of care and confidentiality as older patients. It sets out principles of good practice in providing contraception and sexual health advice to under-16s. The duty of care and confidentiality applies to all under 16s. Whether a young person is competent to consent to treatment or is in serious danger is judged by the health professional on the circumstances of each individual case, not solely on the age of the patient. However, the younger the patient the greater the concern that they may be being abused or exploited. The Guidance makes it clear that health professionals must make time to explore whether there may be coercion or abuse. Cases of grave concern would be referred through child protection procedures using the Government Guidance, 'Working Together to Safeguard Children' (2013).

The legal position for school staff

Federation staff (including non-teaching and volunteers) should not promise confidentiality. Pupils do not have the right to expect that incidents will not be reported to his/her parents/carers and may not, in the absence of an explicit promise, assume that information conveyed outside that context is private. No member of this federation's staff can or should give such a promise. The safety, well-being and protection of the child is the paramount consideration in all decisions staff at this federation make about confidentiality.

Federation staff are NOT obliged to break confidentiality except where child protection is or may be an issue, however, at Oakridge Schools Federation we believe it is important staff are able to share their concerns about pupils with colleagues in a professional and supportive way, on a need to know basis, to ensure staff receive the guidance and support they need and the pupils' safety and well-being is maintained. Federation staff should discuss such concerns with the federation's DSL.

Teachers, counsellor and health professionals

Professional judgement is required by a teacher, counsellor or health professional in considering whether he or she should indicate to a child that the child could make a disclosure in confidence and whether such a confidence could then be maintained having heard the information. In exercising their professional judgement the teacher, counsellor or health professional must consider the best interests of the child including the need to both ensure trust to provide safeguards for our children and possible child protection issues. All teachers at this federation receive statutory training in child protection as part of their induction to this federation and are expected to follow the federation's child protection policy and procedures.

Counsellors and Health Professionals

At Oakridge Schools Federation we offer pupils the support of a school nursing service operate drop in service for pupils. These services are confidential between the health professional and the individual pupil. No information is shared with the relevant school staff except as defined in the federation's child protection policy, and guidance from the Child Protection Committee and Child Protection law. This is essential to maintain the trust needed for these services to meet the needs of our pupils.

Visitors and non-teaching staff

At Oakridge Schools Federation, we expect all non-teaching staff, including volunteers, except those identified in the paragraph above, to report any disclosures by pupils or parents/carers, of a concerning personal nature to the designated child protection coordinator as soon as possible after the disclosure and in an appropriate setting, so others cannot overhear. This is to ensure the safety, protection and well-being of all our pupils and staff. The DSL will decide what, if any, further action needs to be taken, both to ensure the pupil gets the help and support they need and that the member of staff also gets the support and supervision they need.

Parents/carers

Oakridge Schools Federation believes that it is essential to work in partnership with parents and carers and we endeavour to keep parents/carers abreast of their child's progress at their school, including any concerns about their progress or behaviour. However, we also need to maintain a balance so that our pupils can share any concerns and ask for help when they need it. Where a pupil does discuss a difficult personal matter with staff within the federation, they will be encouraged to also discuss the matter with their parent or carer themselves. The safety, well-being and protection of our pupils is the paramount consideration in all decisions staff at this federation make about confidentiality.

Complex cases

Where there are areas of doubt about the sharing of information, seek a consultation with Hampshire Children's Services Child Protection Team.

Links to other school policies and procedures

This policy is intended to be used in conjunction with the federation's PSHE, Drugs, Sex and Relationship, Child Protection, Anti-Bullying, Behaviour, Whistleblowing and Looked After Children policies

Statement of ground rules to be used in lessons

We adopt ground rules to ensure a safe environment for teaching in particular in PSHE. This reduces anxiety to pupils and staff and minimises unconsidered, unintended personal disclosures. At the beginning of each PSHE lesson, pupils are reminded of the ground rules by the teacher or outside visitor. The teacher establishes the ground rules together with the pupils at the beginning of each half term of teaching PSHE.

This is an example of the ground rules for a class:

- We won't ask each other or the teacher any personal questions
- We will respect each other and not laugh, tease or hurt others
- We won't say things we want to keep confidential
- We can pass or opt out of something if it makes us feel uncomfortable
- If we do find out things about other pupils, which are personal and private, we won't talk about it outside the lesson
- If we are worried about someone else's safety we tell a teacher

When confidentiality should be broken and procedures for doing this

See the Child Protection Policy. Where this does not apply and you are still concerned and unsure of whether the information should be passed on or other action taken you should speak to the federation's DSL. If the Headteacher issues instructions that she should be kept informed, all staff must comply. There is always a good reason for this, which you may not know about.

The principles we follow at Oakridge Schools Federation are that in all cases we

- Ensure the time and place are appropriate, when they are not we reassure the child that we understand they need to discuss something very important and that it warrants time, space and privacy
- See the child normally (and always in cases of neglect, or abuse) before the end of the school day. More serious concerns must be reported immediately to ensure that any intervention necessary to protect the child is accessed as early as possible
- Tell the child we cannot guarantee confidentiality if we think they will: Hurt themselves Hurt someone else Tell us that someone is hurting them or others
- Not interrogate the child or ask leading questions
- We won't put children in the position of having to repeat distressing matters to several people
- Inform the pupil first before any confidential information is shared, with the reasons for this
- Encourage the pupil, whenever possible to confide in his/her own parents/carers

Support for staff

Staff may have support needs themselves in dealing with some of the personal issues of our pupils. At Oakridge Schools Federation we prefer individuals to ask for help rather than possibly making a poor decision because they don't have all the facts or the necessary training, or taking worries about pupils home with them. There are many agencies we can refer pupils to who need additional support which and we have procedures to ensure this happens. We all work together as part of a team to support our pupils and asking for help is a way we ensure Oakridge Schools Federation is a happy and safe learning environment. Federation staff should discuss any concerns about pupils with the Headteacher; LSAs with the Deputy Headteacher; mentors with the Deputy Headteacher. Any unresolved issues should be discussed with the Headteacher.

Onward referral

The federation inclusion team leads are responsible for referring pupils to outside agencies from the school. Staff should not make referrals themselves unless they believe that a child protection referral to the Hampshire Professional line should be made if necessary and the DSL does not agree. Pupils can also obtain confidential help themselves, e.g. school nurse drop-ins, GP, local drug and alcohol agencies, ChildLine, NSPCC etc.

Dissemination and implementation

This policy has been read by all teaching and non-teaching staff at the federation as part of whole federation training, where all staff received statutory training on the content and practical applications of the policy. All new staff receive a copy of the policy, together with basic training on the federation's Child Protection Policy and procedures from the DSL.

Review:

This policy is reviewed every 2 years or whenever deemed necessary by the Headteacher and Governors in the light of events and changes in the law.