

Fitness to study policy

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1. Introduction

The College aims to provide an outstanding education for all students whatever their individual needs but there are cases when this is not possible and this policy seeks to clarify these situations and how decisions are made.

This *Fitness to Study policy* applies when qualified, enrolled students face issues which are not primarily of their making and which are impacting on their academic progress. These are instances when a student's needs are such that their remaining in College and completing the course successfully are in doubt. Assessing fitness to study will involve forming a judgement about the level and likely duration of a student's need in relation to the demands of their course and the resources available in the College. These are elaborated in the next sections.

2. College provision

College provision is circumscribed by its funding, its delivery model and its mainstream (ie. non-specialist) nature. It only offers full time A level courses and these are delivered mainly through classroom-based group tuition, set assignments and self-directed work outside the classroom. These place demands on students including high levels of attendance (usually a minimum of 95%) on site for 22 months, five days a week. They demand an ability to learn in a variety of ways and at pace. Students have to devote a lot of time, concentration and energy to their learning. At the same time, College life involves working and developing socially with other people as part of a busy community. Our 1400 students are not supervised as they move around the campus and are free to enter and exit the site according to their commitments. These are core aspects of being a student at Woodhouse and whilst every effort is made to meet each student's needs there are times when this is not possible.

Most students complete their courses and achieve highly despite all the rigours outlined above and the many challenges which can arise during a two year period in anyone's life. This is because the College has well trained teachers and specialist support staff who are experienced in helping students progress in a wide variety of circumstances. The availability of this support means that almost all students remain 'fit to study' throughout their time at the College. Regardless of cause, the 'symptoms' of a student who is struggling manifest in issues regarding their academic progress, attendance and behaviour and the College has a well understood system for providing academic support, setting targets and reviewing individual progress where this is the case.

3. Students with significant needs

There are students for whom the use of 'mainstream' academic support and disciplinary procedures are less appropriate. The normal target-setting and review processes imply that a student has a reasonable level of control over their situation but this is not always the case. Sometimes students struggle to meet the course demands for other reasons, there is less volition on the part of the student and in some cases they have more need. These are where students have one or more of the following:

- Physical illness
- Mental health difficulties
- Addiction
- Specific learning needs
- Injuries
- Disabilities
- Financial responsibilities
- Caring responsibilities
- Some behavioural issues

4. Disclosure of need

The sooner staff at the College are aware of any of these issues the better. This is because it will allow for a better understanding of a student's situation and for support to be put in place before the student falls behind in their work. This is often crucial because once the student has fallen behind they have an additional problem to contend with and this can create further issues for them.

A student may disclose needs to a member of staff at any point during their two years at Woodhouse College. However, students and parents / carers are encouraged to disclose any physical or mental health difficulties, learning support needs and EHCP information as part of their application and again at enrolment. All students meet 1:1 with their personal tutor who will also ask them specific questions about any needs they may have. Further opportunities to discuss needs are provided and communicated by tutors, student services staff and via the College intranet and printed information such as posters and the student planner.

Carers are also invited to raise any concerns or specific family circumstances at an initial meeting with the tutor for parents of new students. Openness is encouraged and sometimes this will involve gathering relevant information through liaising with medical or social services or the student's former school.

Once needs have been identified they should be logged appropriately, according to what they are, who needs to know and what, if anything, needs to happen. In medical and sometimes other situations, documentary evidence may be required and is often invaluable.

5. Support arrangements and support plans (informal and formal)

Once a need is established, relevant staff will work with a student and possibly their parent/carer to find ways of helping them do as well as possible on their course. In some cases such as difficult

family circumstances this may be by offering some informal advice at an early stage but may need to become more formal if such informal steps do not work.

Support plans will usually be developed by senior tutors, ALS or safeguarding staff. They may involve other members of Student Services, teachers, the Careers Co-ordinator (if other options are being explored) and others. Plans should be summarised in writing and documented on the Pastoral log on Dashboard. In some cases where information is of a highly sensitive nature, the Safeguarding Team will document a more detailed plan stored in the student's confidential safeguarding file.

The effectiveness of a support plan must be reviewed regularly and at least each half term to see if they are still relevant or whether they can be improved. Reviews will usually be done by the author of the plan. Where it is clear that a plan is not working and one or more of the thresholds (see below) are close to being reached this must be discussed with the student (and their parent / carer in almost all cases).

Plans to support a student will depend on their needs and should be recorded in the student's pastoral log. Typical elements of such a plan could include:

- Information about support on the College intranet
- Subject workshops and support
- One-to-one support from teacher(s) to help catch up with work
- Consulting parents / carers
- Extending deadlines
- Study skills (Additional Learning Support)
- Referral to the College Safeguarding Team
- ALS referral
- Referral to a progress manager
- Referral to the College counselling service or to external sources of support
- GP appointment
- Self-referral to any of the above
- Changes in timetable
- Directed Study
- Reduction in subjects studied
- Restart of the lower or upper sixth year, if appropriate and possible
- Consideration of other post 16 study options – careers interview

Three brief examples have been included to exemplify this.

Example 1. If there is an external cause of low attendance such as caring responsibilities at home, then there could be a discussion about what the alternatives might be, a phone call home or signposting to voluntary groups for help. Consideration will be given to sensible adjustments in terms of College requirements but there is only limited and short term flexibility about the requirement to attend overall.

Example 2. Where a student's mental health is the issue, the College can 'triage' the urgency and level of need and provide limited direct access to counselling on site. The safeguarding team also refer students to relevant outside agencies and recommends they seek access to external medical services via their GP. If a student is receiving support from CAMHS, the Safeguarding Team may liaise with the CAMHS Worker, to seek guidance on the student's fitness to study and to request

a safety plan if appropriate. Beyond that, the nature of the support plan will depend on the likely duration and severity of the situation. Some of these issues are short term and amenable to therapies and within a two year programme the difficulties they pose can often be overcome. The College Safeguarding Officers are trained Mental Health First Aiders, but are not trained counsellors / therapists / mental health professionals.

Example 3. In the case of injury or illness, the College will try to be flexible around attendance and work completion in the short term. Lessons can be arranged in ground floor rooms for example where students have reduced mobility and staff can be included in discussions about other flexibilities during lessons.

As can be seen from these examples, the support plan may involve documented medical evidence being received and discussed, referral to outside agencies such as the student's GP, to CAMHS, or MASH and at times the College may be directly involved with these organisations in the best interests of the student.

In most cases it is preferable that parents / carers will be involved in the development of support plans and this is actively encouraged. If consent to inform them has been granted by the student then this should be done and recorded in the log. If the situation is one of high risk, a student's lack of consent to inform may be overridden. For example, if the student is known to be actively suicidal, at risk of significant harm to themselves or to or from others.

6. Assessing fitness to study

The College can call into question a student's fitness to study if:

- **Support plans have failed to help a student make sufficient progress in their studies**
- **The perceived ability of a student to function successfully in College deteriorates quickly**

Fitness to study decisions will normally be taken by the Director of Student Services with reference to the ten thresholds in the box below. This will usually apply to a student remaining in College altogether. More rarely, it can apply to a student's fitness to study a particular subject.

These thresholds are used because ultimately, the demands of an A level programme remain more or less the same, regardless of the situation a student faces. The College will not protract difficulties for troubled students by continuing to face them with tasks they are unable to do and nor can it resource individual students to the point where staff workload or other students' progress is being affected unsustainably.

Ten Fitness to Study criteria

1. The student has not attended for four consecutive weeks or has missed too much of their course to enable successful completion or has been unable to complete specific elements of the work required (such as coursework)
2. Continuing to try to catch up or anxiety about not succeeding on the course will cause the student too much anguish and seriously compound the difficulties they face
3. The student's life is so precarious or complex that they need to focus on things other than study for the foreseeable future
4. The student is moving away and the increased journey time makes study at Woodhouse impossible
5. The student needs a type or level of support the College can not provide and which they otherwise can not access in a timely way or have chosen not to do so (such as psychiatric or other specialist care)
6. The student needs continuous or near continuous supervision because they pose a risk to themselves or others
7. The student's capacity to learn the content and skills required in their course is so limited by their circumstances that they are unable to function as a student for a sustained period
8. The student requires a level of individual tuition the College is unable to provide
9. The student is impacting adversely on the learning or wellbeing of others
10. The student is unable to work collaboratively with others and this is a course requirement

7. Consensus situations

It is usually the case that there is a consensus between the College, parents and the student that one of these thresholds has been met and it is in the best interests of the student to leave College. At such a point, the Director of Student Services will ask for the student to be taken off roll and will endeavour to provide any information, advice and guidance which might be relevant.

8. Procedure for situations where there is not a consensus

A lack of consensus can arise for a number of reasons but most common is the view that remaining in the College is the 'best place' for the student regardless of whether they are making

progress educationally. This can come from the student, the student's parent / carer and sometimes other agencies.

Though sympathetic in these instances, it remains the case that the College's role is to provide courses to students who will benefit from them.

College staff are best placed to assess whether a student is attending and engaging in lessons and completing work satisfactorily

If there is no consensus that withdrawal is the most appropriate outcome the Director of Student Services should listen to the concerns raised by the student and / or their family.

The Director of Student Services then has the discretion to consider one of the following recommendations for the Principal:

1. **Continuation:** If there is further scope for improving the support plan this may be considered. At this stage, targets have to be clearly stated and it is offered on the basis that if the student does not meet them they will withdraw without contesting this after a stipulated period. At least one of the targets must relate to the relevant threshold(s). This is only offered in cases where successful course completion is a realistic possibility. Documented medical evidence, or agreement that a student is fit to study from a medical practitioner may be necessary in such a case.
2. **Restart of the appropriate year:** If one of the thresholds applies but a student's condition is likely to improve, then a re-start might be recommended. Students can only restart once. If they do, they must be sure they are taking the correct courses to enable them to achieve.
3. **Withdrawal from the College:** If at least one of the thresholds applies and the student's situation is such that they can not progress on their course the student should be withdrawn. Depending on the phase of the course, they may be allowed to take their exams.

The option which applies will be the decision of the Principal.

The Principal will need to consider the history of the case, the support which has been provided and the results of having provided it. The decision will be based on balancing the needs of the individual student against the likely outcomes and the impact on the wider College. The Principal's decision is final and there is no appeal.