

# **Sacred Heart RC Primary School Atherton**



## **FREEDOM OF INFORMATION POLICY, SCHOOL PUBLICATION SCHEME & SCHEDULE**

**“With Christ as our guide, we inspire and thrive.”**

## Introduction

The Freedom of Information Act 2000 gives individuals the right to access official information from public bodies. Under the Act, any person has a legal right to ask for access to information held by the school. They are entitled to be told whether the school holds the information, and to receive a copy, subject to certain exemptions. While the Act assumes openness, it recognises that certain information is sensitive. There are exemptions to protect this information. Full details on how requests can be made are set out in section 1 of this policy. Public Authorities should be clear and proactive about the information they will make public. For this reason, a publication scheme is available and can be found at section 2 of this policy.

This policy does not form part of any individual's terms and conditions of employment with the school and is not intended to have contractual effect. This policy should be used in conjunction with the school's GDPR Data Protection Policy.

## SECTION 1 – FREEDOM OF INFORMATION REQUESTS

Requests under Freedom of Information should be made to Ian McDermott, Head teacher. However, the request can be addressed to anyone in the School Office. All staff need to be aware of the processes and policy for dealing with requests

Requests for information that are not data protected, or environmental information requests will be covered by the Freedom of Information Act.

**Data Protection enquiries (or Subject Access Requests/SARs)** are requests where the enquirer asks to see what personal information the school holds about the enquirer. If the enquiry is a Data Protection request, the School's GDPR & Data Protection Policy should be followed.

**Environmental Information Regulations enquiries** are those which relate to air, water, land, natural sites, built environment, flora and fauna, health, and any decisions and activities affecting any of these. These could, therefore, include enquiries about recycling, phone masts, school playing fields, car parking etc. If the enquiry is about environmental information, follow the guidance on the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) website.

Freedom of Information requests **must** be made in writing, **(including email)**, and should include the enquirer's name, correspondence address (email addresses are allowed), and state what information they require. There must be enough information in the request to be able to identify and locate the information. If this information is covered by one of the other pieces of legislation (as referred to above), they will be dealt with under the relevant policy/procedure related to that request.

If a request is unclear or lacks sufficient detail, the school will ask the requester for clarification. The response period begins only once all necessary information has been provided. Requesters are not required to reference the Freedom of Information Act or explain their reasons for seeking information. The school must confirm whether the requested information is held and provide it, unless an exemption applies. Responses must be issued within 20 school days, excluding holidays.

## Information

Provided all requirements are met for a valid request to be made, the School will provide the information that it holds (unless an exemption applies).

**Holding information** means information relating to the business of the school:

- That the school has created; or
- That the school has received from another body or person; or
- Held by another body on the school's behalf.

Information means both hard copy and digital information, including email.

If the information is held by another public authority, such as the Local Authority, first check with them they hold it, then transfer the request to them. If this applies, the School will notify the enquirer that they do not hold the information and to whom they have transferred the request. The school will continue to answer any parts of the enquiry in respect of information it does hold.

When the School does not hold the information, it has **no duty to create or acquire it** just to answer the enquiry; although a reasonable search will be made before confirming whether the school has the information requested. If the information requested is already in the public domain, for instance, through the Publication Scheme or on the School's website, the school will direct the enquirer to the information and explain how to access it. The requester has the right to be told if the information requested is held by the school (subject to any of the exemptions). This obligation is known as the school's *duty to confirm or deny* that it holds the information. However, the school does not have to confirm or deny if:-

- The exemption is an absolute exemption; or - In the case of qualified exemptions, confirming or denying would itself disclose exempted information.

## Vexatious Requests

The school is not obliged to respond to requests designed to cause inconvenience, harassment, or expense, or those that are repeated without a reasonable interval.

The Freedom of Information Act 2000 grants individuals the right to access official information from public bodies, including schools. Under this Act, anyone can request access to information held by the school, be informed if the school holds the information, and receive a copy, subject to certain exemptions. While the Act promotes openness, it also protects sensitive information through exemptions.

This policy outlines the process for making Freedom of Information requests (Section 1) and provides details of the school's publication scheme (Section 2). It should be used alongside the school's Data Protection Policy.

## Section 1 – Freedom of Information Requests

**How to Make a Request:** Requests must be made in writing (email or letter) and include the enquirer's name, correspondence address, and details of the information required. Requests can be addressed to any staff member, but should ideally be sent to Ian McDermott, Headteacher.

### Types of Requests:

**Data Protection Requests:** For personal information held by the school, refer to the GDPR Data Protection Policy.

**Environmental Information Requests:** For information on environmental matters, refer to DEFRA guidelines.

**Freedom of Information Requests:** For other types of information, follow this policy.

**Response Time:** The school must respond within 20 school days (excluding holidays) or 60 working days, whichever is shorter. The time limit starts the next working day after the request is received. If further clarification is needed, the time limit begins once the additional information is provided.

**Exemptions:** The school may refuse a request if:

Information is exempt under the Act.

The information is not held.

The request is vexatious or repeated.

The cost of compliance exceeds £450.

**Vexatious Requests:** The school is not obligated to respond to requests designed to cause inconvenience, harassment, or expense, or those that are repeated without a reasonable interval.

**Fees:** Fees may apply if the cost of fulfilling the request exceeds £450 (calculated at £25 per hour for 18 hours of work). If the cost is below the threshold, charges may only cover photocopying, printing, and postage. Fees must be paid before the request is processed.

If the school is going to charge, they will send the enquirer a fees notice. The school does not have to comply with the request until the fee has been paid. More details on fees can be found on the ICO website-

[Publication schemes: a guide | ICO](#)

If a request is likely to be refused due to cost or incur a significant fee, the school should contact the applicant beforehand to discuss options for narrowing the scope to reduce costs.

When multiple requests appear to be co-ordinated or part of a campaign, the total estimated cost of fulfilling all related requests may be considered when applying cost limits.

### Time Limits

Compliance with a request must be prompt and within the time limit of 20 school days (this does not include the school holidays or weekends) or 60 working days if this is shorter. Failure to comply could result in a complaint by the requester to the Information Commissioner's Office. The response time starts counting as the first day from the next working day after the request is received (so if a request was received on Monday 6th October the time limit would start from the next working day, the 7th October).

Where the School has asked the enquirer for more information to enable it to answer, the 20 school days start time begins when this further information has been received. If some information is

exempt this will be detailed in the School's response. Where the School has notified the enquirer that a charge is to be made, the time period stops until payment is received.

### **Third Party Data**

Consultation of third parties may be required if their interests could be affected by release of the information requested, and any such consultation may influence the decision.

### **Exemptions**

The presumption of the Freedom of Information Act is that the school will disclose information unless the Act provides a specific reason to withhold it. The Act recognises the need to preserve confidentiality and protect sensitive material in certain circumstances.

The school may refuse all/part of a request, if one of the following applies: -

- 1) There is an exemption to disclosure within the act.
- 2) The information sought is not held.
- 3) The request is considered vexatious or repeated; or
- 4) The cost of compliance exceeds the threshold.

A series of exemptions are set out in the Act which allow the withholding of information in relation to an enquiry. Some are very specialised in their application (such as national security) and would not usually be relevant to schools.

There are two general categories of exemptions: -

**1) Absolute:** where there is no requirement to confirm or deny that the information is held, disclose the information or consider the public interest; and

**2) Qualified:** where, even if an exemption applies, there is a duty to consider the public interest in disclosing information.

### **Absolute Exemptions**

The following are the only absolute exemptions which will apply to the school: -

Information accessible to the enquirer by other means (for example by way of the School's Publication Scheme).

National Security/Court Records

Personal information (i.e. information which would be covered by the Data Protection Act).

Information provided in confidence.

If an absolute exemption exists, it means that disclosure is not required by the Act. However, a decision could be taken to ignore the exemption and release the information considering all the facts of the case if it is felt necessary to do so.

### **Qualified Exemptions**

If one of the below exemptions apply (i.e. a qualified disclosure), there is also a duty to consider the public interest in confirming or denying that the information exists and in disclosing information.

The qualified exemptions under the Act which would be applicable to the school are: -

- Information requested is intended for future publication (and it is reasonable in all the circumstances for the requester to wait until such time that the information is actually published)
- Reasons of National Security.
- Government/International Relations
- Release of the information is likely to prejudice any actual or potential legal action or formal investigation involving the school
- Law enforcement (i.e. if disclosure would prejudice the prevention or detection of crime, the prosecution of offenders or the administration of justice)
- Release of the information would prejudice the ability of the school to carry out an effective audit of its accounts, resources and functions
- For Health and Safety purposes
- Information requested is Environmental information
- Information requested is subject to Legal professional privilege; and
- For *Commercial Interest* reasons.

Where the potential exemption is a qualified exemption, the School will consider the public interest test to identify, if the public interest in applying the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing it.

In all cases, before writing to the enquirer, the person given responsibility by the School for dealing with the request will need to ensure that the case has been properly considered, and that the reasons for refusal, or public interest test refusal, are sound.

### **Refusal**

If it is decided to refuse a request, the school will send a refusals notice, which must contain

- The fact that the responsible person cannot provide the information asked for
- Which exemption(s) apply
- Why the exemption(s) apply to this enquiry (if it is not self-evident)
- Reasons for refusal; and
- The school's complaints procedure.

For monitoring purposes and in case of an appeal against a decision not to release the information or an investigation by the Information Commissioner, the responsible person must keep a record of all enquiries where all or part of the requested information is withheld and exemptions are claimed. The record must include the reasons for the decision to withhold the information.

## **SECTION 2 – FREEDOM OF INFORMATION PUBLICATION SCHEME**

### **Introduction**

This publication scheme follows a model approved by the Information Commissioners Office. This scheme is not a list of individual publications but rather a description of the classes of types of information that we are committed to publishing. This list is not an exhaustive list of all of the types of information that we publish. We try to proactively publish as much information as we can where the information would have a wider public interest. This scheme does not include information that we consider to be sensitive, such as personal information, information prevented from disclosure by law or information about security matters.

### **Classes of Information**

There are six classes of information that we hold: -

- Who we are and what we do
- What we spend and how we spend it
- What our priorities are and how we are doing
- How we make decisions
- Our policies and procedures
- The services we offer

### **Charges for Information Published Under this Scheme**

The school may charge individuals for information published under this scheme. The purpose of this scheme is to make the maximum amount of information readily available at the minimum inconvenience and cost to the public. Charges made by the school for routinely published material will be justified and transparent and kept to a minimum.

Material which is published and accessed on the website will be provided free of charge.

Charges may be made for information subject to a charging regime specified by law.

Charges will be made to cover:

- Photocopying
- Postage and Packaging
- The costs directly incurred as a result of viewing information.

Single copies of information requested which are covered by the publication scheme will be provided free unless otherwise stated within the scheme. If the request involved a large amount of photocopying, printing or postage, then this may be at a cost. If this is the case we will let you know as well as let you know the cost before fulfilling your request.

### **How to request information**

If you require a paper version of any of the documents within the scheme please contact the school using the contact details below.

Telephone: Ian McDermott, Headteacher

Email: [enquiries@admin.athertonsacredheart.wigan.sch.uk](mailto:enquiries@admin.athertonsacredheart.wigan.sch.uk)

Address: Sacred Heart RC Primary School, Lodge Lane, Atherton, Gtr. Manchester, M46 9BL.

Please mark all correspondence **Publication Scheme Request** in order to help us process your request quickly. If the information you are looking for isn't available via the scheme, you can still contact the school to ask if we have this information.

### **Making Information Available**

Information will generally be made available on the school website. Where it is not possible to include this information on the school website, or when an individual does not wish to access the information by the website the school will indicate how information can be obtained by other means and provide it by those means. This may be detailed in response to a request or within the scheme itself. This will usually be by way of a paper copy.

In some exceptional circumstances, some information may be available only by viewing in person. Where this manner is specified, contact details will be provided. An appointment to view the information will be arranged within a reasonable timescale.

Information will be provided in the language in which it is held or in such other language that is legally required. Where we are legally required to translate any information, we shall do so.



## **The Publication Scheme Schedule**

### **Who we are and what we do**

Information relating to the Governing Body

### **Description**

Information contained in official governing body documents including the governor's annual report:-

- Who is who
- Basis of governors appointment
- The manner in which the governing body is constituted
- Category of the school
- A statement on progress in implementing the action plan drawn up following an inspection
- A financial statement – including gifts made to the school and amounts paid to the governors for expenses
- Information about the implementation of the governing body's policy on pupils with special educational needs and any changes to the policy during the last year
- A description of arrangements for the admission of pupils with disabilities, including details of the steps to prevent disabled students being treated less favourably than other pupils, details of existing facilities to assist access to the school by pupils with disabilities, the accessibility plan covering future policies for increasing access by those with disabilities to the school
- A statement of policy on whole staff development identifying how teacher's professional development impacts on teaching and learning.
- Number of pupils on roll and rates of pupils authorised and unauthorised absence
- National curriculum assessment results for appropriate key stages with national summary figures
- The term of office of each category of governor if it lasts less than 4 years and the name of anybody entitled to appoint any category of governor.

### **School prospectus/handbook**

- The name, address, website and telephone number of the school and the type of school
- The name of the school Headteacher – Ian McDermott
- The school's staffing structure
- Information about the schools policy on providing for pupils with special educational needs
- Statement on the schools aims and values
- Information on the school policy on admissions
- School term dates, times and attendance
- Uniform
- Number of pupils on roll and rates of student absence
- Details of any affiliations with a particular religion or religious denomination, the religious education and collective worship and the alternative provision for these pupils.

**What we spend and how we spend it**

Financial statement for the current and previous financial year

**Description**

Relating to projected and actual income and expenditure, procurement, contracts and financial audit.

**Details of expenditure**

Sets out details of items of expenditure over £5,000 including the cost, name of supplier and information about the transaction.

**Procurement and contracts**

Details of the procurement and contracts the school has entered into or details relating to the organisation who has carried out this process on the school's behalf (for example the local authority).

**Pay policy**

A copy of the pay policy that the school uses to govern staff pay.

**Allowances**

Details of allowances and expenses that can be incurred by staff and governors.

**Pupil Premium**

How the school uses pupil premium.

**What we spend and how we spend it (Cont.)****Description (Cont.)**

Utilities and school running expenditure

Details of the school's overheads and running costs.

For which charges are permitted.

For example school publication, music tuition & trips

Health and Safety Policy and Risk Assessment

Statement of general policy with respect to health and safety at work of employees (and others) and the organisation and arrangements for carrying out the policy.

Staff Conduct, Discipline and Grievance

Statement of procedure for regulating conduct and discipline of school staff and procedures by which staff may seek redress for grievance.

Curriculum circulars and Statutory Instruments

Departmental circulars and administrative memoranda sent by the Department of Education to

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the Headteacher – Ian McDermott or governing body relating to the curriculum.

### **How we make decisions**

Admissions Policy/ Decisions (not individual)

### **Description**

This does not include individual decisions. This is a statement of our policy with regards to admissions and how we make decisions regarding admissions.

### **Services we offer**

Extra-curricular Activities and out of school clubs.  
Wraparound Provision.

### **Description**

Details of these are contained in our newsletters and letters home to families.

### **Complaints and/or Appeals**

Any written (including email) expression of dissatisfaction should be handled through the school's existing complaints procedure. Wherever practicable the review should be handled by someone not involved in the original decision.

The Governing Body should set and publish a target time for determining complaints and information on the success rate in meeting the target. The school should maintain records of all complaints and their outcome.

If the outcome is that the school's original decision or action is upheld, then the applicant can appeal to the Information Commissioner. The appeal can be made via their website or in writing to:  
Customer Contact Information, Commissioner's Office, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, SK9 5AF.

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