

Freedom of Information Policy

Introduction

The Freedom of Information Act 2000 ("FOIA") imposes obligations on public authorities to publish or make available information to members of the public. For the purposes of the work of Ambitious about Autism and the Ambitious about Autism Schools Trust, the definition of public authority includes the Rise School but not other elements of the charity's work or educational provision.

We are committed to being transparent and to comply fully with FOIA. We aim to be as open as possible about all our work, placing on our website and in the public domain documents, policies and procedures; and subject to the exemptions permitted under the Act will make all other information available on request.

Under the FOIA we must produce a publication scheme, setting out:

- the classes of information which we publish or intend to publish
- the manner in which the information will be published
- whether the information is available free of charge or on payment.

On certain occasions we will not be able to supply all the information requested. Information will only be withheld in accordance with the exemptions laid down in the FOIA or the Environmental Information Regulations 2004 (EIR), in particular:

- The School's duties under the Data Protection Act 2018 and UK General Data Protection Regulations (UK GDPR) to keep confidential sensitive and/or personal information about individual members of staff and learners.
- Other legal and contractual obligations
- Material detrimental to the safe and efficient conduct of the School's operations
- Information which is commercially sensitive

In the event that any of the above is true the School will always state the reasons why information has been withheld.

This policy sets out what information we publish, how to request information, how we respond to requests and what is excluded.

Categories of information published

The publication scheme guides you to information which we currently publish (or have recently published) or which we will publish in the future. Most information is published on our website.

The classes of information that we undertake to make available are organised into seven broad topic areas¹:

- Who we are and what we do: Articles of Association, school prospectus, outline of the school curriculum, details of the Governing body, school session times and term dates, location and contact details;
- What we spend and how we spend it: our report and accounts for at least the current year and previous two years, details and sources of funding including expenditure over £5000, capital fundings, financial audits, procurement policies, pay policies and staff allowances and expenses, staff pay and grading structures, governors' allowances;
- What are our priorities and how we are doing: performance data supplied to the Government, Ofsted inspection reports, performance management policy and procedures, the School's future plans, safeguarding and child protection policies;
- How we make decisions: Governors' documents including minutes of meetings, Admissions Policy for the current and previous 3 years;

¹ Based on the ICO's model policies and definition document for free schools: <https://ico.org.uk/media/for-organisations/documents/1235/definition-document-schools-in-england.pdf> Version 3

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- Our policies and procedures: our written protocols including policies related to learning, any required by statute, records management and personal data, equality, diversity and inclusion, staff recruitment, charging regimes;
- Lists and registers: any required by law;
- The services we offer: the school prospectus, newsletters, leaflets, media releases, extra curricula activities, out of school clubs, services for which the school charges a fee.

How to request information

If you require a paper version of any of the documents within the scheme, please contact the school by telephone, email, fax or letter. Contact details are set out below.

Leigh-Anne Sullivan, The Rise School Business Manager
 Telephone: 020 8099 0640
 Email: Leigh-AnneSullivan@TheRiseSchool.com
 Address: The Rise School, Browell's Lane, Feltham, TW13 7EF

To help us process your request quickly, please clearly mark any correspondence 'PUBLICATION SCHEME REQUEST' (in CAPITALS please).

If the information you're looking for isn't available via the scheme and isn't on our website, you can still contact the school to ask if we have it.

There is no need for you to explain your reasons for the request, or to state explicitly that it is a request under FOIA. Requests for information must be made in writing, including email. The request must state the name and address of the person applying for the information and the required information.

Paying for information

Information published on our website is free. Single copies of information covered by the classes listed above are provided free. If your request means that we have to do a lot of photocopying or printing, pay a large postage charge then we will let you know the cost before fulfilling your request.

Dealing with requests

Recorded information held by the Rise School is subject to the requirements of the FOIA. The type of information which may be requested can be paper or electronic and may include draft documents, agenda, minutes, emails, diaries, photographs, sound and video recordings and even rough handwritten notes.

Where a valid request is received, there is a duty on the Rise School to confirm or deny whether it holds the information and if it does hold it, to provide the information so long as an exemption does not apply.

If information is requested, but is not held, the Rise School will inform you of this. In exceptional cases the School may not be able to either confirm or deny if the information requested is held.

When a request is unclear the School will ask for clarification. Our expected turn-around for acknowledging requests is 3 working days and to respond with the requested information within 20 working days of receipt of a valid request. If this is not possible the applicant will be informed on an ongoing basis.

Exemptions

The FOIA does not entitle applicants to be given all information held by the School. The FOIA sets out exemptions from the right of access to information.

In broad terms, there are two kinds of exemptions:

- Absolute exemptions – the right to information is completely over-riden by the exemption
- Qualified exemptions – where an exemption may be applied, but the Commission must weigh up competing interests to decide whether it serves the interests of the public better to withhold or disclose the information. This is known as the public interest test.

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When requests are refused a refusal notice must be issued setting out the part of the FOIA relied upon and usually to explain the reason for the decision. The refusal notice will outline our complaints procedure with relevant details and inform the requester of their right to complain to the Information Commissioner.

Data Protection

The School is under a legal duty to protect personal data as required by legislation - the UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR) and Data Protection Act (DPA) 2018. The School will carefully consider its responsibilities under these acts before releasing any information.

If responding to a request under the FOIA would breach the DPA or UK GDPR then it will be exempt from disclosure.

Any request made by an individual for their own personal data (information about themselves) will be a Subject Access Request and will be readily responded to as such under our Data Protection Policy which is published on our website.

Vexatious requests

It is possible that requests can be identified as vexatious. These may be costly to process in terms of time and staff resource and opportunity cost. Where we believe a request to be vexatious we will issue a refusal notice unless we have already done so in response to another vexatious or repeated request from the same individual, and it would be unreasonable to issue another one. The School can refuse requests if they are repeated, whether or not they are vexatious.

Confidentiality

If we receive information from someone else and complying with a request for that information would be a breach of confidence that is actionable, the information may be exempt from disclosure.

Legal privilege

If complying with a request would reveal information that is subject to 'legal professional privilege' then it may be exempt from disclosure. These rules exist to give confidence to people that their conversations with legal advisors on legal matters are confidential.

Cost limit

The Rise School reserves the right to refuse requests where the cost of providing the information would exceed the statutory cost limit.

Other exemptions

There are other exemptions that the School might apply and these include but are not limited to:

- Information already reasonably accessible
- Information intended for future publication
- Research publication
- Would constitute contempt of court

Complaints

All complaints will be dealt with in line with the organisation's Compliments and Complaints Policy which is published on our website. There is also the right to complain to the Information Commissioner's Office.

About this version of the policy

The Rise School is committed to equal opportunities and our aim is to make our policy easy to use and accessible to all of our stakeholders. We will take reasonable steps to accommodate any reasonable adjustments required to enable access to this policy or to provide responses to requests in other formats and provide such assistance as may reasonably be required.

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