



Freedom of Information Policy

This school is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people and expects all staff and volunteers to share this commitment

Governor's Committee Responsibility:

Resources

Date Approved:

Autumn 2018

Review Period:

3 yearly

Next Review Date:

Autumn 2021

The Limpsfield Grange Values:

At Limpsfield Grange we believe in working together to make a difference.

We are a tolerant community; we accept, value and understand others.

We care for all members of our community without judgement.

We are responsible for our own learning, behaviour and actions.

We accept that sometimes things go wrong. We work together to take responsibility for our mistakes and for putting things right.

We are a respectful community and we treat others as we would like to be treated, even if they have different views and opinions to our own.

We understand that good behaviour helps us to prepare for life beyond Limpsfield Grange.

We are positive and resilient. We celebrate difference in everything that we do.

We are all proud to be part of the Limpsfield Grange community.

July 2017

Limpsfield Grange School – Freedom of Information Policy

Background and rationale

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 Limpsfield Grange 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.

Public Authorities are clear and proactive about the information they will make public, for this reason, a publication scheme is available in the policies section of the school website.

Scope

This policy applies to all staff, Governors, volunteers, visitors, students, parents community partners who hire our facilities or who engage with Limpsfield Grange School.

This policy does not form part of any individual's terms and conditions of employment with Limpsfield Grange School and is not intended to have contractual effect.

Requests

Requests under Freedom of Information should be made to Headteacher, however the request can be addressed to anyone within Limpsfield Grange School; all school staff need to be aware of the process for dealing with requests.

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

Data Protection enquiries (or subject access requests) are requests where the enquirer asks to see what personal information that Limpsfield Grange School holds about the enquirer. If the enquiry is a Data Protection request, the school's Data Protection Policy will be followed.

Environmental Information Regulations enquiries are those which relate to air, water, land, natural sites, built environment, flora and fauna, and 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, the guidance on the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) website will be followed.

Freedom of Information requests must be made in writing, (including email), and should include the enquirers name and correspondence address (email addresses are allowed), and state what information is required. 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), it will be dealt with under the relevant policy/procedure related to that request.

If the request is ambiguous and/or we require further information in order to deal with the request, Limpsfield Grange School will request this further information directly from the individual making the request. Please note that we do not have to deal with the request until the further information is received. Therefore, the time limit starts from the date that we receive all information required in order to deal with the request.

The enquirer does not have to mention the Act, nor do they have to say why they want the information. There is a duty to respond to all requests, telling the enquirer whether or not the information is held, and supplying any information that is held, except where exemptions apply. There is a time limit of 20 working days excluding school holidays for responding to the request.

Information

Provided all requirements are met for a valid request to be made, Limpsfield Grange 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, the enquirer should first check with them that they hold it, then transfer the request to them. If this applies, Limpsfield Grange School will notify the enquirer that we do not hold the information and find out 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 Limpsfield Grange School does not hold the information, we have no duty to create or acquire it; just to answer the enquiry, although a reasonable search will be made before confirming whether we have the information requested.

If the information requested is already in the public domain, for instance through the Publication Scheme or the Limpsfield Grange School website, we will direct the enquirer to the information and explain how to access it.

The enquirer has the right to be told if the information requested is held by Limpsfield Grange (subject to any of the exemptions). This obligation is known as our “duty to confirm or deny” that we hold the information. However, we do 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

There is no obligation for Limpsfield Grange School to comply with vexatious requests. A vexatious request is one which is designed to cause inconvenience, harassment or expense rather than to obtain information, and would require a substantial diversion of resources or would otherwise undermine the work of the school.

In addition, the school does not have to comply with repeated identical or substantially similar requests from the same applicant unless a “reasonable” interval has elapsed between requests.

Fees

Limpsfield Grange School may charge the enquirer a fee for providing the requested information. This will be dependent on whether the staffing costs in complying with the request exceeds the “threshold.” The

threshold is currently £450 with staff costs calculated at a fixed rate of £25 per hour (therefore 18 hours' work is required before the threshold is reached).

If a request would cost less than the threshold, then the school can only charge for the cost of informing the enquirer whether the information is held, and communicating the information to the enquirer (e.g. photocopying, printing and postage costs).

When calculating costs/threshold, Limpsfield Grange School can take account of the staff costs/time in determining whether the information is held by the school, locating and retrieving the information, and extracting the information from other documents. Limpsfield Grange School will not take account of the costs involved with considering whether information is exempt under the Act.

If a request would cost more than the appropriate limit, (£450) the school can turn the request down, answer and charge a fee or answer and waive the fee.

If Limpsfield Grange School is going to charge we will send the enquirer a fees notice. We do not have to comply with the request until the fee has been paid. More details on fees can be found on the ICO website.

If planning to turn down a request for cost reasons, or charge a high fee, Limpsfield Grange School will contact the enquirer in advance to discuss whether they would prefer the scope of the request to be modified so that, for example, it would cost less than the appropriate limit.

Where two or more requests are made to the school by different people who appear to be acting together or as part of a campaign, the estimated cost of complying with any of the requests may be taken to be the estimated total cost of complying with them all.

Time Limits

Compliance with a request must be prompt and within the time limit of 20 working days (excluding school holidays). Failure to comply could result in a complaint by the requester to the Information Commissioner. The response time starts from the time the request is received.

Where Limpsfield Grange School has asked the enquirer for more information to enable it to answer, the 20 working days start time begins when this further information has been received.

If some information is exempt this will be detailed in our response.

If a qualified exemption applies and we need more time to consider the public interest test, the school will reply in 20 working days stating that an exemption applies but include an estimate of the date by which a decision on the public interest test will be made. This should be within a "reasonable" time.

Where we have 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.

Consultation will be necessary where:

- Disclosure of information may affect the legal rights of a third party, such as the right to have certain information treated in confidence or rights under Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights;
- The views of the third party may assist Limpsfield Grange School to determine if information is exempt from disclosure; or
- The views of the third party may assist Limpsfield Grange School to determine the public interest test.

Personal information requested by third parties is also exempt under this policy where release of that information would breach the Data Protection Act. If a request is made for a document (e.g. Governing Body minutes) which contains personal information whose release to a third party would breach the Data Protection Act, the document may be issued by blanking out the relevant personal information as set out in the redaction procedure.

Exemptions

The presumption of the Freedom of Information Act is that Limpsfield Grange 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: -

- There is an exemption to disclosure within the Act;
- The information sought is not held;
- The request is considered vexatious or repeated; or
- 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 much specialised in their application (such as national security) and would not usually be relevant to schools.

There are two general categories of exemptions:

- **Absolute:** where there is no requirement to confirm or deny that the information is held, disclose the information or consider the public interest;
- **Qualified:** where, even if an exemption applies, there is a duty to consider the public interest in disclosing information.

Absolute Exemptions

There are eight absolute exemptions set out in the Act. However the following are the only absolute exemptions which will apply to Limpsfield Grange School:

- Information accessible to the enquirer by other means (for example by way of Limpsfield Grange 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 taking into account 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 Limpsfield Grange School are: -

- Information requested is intended for future publication (and it is reasonable in all the circumstances for the enquirer 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 Limpsfield Grange 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 Limpsfield Grange 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 Headteacher 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, Limpsfield Grange 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
- Limpsfield Grange 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 Headteacher 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.

Complaints and appeals

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

If the outcome is that Limpsfield Grange 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

Related documents

- Complaints Policy and Procedure
- Equalities Policy
- Freedom of Information Publication Scheme
- Safeguarding Policy

These documents can be found in the policies section of the school website.

Links

<https://ico.org.uk/for-organisations/education/>

Review

The Governing Body of Limpsfield Grange School adopted this policy on:

It will be reviewed on: _____

Signed _____

Dated _____