FREEDOM OF INFORMATION POLICY



Policy Ratified	March 2023
Review Date	March 2025
Signed (Headteacher)	fan Ze.
Signed (Chair of Governors)	M/spe

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 The school is committed to the Freedom of Information Act and to the principles of accountability and the general right of access to information, subject to legal exemptions. This policy outlines our response to the Act and a framework for managing requests.
- 1.2 The Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA) came fully into force on 1 January 2005. 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.
- 1.3 The Act is fully retrospective, so that any past records which the school holds are covered by the Act. The Records Management Society of Great Britain provides a guide for schools on how long they should keep school records (www.irms.org.uk). It is an offence to wilfully conceal, damage or destroy information in order to avoid responding to an enquiry, so it is important that no records that are the subject of an enquiry are amended or destroyed.
- 1.4 There is a duty to respond to all requests, informing 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 (ie periods of school closure are excluded from this timetable) for responding to the request.
- 1.5 The Department for Education has a Freedom of Information Guide for schools and academies on their website (www.education.gov.uk).

2. Purpose and scope

- 2.1 This procedure applies to all school staff.
- 2.2 Requests for personal data are still covered by the Data Protection Act (DPA). Individuals can request to see what information the school holds about them. This is known as a Subject Access Request (SAR), and must be dealt with accordingly.
- 2.3 Requests under the Act can be addressed to anyone employed by the school. Staff need to be aware of the process for dealing with requests. Requests must be made in writing (this includes email), and should include the enquirer's name and correspondence address, and state what information they require. They do not have to mention the Act, nor do they have to say why they want the information.
- 2.4 Requests for information about anything relating to the environment such as air, water, land, the natural world or the built environment and any factor or measure affecting these are covered by the Environmental Information Regulations (EIR). They also cover issues relating to Health and Safety. For example, queries about chemicals used in the school or on school land, phone masts, car parks etc. would all be covered by the EIR. Requests under EIR are dealt with in the same way as those under FOIA, but unlike FOIA requests, they do not need to be written and can be verbal.

3. Obligations and duties

- 3.1 The school recognises its duty to provide advice and assistance to anyone requesting information. The school will respond to straightforward verbal requests for information, and will help enquirers to put more complex verbal requests into writing so that they can be handled under the Act.
- 3.2 The school will inform enquirers whether or not we hold the information they are requesting (the duty to confirm or deny), and will provide access to the information we hold in full accordance with the procedures laid down in Appendix 1.

4. Publication Scheme

- 4.1 The school has adopted the Model Publication Scheme for Schools approved by the Information Commissioner.
- 4.2 The Publication Scheme and the materials it covers will be readily available from the school's website.

5. Dealing with requests

- 5.1 The school will respond to all requests in accordance with the procedures laid down in Appendix 1.
- 5.2 The school will ensure that all staff are aware of the procedures and will delegate the day-to-day responsibility for FOIA policy and the provision of advice, guidance publicity to the headteacher.
- 5.3 The headteacher will be the single point of reference, will co-ordinate FOIA and related policies and procedures and will consider what information and training staff may need.

6. Exemptions

- 6.1 Certain information is subject to either absolute or qualified exemptions. The exemptions are listed in Appendix 2.
- 6.2 The school will maintain a register of requests where we have refused to supply information, and the reasons for the refusal. The register will be retained for 5 years.

7. Public Interest Test

- 7.1 Unless it is in the public interest to withhold disclosure, any information requested has to be released. We will apply the Public Interest Test before any qualified exemptions are applied.
- 7.2 For information on applying the Public Interest Test see Appendix 3.

8. Charging

8.1 We reserve the right to refuse to supply information where the cost of doing so exceeds the statutory maximum, currently $\pounds 450$.

8.2 The Governing Body reserves the right to charge a fee for complying with requests for information under FOIA. The fees are calculated according to FOIA regulations (see Appendix 4).

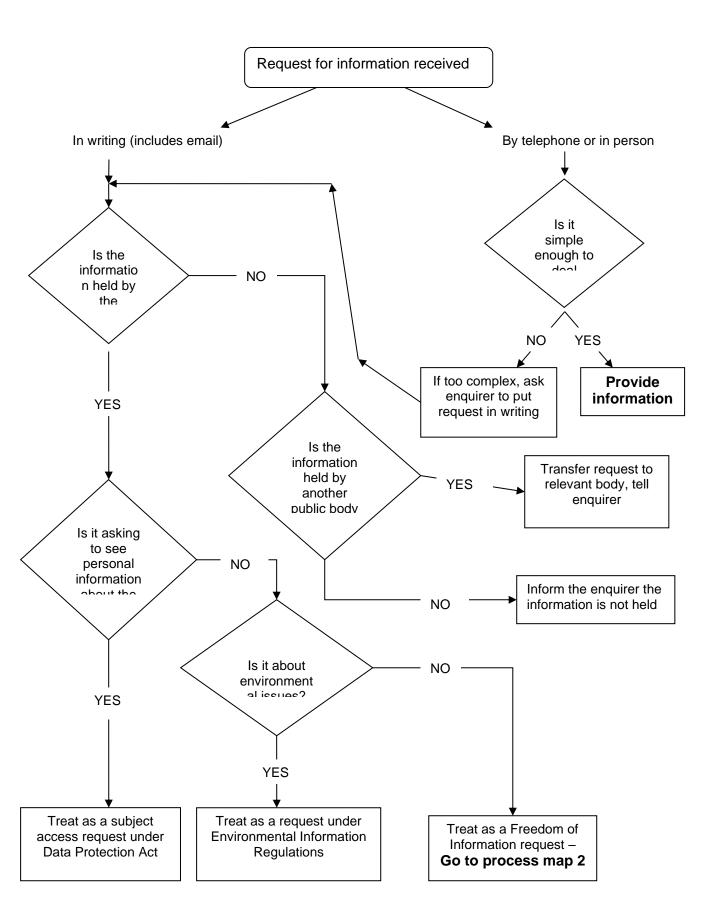
9. **Responsibilities**

9.1 The Governing Body has delegated the overall responsibility for compliance with the FOIA to the headteacher.

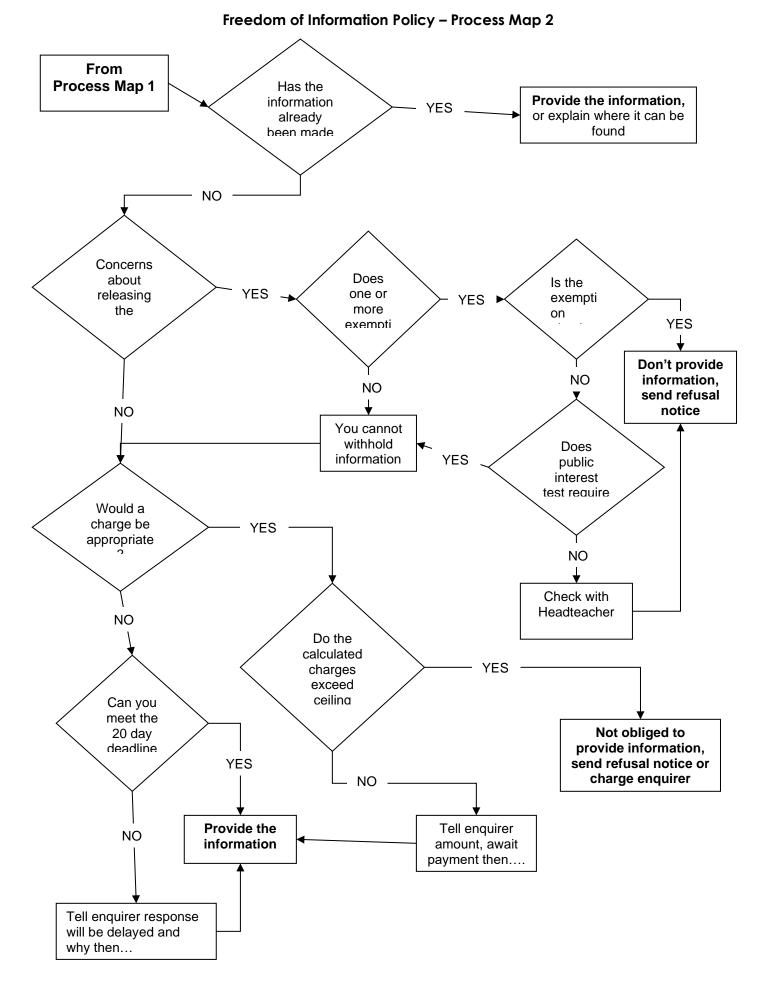
10.Feedback and complaints

- 10.1 The school welcomes any comments and suggestions regarding this policy. Any complaints will be dealt with through the school's normal complaints procedure.
- 10.2 If, following investigation, the school's original decision is upheld, then the school has a duty to inform the complainant of their right to appeal to the Information Commissioner's office.
- 10.3 Appeals should be made in writing to the Information Commissioner's Office. They can be contacted at:

FOIA/EIR Complaints Resolution Information Commissioner's Office Wycliffe House Water Lane Wilmslow Cheshire SK9 5AF



Appendix 1 - Process Map 1 – Procedures for dealing with FOIA requests



Appendix 2 – Exemptions

Although decisions on disclosure should be made on a presumption of openness, the Freedom of Information Act recognises the need to preserve confidentiality and protect sensitive material in some circumstances.

We will not withhold information in response to a valid request unless one of the following applies:

- an exemption to disclose, or
- the information sought is not held, or
- the request is considered vexatious or repeated, or
- the cost of compliance exceeds the threshold (see Appendix 4).

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 are not normally relevant to schools/academies. There are more than 20 exemptions but schools/academies are likely to use only a few of them.

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 test, and
- Qualified where, even if an exemption applies, there is a duty to consider the public interest in disclosing information.

Absolute exemptions

There are 8 absolute exemptions listed in the Act. Even where an absolute exemption applies it does not mean that the school cannot disclose in all cases; it means that disclosure is not required by the Act. A decision could be taken to ignore the exemption and release the information taking into account all the facts of the case.

There is still a legal obligation to provide reasonable advice and assistance to the enquirer.

The absolute exemptions in the Act are set out below. Those which might be relevant to the school are marked with an asterisk*:

- a. Information accessible to the enquirer by other means* (section 21) If information is reasonably accessible to the applicant by another route than the Act, it is exempt information. This is the case even if the enquirer would have to pay for the information under the alternative route. This exemption includes cases where you are required to give information under other legislation, or where the information is available via the Publication Scheme.
- b. Information dealing with security matters (section 23) This applies to information directly or indirectly supplied by, or relating to, bodies dealing with security matters such as MI5, MI6, Special Forces, etc.

- c. Court records (section 32) This applies to information related to proceedings in a court or tribunal or served on a public authority for the purposes of proceedings.
- d. Parliamentary Privilege (section 34) This exempts information if it is required for the purpose of avoiding an infringement of the Parliamentary privilege.
- e. Prejudice to the effective conduct of public affairs (section 36) This relates to the maintenance of the collective responsibility of Ministers.
- f. Personal information* (section 40) Where the enquirers ask to see information about themselves, this is exempt under the Act because it is covered by the Data Protection Act.
- g. Information provided in confidence^{*} (section 41) This relates to information obtained from a person if its disclosure would constitute a breach of confidence actionable by that, or another, person.
- h. Prohibitions on disclosure* (section 44) Information is exempt where its disclosure is prohibited under any other legislation by order of a court or where it would constitute a contempt of court or where it is incompatible with any EC obligation.

Qualified exemptions

With qualified exemptions, even if it is decided that an exemption applies, there is a duty to consider the public interest in confirming or denying that the information exists and in disclosing the information. Guidance on carrying out the public interest test is in Appendix 3.

The qualified exemptions in the Act are set out below. Those which might be relevant to the school are marked with an asterisk*:

- a. Information intended for future publication* (section 22) If, at the time the request was made, information is held with a view to publication, then it is exempt from disclosure if it is reasonable that it should not be disclosed until the intended publication date. This could apply to statistics published at set intervals, statutory accounts, and similar information.
- b. National security (section 24) Information is exempt for the purposes of safeguarding national security.
- c. Defence (section 26) Information is exempt if its disclosure would prejudice the defence of the UK.
- d. International relations (section 27) Information is exempt if its disclosure would, or would be likely to, prejudice relation between the UK and any other state.
- e. Relations within the UK (section 28) Information is exempt if its disclosure would, or would be likely to, prejudice relations between any administration in the UK.

- f. The economy (section 29) Information is exempt if its disclosure would, or would be likely to, prejudice the economic or financial interests of the UK.
- g. Investigations and proceedings conducted by public authorities* (section 30) Information is exempt if it has at any time been held by the school for the purposes of criminal investigations or proceedings, such as determining whether a person should be charged with an offence or whether a charged person is guilty, or investigations which may lead to a decision to institute criminal proceedings. The duty to confirm or deny does not apply to such information.
- Law enforcement* (section 31) Information which is not exempt under Section 30 may be exempt under this exemption in the event that disclosure would, or would be likely to, prejudice the following among others:
 - The prevention or detection of crime
 - The apprehension or prosecution of offenders
 - The administration of justice
 - The exercise of functions such as ascertaining if a person has broken the law, is responsible for improper conduct, whether circumstances justify regulatory action, ascertaining a person's fitness or competence in relation to their profession, ascertaining the cause of an accident or protecting or recovering charities or its properties.
 - Any civil proceedings brought by or on behalf of the school which arise out of an investigation carried out for any of the purposes mentioned above. The duty to confirm or deny does not arise where prejudice would result to any of these matters.
- i. Audit functions (section 33) Information is exempt if disclosure would, or would be likely to, prejudice the exercise of an authority's functions in relation to the audit of the accounts of other public authorities. It does not apply to internal audit reports.
- j. Formulation of government policy (section 35) Information held is exempt information if it relates to the formulation or development of government policy, ministerial communications, advice by Law Officers (eg Attorney General) and the operation of any Ministerial private office.
- k. Prejudice to the conduct of public affairs (section 36) Information likely to prejudice the maintenance of the convention of the collective responsibility of Ministers or likely to inhibit the free and frank provision of advice or exchange of views.
- Communications with the King (section 37) Information is exempt if it relates to communications with the King, the Royal Family or Royal Household or if it relates to the award of honours. The duty to confirm or deny does not arise where this exemption applies.
- m. Health and Safety* (section 38) Information is exempt if its disclosure would or would be likely to endanger the safety or physical or mental health of any individual. The duty to confirm or deny does not arise where prejudice would result.

- n. Environmental information* (section 39) Information is exempt under FOIA when it is covered by the Environmental Information Regulations.
- o. Personal information* (section 40) Where the information concerns a third party, it is exempt if its disclosure would contravene the Data Protection Act, or the data protection principles; or if the person to whom the information relates would not have a right of access to it because it falls under one of the exemptions to the Data Protection Act. The duty to confirm or deny does not arise in relations to this information if doing so would be incompatible with any of the above.
- p. Legal professional privilege* (section 42) Legal professional privilege covers any advice given by legal advisers, solicitors or barristers. Generally such information will be privileged. If the school wishes to disclose information of this nature, we will need to seek consent from the provider of the advice. This exemption covers all such information where a claim to legal professional privilege can be maintained in legal proceedings. The duty to confirm or deny does not arise where to do so would involve the disclosure of such information.
- q. Commercial interests* (section 43) Information is exempt if it constitutes a trade secret or would be likely to prejudice the commercial interests of any person or body, including schools. The duty to confirm or deny does not arise where prejudice would result to commercial interests but not where the information constitutes a trade secret.

Assessing each case on its own merits

Where information has previously been withheld, it must not be assumed that any subsequent requests for the same information will also be refused. Sensitivity of information decreases with age and the impact of any disclosure will be different depending on when the request is received.

Therefore, for each request, we will consider the harm that could result at the time of the request and, while taking into account any previous exemption applications, each case should be considered separately.

In all cases, before writing to the enquirer, the person given responsibility for FOIA by the governing body will need to ensure that the case has been properly considered, and that the reasons for refusal, or public interest test refusal, are sound. To help ensure this, every case of refusal is reviewed by the headteacher.

Appendix 3 - Applying the Public Interest Test

Having established that a qualified exemption definitely applies to a particular case, we must then carry out a public interest test to identify if the public interest in applying the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing it. Therefore, unless it is in the public interest to withhold the information, it has to be released. Although precedent and a case law will play a part, individual circumstances will vary and each case will need to be considered on its own merits.

In the public interest is not necessarily the same as that which may be of interest to the public. It may be irrelevant that a matter may be the subject of public curiosity.

In most cases it will be relatively straightforward to decide where the balance of the public interest in disclosure lies. However, there will inevitably be cases where the decision is a difficult one. Factors that might be taken into account when weighing the public interest include:

For Disclosure	Against Disclosure
Is disclosure likely to increase access to information held by the school?	Is disclosure likely to distort public reporting or be misleading because it is incomplete?
Is disclosure likely to give the reasons for a decision or allow individuals to understand decisions affecting their lives or assist them in challenging those decisions?	Is premature disclosure likely to prejudice fair scrutiny, or release sensitive issues still on the internal agenda or evolving?
Is disclosure likely to improve the accountability and transparency of the school in the use of public funds and help to show that it obtains value for money?	Is disclosure likely to cause unnecessary public alarm on confusion?
Is disclosure likely to contribute to public debate and assist the understanding of existing or proposed policy?	Is disclosure likely to seriously jeopardise the school's legal or contractual position?
Is disclosure likely to increase public participation in decision making?	Is disclosure likely to infringe upon other legislation eg Data Protection Act?
Is disclosure likely to increase public participation in the political processes in general?	Is disclosure likely to create a controversial precedent on the release of information or impair our ability to obtain information in the future?
Is disclosure likely to bring to light information affecting public safety?	Is disclosure likely to adversely affect the school's proper functioning and discourage openness in expressing opinions?

For Disclosure	Against Disclosure
Is disclosure likely to reduce further enquiries on the topic?	If a large amount of information on the topic has already been made available, would further disclosure shed any more light or serve any useful purpose?

Note also that:

- Potential or actual embarrassment to, or loss of confidence in, the school, its staff or its governors is NOT a valid factor to consider.
- The fact that the information is technical, complex to understand and may be misunderstood may not of itself be a reason to withhold information.
- The potential harm of releasing information will reduce over time and should be considered at the time the request is made rather than by reference to when the relevant decision was originally taken.
- The balance of the public interest in disclosure cannot always be decided on the basis of whether the disclosure of particular information would cause harm, but on certain higher order considerations such as the need to preserve confidentiality of internal discussions.
- A decision not to release information may be perverse, i.e. would a decision to withhold information because it is not in the public interest to release it, itself result in harm to public safety, the environment or a third party.

We will record the answers to these questions and the reasons for these answers.

Deciding on the public interest is not simply a matter of adding up the number of relevant factors on each side. We will decide how important each factor is in the circumstances on make an overall assessment. This assessment will be reviewed by the headteacher.

Decision for disclosure

Where the balance of the public interest lies in disclosure, the enquiry will be dealt with and the information required will be made available.

Decision against disclosure

After carrying out the public interest test if it is decided that the exemption should still apply, we will reply to the request with the appropriate reply under the circumstances.

There will be occasions when it has been decided that a qualified exemption applies but consideration of the public interest test may take longer. In such a case, we will contact the enquirer within 20 working days stating that a particular exemption applies, but we will include an estimate of the date by which a decision on the public interest test will be made. This will be within a reasonable time, normally no more than 10 working days beyond the 20 days.

Appendix 4 - Fee charging

FOIA does not require charges to be made but schools have discretion to charge applicants a fee in accordance with the Fees Regulations (draft fees Regulations on the Legislation website:

http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2004/3244/contents/made

Costs that may be taken into account

The following will be taken into account when calculating the estimated cost of complying with a request for information:

The prescribed costs: these are any costs reasonably incurred by the school in:

determining whether we hold information of the description specified in the request

locating and retrieving the information and in meeting the applicant's preference for communicating the information including the cost of associated staff time.

but it does not include the cost of staff time incurred in determining whether the school is obliged to comply with the request for information

The disbursements: these are any costs directly and reasonably incurred by the school in:

informing the applicant whether you hold information of the description specified in the request

communicating the information to the applicant

How we charge

- 1. If the information is exempt for the purposes of the FOIA fees will not apply. The school will contact the enquirer to inform them that the information is exempt. There will be no charge.
- 2. If it is apparent that the request would cost less than the current limit (\pounds 450), we would not make the calculation.
- 3. We will calculate the appropriate limit. Staff costs are £25 an hour. When calculating whether the limit is exceeded, we will take into account the costs of determining whether the information is held, where it is held, retrieving the information and extracting the information from other documents. We do not take into account the costs involved with considering whether information is exempt under the Act.
- 4. If a request costs less than the limit, we will only charge for the cost of informing the applicant whether the information is held and communicating the information to the applicant (eg photocopying, printing and postage costs).

Charges are:

- 5p per A4 sheet for printing or photocopying, black and white;
- 10p per A3 sheet for printing or photocopying, black and white;
- 92p per A4 sheet for printing or photocopying, colour;
- £1.24 per A3 sheet for printing or photocopying, colour;
- Postage costs documents will be sent by second class mail unless specified otherwise;
- 5. If a request exceeds the limit, we are able to turn the request down, answer and charge a fee, or answer and waive the fee. If we choose to comply with a request where the estimated cost exceeds the threshold we will calculate the charge (as paragraph 3).
- 6. For all requests we have regard to the following points:
 - Duty to provide advice and assistance to applicants. If we plan to turn down a request for cost reasons we will contact the applicant in advance to discuss whether they would prefer the scope of the request to be modified so that it would cost less than the appropriate limit; or
 - If we plan to suggest charging the applicant a high fee, we will contact the applicant in advance to discuss the amount of the charge and whether they would prefer the scope of the request to be modified so that it would cost less than the appropriate limit
 - The Regulations set out the maximum amount that can be charged. They do not set out a minimum charge nor prevent the school from charging no fee. We may, for straightforward requests, waive a fee.

Limits to fee charges

The fee for complying with a request for information must not be more than the sum of the prescribed costs and the disbursements.

Aggregated costs

Where 2 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 costs of complying with any of the requests is to be taken to be the estimated total cost of complying with them all, provided that:

- I. the two or more requests referred to in that section are for information which is on the same subject matter or is otherwise related;
- II. the last of the requests is received by the school by the twentieth school day following the date of receipt of the first of the requests, and
- III. it appears to the school that the requests have been made in an attempt to ensure that the prescribed costs of complying separately with each request would not exceed the appropriate limit.

How will the applicant be informed?

Where we intend to charge a fee for complying with a request for information, we will give the person requesting the information notice in writing (the "fees notice") stating that a fee of the amount specified in the notice is to be charged for complying.

We require proof of delivery of a fees notice, either signed for in the post or emailed with a return receipt request. Where a fees notice has been given to the person making the request, we do not comply with the request unless the fee is paid within 3 months of the notice being received.

Appendix 5 - Guide to information available under the publication scheme

Information	How the information can be obtained	Cost
Class 1 - Who we are and what we do (Organisational information, structures, locations and contacts). Current information only		
Who's who in the school	Website: https://www.woodbank.calderdale.sch.uk/	Free
Who's who on the governing body and the basis of their appointment	Website: https://www.woodbank.calderdale.sch.uk/	Free
Instrument of Government	Website: https://www.woodbank.calderdale.sch.uk/	Free
Contact details for the Head teacher and for the governing body, via the school (named contacts where possible).	Website: https://www.woodbank.calderdale.sch.uk/	Free
Annual Report	Website: https://www.woodbank.calderdale.sch.uk/	Free
Staffing structure	Website: https://www.woodbank.calderdale.sch.uk/	Free
School session times and term dates	Website: https://www.woodbank.calderdale.sch.uk/	Free
Address of school and contact details, including email address.	Website: https://www.woodbank.calderdale.sch.uk/	Free

Class 2 – What we spend and how we spend it - Financial information relating to projected and actual income and expenditure, procurement, contracts and financial audit) Current and previous financial year as a minimum		
Annual budget plan and financial statements	Hard copy: available upon request – contact school	Free
Capital funding	Hard copy: available upon request – contact school	Free
Financial audit reports	Hard copy: available upon request – contact school	Free
Details of expenditure items over $\pounds2000$ – published at least annually but at a more frequent quarterly or six-monthly interval where practical.	Hard copy: available upon request – contact school	Free
Procurement and contracts the school has entered into, or information relating to / a link to information held by an organisation which has done so on its behalf (for example, a local authority or diocese).	Hard copy: available upon request – contact school	Free
Pay policy	Hard copy: available upon request – contact school	Free
Staff allowances and expenses that can be incurred or claimed, with totals paid to individual senior staff members (Senior Leadership Team or equivalent, whose basic actual salary is at least £60,000 per annum) by reference to categories.	Hard copy: available upon request – contact school	Free
Staffing, pay and grading structure. As a minimum the pay information should include salaries for senior staff (Senior Leadership Team or equivalent as above) in bands of £10,000; for more junior posts, by salary range.	Hard copy: available upon request – contact school	Free
Governors' allowances that can be incurred or claimed, and a record of total payments made to individual governors.	Hard copy: available upon request – contact school	Free

School profile Performance data supplied to the English Government	Website: https://www.woodbank.calderdale.sch.uk/	Free
The latest Ofsted Inspectorate report Post-inspection action plan	Hard copy: available upon request – contact school	
Performance management policy and procedures adopted by the governing body	. Hard copy: available upon request – contact school	Free
Performance data or a direct link to it	Hard copy: available upon request – contact school	Free
The school's future plans; for example, proposals for and any consultation on the future of the school, such as a change in status	Hard copy: available upon request – contact school	Free
Safeguarding and child protection	Website: https://www.woodbank.calderdale.sch.uk/	Free
Class 4 – How we make decisions - Decision making processes and records of decision	ons. Current and previous three years as a minimum	
Admissions policy/decisions (not individual admission decisions)	Website: https://www.woodbank.calderdale.sch.uk/	Free
Agendas and minutes of meetings of the governing body and its committees (NB th will exclude information that is properly regarded as private to the meetings).	s Hard copy: available upon request – contact school	Free

 Records management and personal data policies, including: Information security policies Records retention, destruction and archive policies Data protection (including information sharing policies) 	Website: https://www.woodbank.calderdale.sch.uk/ Hard copy: available upon request – contact school	Free
Charging regimes and policies. This should include details of any statutory charging regimes. Charging policies should include charges made for information routinely published. They should clearly state what costs are to be recovered, the basis on which they are made and how they are calculated. If the school charges a fee for re-licensing the use of datasets, it should state in its guide how this is calculated (please see "How to complete the Guide to information").	Website: https://www.woodbank.calderdale.sch.uk/ Hard copy: available upon request – contact school	Free
Class 6 – Lists and Registers - Currently maintained lists and registers only (this does not	include the attendance register).	
Curriculum circulars and statutory instruments	Website: https://www.woodbank.calderdale.sch.uk/ Hard copy: available upon request – contact school	Free
Disclosure logs	Inspection only – contact school	Free
Asset register	Inspection only – contact school	Free
Any information the school is currently legally required to hold in publicly available registers	Inspection only – contact school	Free

Class 7 – The services we offer - Information about the services we offer, including leaf businesses. Current information only	lets, guidance and newsletters produced for the pu	blic and
Extra-curricular activities	None at present	n/a
Out of school clubs	None at present	n/a
Services for which the school is entitled to recover a fee, together with those fees	Website: <u>https://www.woodbank.calderdale.sch.uk/</u> - Charging and Remissions Policy	Free
School publications, leaflets, books and newsletters	Website: https://www.woodbank.calderdale.sch.uk/ Hard copy: available upon request – contact school	Free

SCHEDULE OF CHARGES

This describes how the charges have been arrived at and should be published as part of the guide.

TYPE OF CHARGE	DESCRIPTION	BASIS OF CHARGE
Disbursement cost	photocopying/printing @ 0.021p per sheet (black & white)	actual cost
	postage	actual cost of Royal Mail standard 2 nd class
Statutory Fee		in accordance with the relevant legislation (quote the actual statute)