The Pines School

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Freedom of Information Policy

Policy Owner:	Head Teacher
Amended:	Oct 24
Reviewed by SLT:	Oct 24
Approved by Curriculum Children & Learning Committee:	
Next Review:	Spring 2027
Ratified By: Chair of Governors **Signed:**	**Date:**

1. POLICY OBJECTIVES

1.1 The Freedom of Information Act 2000 ("FOIA") sets out a public "right to know" in relation to public bodies. The FOIA also sets out certain exemptions to those rights.

1.2 The purpose of this Freedom of Information Policy is to outline The Pines School's approach to its FOIA obligations to create a climate of openness and dialogue.

2. ABOUT THIS POLICY

2.1. This policy sets out how The Pines School will respond to a request under the FOIA.

2.2. This policy applies to the information held by The Pines School or held by other parties on behalf of The Pines School that is governed by the FOIA. To promote a culture of openness and accountability, and to comply with the FOIA, we have a responsibility to ensure that this information is either routinely made available or provided on request, unless there is a legitimate reason for withholding it.

3. THE FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT

3.1 The FOIA provides public access to information held by public authorities.

It does this in two ways:

- public authorities are obliged to publish certain information about their activities; and
- members of the public are entitled to request information from public authorities.

3.2 FOIA covers any recorded information that is held by a public authority in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and by UK-wide public authorities based in Scotland. Information held by Scottish public authorities is covered by Scotland's own Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002.

3.3 Recorded information includes printed documents, computer files, letters, emails, photographs, and sound or video recordings.

3.4 For a request to be dealt with according to the Freedom of Information Act, the requester must:

- contact the relevant authority directly;
- make the request in writing, for example in a letter or an email. They can make a verbal or written request for environmental information;
- give their real name; and
- give an address to which the authority can reply. This can be a postal or email address.

A requester does not have to:

- mention the Freedom of Information Act;
- know whether the information is covered by the Freedom of Information Act; or
- say why they want the information.

4. FREEDOM OF INFORMATION PRINCIPLES

4.1 The main principle behind freedom of information legislation is that people have a right to know about the activities of public authorities, unless there is a good reason for them not to.

This means that:

- everybody has a right to access official information. Disclosure of information should be the default – in other words, information should be kept private only when there is a good reason and it is permitted by FOIA;
- an applicant (requester) does not need to give you a reason for wanting the information. On the contrary, you must justify refusing them information;
- you must treat all requests for information equally, except under some circumstances relating to vexatious requests and personal data
- The information someone can get under FOIA should not be affected by who they are. You should treat all requesters equally, whether they are journalists, local residents, public authority employees, or foreign researchers; and
- because you should treat all requesters equally, you should only disclose information under FOIA if you would disclose it to anyone else who asked. In other words, you should consider any information you release under FOIA as if it were being released to the world at large.

5. BREACH OF POLICY AND STANDARDS

5.1 Disciplinary action may be taken in accordance with The Pines School's disciplinary procedures against any employee who knowingly or recklessly:

- Alters, defaces, blocks, erases, destroys or conceals any record held by The Pines School, with the intention of preventing the disclosure of all, or any part, of the information that has been requested as part of a Freedom of Information request;
- Contravenes any instruction contained in, or following from, this Policy and Standards.

5.2 We expect that similar disciplinary procedures will be applied by any of our contractors which deal with The Pines School's information and data on The Pines School's behalf.

6. COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

6.1 Where a request for information is refused for any reason, we will notify the applicant and give the reasons. For exemptions we will state which exemption has been claimed, and unless apparent, why that exemption applies, specifying the public interest factors (for and against disclosure) if applicable. We will not simply repeat the wording of the exemption unless the explanation would involve the disclosure of information which would itself be exempted information.

6.2 When communicating any decision made in relation to a request under FOIA's general right of access, we will notify the applicant of their rights of complaint. A person dissatisfied with the way in which their request has been handled may ask for an internal review of the way in which their request was dealt with, and, if still dissatisfied, may apply directly to the Information Commissioner for a decision.

7. PUBLICATION OF INFORMATION

7.1. The organisation maintains and publishes a publication scheme on its website outlining classes of information that will be made routinely available, including policies and procedures.

7.2. Classes of information specified in the publication scheme will be made available quickly and easily on request.

7.3. The organisation will not publish any personal information, including photos, on its website without the permission of the affected individual.

7.4. When uploading information to the organisation website, staff will be considerate of any metadata or deletions which could be accessed in documents and images on the site.