THE HOWARD
Academy Trust

Freedom of Information Policy

Date of last review: April 2026

Document Management Information

Applicable to:	All staff in all Academies and Central Support Services including individuals employed by the Trust and agency staff. All Members and Trustees.
Dissemination:	The policy will be available to staff via the Trust's Policy Centre and website.
Training:	On request
Review frequency:	The policy will be reviewed biennially. The policy will be reviewed earlier if needed in the light of new evidence, legislation and guidance
Policy Author:	Patricia Field – Data Manager
Executive Policy Owner:	Cathy Reid – Deputy Chief Executive
Approval by:	Level 3 – Chief Executive Approval
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Revision History

Document Version	Description of Revision	Date Approved
V1.0	Policy created	April 2026

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Freedom of Information Policy

Policy Statement

The Howard Academy Trust (THAT) and its member academies is committed to the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOI) 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. The Trust will make every effort to meet its obligations under the respective legislation and will regularly review procedures to ensure that it is doing so.
The underlying principle of this policy is that the public have a right to access to recorded information held by the Trust and that the Trust should seek to promote an open regime regarding access to information, subject to the exemptions contained within the relevant legislation.

General information about the Data Protection Act and GDPR can be obtained from the Information Commissioner's Office (Help Line 0303 123 1113, website www.ico.org.uk).

Data Protection Officer (DPO)

The Howard Academy Trust's Data Protection Lead is:

Trust Data Manager
The Howard Academy Trust
C/O Waterfront UTC
South Side Three Road
Chatham
Kent

Email: dpo@thatrust.org.uk

The Howard Academy Trust also use an external Data Protection Officer – School Pro. They can be contacted by emailing dpo@schoolpro.co.uk

The DPO will:

- Inform and advise the Trust and its employees about their obligations to comply with the GDPR and other data protection laws.
- Monitor the Trust's compliance with the GDPR and other laws, including managing internal data protection activities, advising on data protection impact assessments, conducting internal audits and providing the required training to staff members.

The individual appointed as DPO will have professional experience and knowledge of data protection law, particularly that in relation to academies.

The DPO will report to the highest level of management at the Trust, which is the Chief Executive.

The DPO will operate independently and will not be dismissed or penalised for performing their task.

Sufficient resources will be provided to the DPO to enable them to meet their GDPR obligations.

Background

The Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOI) came fully into force on the 1st January 2005. Under the Act, any person has a legal right to ask for access to information held by the Trust. They are entitled to be told whether the Trust and its member academies hold the information, and to receive a copy, subject to certain exemptions.

The information which the Trust and its member academies routinely make available to the public is included in the Publication Scheme. Requests for other information should be dealt with in accordance with the statutory guidance. While the Act assumes openness, it recognises that certain information is sensitive. There are exemptions to protect this information.

The Act is fully retrospective, so that any past records which the Trust and its member academies hold are covered by the Act. The DfE has issued a Retention Schedule produced by the Records Management Society of Great Britain, to guide schools on how long they should keep school records. It is an offence to wilfully conceal, damage or destroy information to avoid responding to an enquiry, so it is important that no records that are the subject of an enquiry are amended or destroyed.

Requests under FOI can be addressed to anyone in the Trust or its member academies; so all staff need to be aware of the process for dealing with requests – see responsibilities. Requests must be made in writing, (including email), and should include the enquirers 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. There is a duty to respond to all requests, telling the enquirer whether the information is held, and supplying any information that is held, except where exemptions apply. There is no need to collect data in specific response to an FOI enquiry. There is a time limit of 20 working days excluding school holidays for responding to the request.

Scope

The FOI Act joins the Data Protection Act (2018) and the Environmental Information Regulations (2004) as legislation under which anyone is entitled to request information from the school.

This policy applies to all recorded information held by the Trust and its member academies that relates to the business of the Trust and its Member academies. This includes:

- Information created and held by the Trust and its member academies
- Information created by the Trust and its member academies and held by another organisation on our behalf
- Information held by the Trust and its member academies provided by third parties, where this relates to a function or business of the Trust and its member academies (such as contractual information) and
- Information held by the Trust and its member academies relating to Governors where the information relates to the functions or business of the Trust and its member academies

Requests for personal data are still covered by the Data Protection Act (DPA). Individuals can request to see what information the Trust and its member academies hold about them. This is known as a Subject Access Request and must be dealt with accordingly. 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 Trust and its member academies 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 FOI, but unlike FOI requests, they do not need to be written and can be verbal.
If any element of a request to the Trust and its member academies includes personal or environmental information, these elements must be dealt with under DPA or EIR. Any other information is a request under FOI, and must be dealt with accordingly

Obligations and Duties

The Trust and its member academies recognise its duty to:

- provide advice and assistance to anyone requesting information. We 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.

- tell enquirers whether or not we hold the information they are requesting (the duty to confirm or deny) and provide access to the information we hold in accordance with the procedures laid down in Appendix 1.

Publication Scheme

The Howard Academy Trust and its member academies has adopted the Model Publication Scheme for Schools approved by the Information Commissioner.

Dealing With Requests

We will respond to all requests in accordance with the procedures laid down in Appendix 1
We will ensure that all staff are aware of the procedures.

Exemptions

Certain information is subject to either absolute or qualified exemptions. The exemptions re listed in Appendix 2.

When we wish to apply a qualified exemption to a request, we will invoke the public interest test procedures to determine if public interest in applying the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

We 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.

Certain information is subject to either absolute or qualified exemptions. The exemptions are listed in Appendix 2.

Public Interest Test

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

Charging

The three information regimes contain different provisions that permit charges to be made for responding to information requests. The Governing Body may charge a fee for complying with requests, as calculated in accordance with FOI regulations. If a charge is to be made, the Trust and its member academies will give written notice to the applicant before supplying the information requested.

The Trust and its member academies will only charge for the cost of copying and transmitting information, not for time taken in reaching decisions regarding whether information is covered by an exemption.

Where the Trust and its member academies estimates that the cost of locating the information will exceed the statutory threshold of £450, it will consider whether or not to comply with the request. The Trust and its member academies is not obliged to comply with such a request but may choose to do so.
Further information with regards to charging can be found in Appendix 4.

Responsibilities

The Trust Directors have delegated the day-to-day responsibility for compliance with the FOI to the Chief Executive Officer and the Principal at each Academy.

Freedom of Information enquiries should be sent in writing to the Data Protection Lead for the trust at DPO@thatrust.org.uk

All FOI requests which come into the Trust and its member academies must be reported to School Pro who, along with the Data Protection Co-ordinator's in the Trust and each of its academies will be responsible for evaluating and co-ordinating the response.

Complaints

If you wish to raise a concern about how we process a Freedom of Information Request, please contact us directly at DPO@. We will acknowledge your complaint within 30 days of receipt and take appropriate steps to investigate and respond without undue delay.
If you are not satisfied with our response, you may escalate your complaint to the Information Commission at: Information Commissioner's Office