



FREEDOM OF INFORMATION (FoI) POLICY

Policy & Guidance

- Schools must act in accordance with the [Freedom of Information Act 1982 \(Vic\)](#) which creates a right of access to Victorian Government documents.
- The Freedom of Information (FOI) Unit manages all requests on behalf of the Department and Victorian government schools.
- Only authorised officers can make decisions about FOI requests. This includes:
 - the Secretary of the Department
 - the FOI Unit Manager and Team Leader
- Every individual has the right to request a document from the Department, including documents held by Victorian government schools.
- The Department's [Requests for Information about Students Policy](#) provides advice to schools on how to manage requests for documents including when to release documents directly and when to advise the person to make a Freedom of Information request to the Department's FOI Unit.

Purpose

- The purpose of this policy is to ensure Footscray North Primary School acts in accordance with Freedom of Information (FOI) requirements.

Implementation

- If the Principal receives a request for documents that should be managed by the FOI Unit (for example, a request for documents from the media or requests from parents/carers for documents that is not considered ordinary school communication), she/he will advise the person to make a Freedom of Information request to the FOI Unit by email: foi@edumail.vic.gov.au
- When they receive the request, the FOI Unit will initiate a search through a regional officer, who will then contact the school.
- The school will be asked to undertake a thorough and diligent search for documents to provide to the regional officer contact. This means checking all paper-based and electronic files, emails and databases.
- When sending documents to the region, the school will advise the regional contact about any concerns that may be held about the release of the information so this can be factored into the decision about what should be released.
- If the school cannot find any documents, we will let the regional contact know the places that were searched and any reasons why documents could not be located.
- The Department must process requests within 30-days, so our prompt assistance is appreciated.

What if the person is seeking a lot of documents?

If we believe that the request needs clarification, or that the work required to locate and send the documents is too resource-intensive or time-consuming (i.e. over 250 pages in total, or the search

would take longer than a few days for one staff member), we will contact the FOI Unit to discuss the matter before we begin any searches.

If a request is too broad in scope and/or will take an unreasonable amount of time to process, the FOI Unit is required to consult with the Applicant and may work with the school to recommend an alternative request scope.

What happens once the school's documents are provided to the FOI Unit?

The regional office will provide the documents to the FOI Unit for assessment. Any information that is exempt from release (for example because it is confidential or contains personal information) will be 'redacted' (blacked out).

Any third parties (including staff and parents/carers) who may be affected by the release, may be contacted to provide their views on the sensitivity of documents requested.

Do individuals need to make FOI requests to access documents?

The Principal has the discretion to release information directly to a student, former student or parent/carer. However, if a document contains other peoples' personal information or any other sensitive material, we will ask the person to submit a FOI request so that exemptions or redactions can be made.

What happens if School Council records are requested?

School Councils are not subject to the operation of the Freedom of Information Act 1982 (Vic). However, any document created by a School Council and forwarded to the Department, regional office, or school can be subject to an FOI request.

Therefore, School Council records will be clearly distinguishable from other school records.

- Please refer also to the school's *Privacy & Information Sharing Policy* and the *School Council Meetings Policy*.

Evaluation

- This policy will be reviewed as part of the school's three-year review cycle or if guidelines change (latest DET update mid-June 2020).

An operational policy
School Council Approval No Longer Required

Reference:
<https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/freedom-of-information>