

Important Information for Schools

Schools Freedom of Information requests

Audit Services have recently been contacted by a number of Derbyshire Schools in relation to a Freedom of Information request received via email. The request appears to originate from an unmonitored email address and encourages recipients to submit data through the use of an embedded link, signified by the phrase 'Click Here To Submit Your Response'.

Due to the increasing number of virus and cyber-attacks triggered through the execution of attachments and links contained within emails of unknown origin, a significant risk may be posed to PCs and networks should malware or viruses be inadvertently downloaded onto equipment.

In accordance with previous cyber security guidance, Audit Services continue to advise that staff should not utilise embedded links to access unknown websites or systems. It is generally recommended that unsolicited emails are immediately deleted. However, emails containing Freedom of Information (FOI) requests impose statutory requirements on schools.

In order to adhere to legislation and discharge their duty to provide advice and assistance in accordance with S.16 Freedom of Information Act, the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) advises schools to send an email to the address provided by the requester (albeit that it appears to be unmonitored) and state that they are happy to respond providing that a valid request is submitted. This means that a valid email address must be given by the requester. Schools can then submit their response in this manner. However, the requester should also be referred to the school's website in order to answer some of the questions posed, if applicable.

Should schools require further information or advice on this matter, audit services should be contacted in the first instance.