

DE/2026-112 – Freedom of Information Request

Request:

I wish to request all information held relating to communications strategy, messaging plans, media handling, parent communications, and internal briefing materials concerning:

- St Malachy's Primary School, Kilclief, and
- St Joseph's Primary School, Strangford,

including the Accommodation Review, capital works at St Joseph's, and the proposed Development Proposal.

This request covers the period 1 January 2020 to the present.

This request concerns all information held, regardless of whether your organisation considers the information to relate to a Development Proposal, an Accommodation Review, capital works, or internal planning.

For clarity:

Communications strategy, messaging plans, internal briefings, and media lines are NOT Development Proposal activities.

They fall within your organisation's responsibilities before, during and after any DP process.

Therefore, your organisation cannot rely on the position that it "does not become engaged until a DP is published" to refuse or limit disclosure.

This request includes all recorded information in any format, including emails, Teams chats, WhatsApp messages, handwritten notes, drafts, attachments, internal memos, meeting notes, spreadsheets, and correspondence.

1. Full Communications Strategy

Please provide:

- the complete communications strategy
- all drafts
- all internal versions
- all updates or revisions
- all attachments or appendices

This includes any strategy relating to:

- the Accommodation Review
- the modular works at St Joseph's

- the proposed closure of St Malachy's
- the announcement to parents
- media handling

2. Internal Messaging Plans

Please provide:

- all messaging plans
- all "lines to take"
- all prepared responses for parents
- all prepared responses for media
- all internal briefing notes for staff or senior officers
- all documents explaining how to present the modular works

3. Parent Communication Planning

Please provide:

- all drafts of letters to parents
- all internal discussions about what to tell parents
- all internal discussions about what NOT to tell parents
- all communications plans for parent meetings
- all briefing notes for principals before speaking to parents

4. Media Handling & Press Lines

Please provide:

- all media lines
- all press statements (drafts and final)
- all internal discussions about media risk
- all correspondence with press offices (EA, CCMS, DE)
- all documents relating to anticipated media questions

5. Communications relating to the modular works

Please provide:

- all internal discussions about how to describe the modular works
- all drafts of explanations given to parents
- all discussions about whether to link or not link the modulars to the DP
- all communications about the principal's office, GDPR, or child protection messaging

6. Communications relating to St Joseph's becoming the receiving school

Please provide:

- all internal discussions about how to present St Joseph's as the receiving school
- all communications about capacity, suitability, or safety concerns
- all discussions about how to manage parent reaction

7. Communications relating to St Malachy's

Please provide:

- all internal discussions about how to present St Malachy's situation
- all communications about sustainability messaging
- all discussions about investment or lack of investment
- all communications about how to manage community reaction

8. Cross-body communications coordination

Please provide:

- all correspondence between CCMS and EA
- all correspondence between CCMS and DE
- all correspondence between EA and DE
- all discussions about aligning messaging
- all discussions about who would speak publicly and when

9. Crisis or Backlash Planning

Please provide:

- all documents relating to anticipated backlash
- all risk assessments relating to communications
- all internal discussions about managing negative reaction
- all plans for handling complaints or media escalation

10. Any other information held

Please provide:

- any other recorded information relating to communications strategy, messaging, media handling, or parent communications for either school.

For the avoidance of doubt:

This request concerns information held by your organisation.

Whether or not a Development Proposal has been published is irrelevant to your obligation to disclose information relating to communications strategy, messaging plans, internal briefings, media lines, or communications planning associated with the Accommodation Review, capital works, or the proposed closure of St Malachy's PS.

If your organisation intends to rely on the position that it “does not become engaged until a DP is published”, please specify the statutory basis for this claim.

Department Response:

I refer to your request of 15 June 2026 under the above legislation, in which you have requested all information held by the Department of Education relating to communications strategy, messaging plans, media handling, parent communications and internal briefing materials concerning St Malachy’s Primary School, Kilclief and St Joseph’s Primary School, Strangford for the period 1 January 2020 to the present.

In respect of Section 1(1)(a) of the act I wish to advise you that following a search of our records, some of the information you have requested is not held by the Department.

The Department manages hundreds of Minor Works schemes and does not prepare a communications Strategy, media strategy or messaging plan for these schemes. Media queries, correspondence from elected representatives, parents or members of the public are addressed on a case-by-case basis. There has not been any media queries or correspondence from elected representatives, parents or members of the public regarding the modular scheme at St Joseph’s Primary School.

I have attached relevant PDF documents regarding communications about the principal’s office/modular scheme. Please note some information has been redacted under section 40(2) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 as this information constitutes the personal information of third parties and disclosure would breach the first data protection principle. This is an absolute exemption and is not subject to a public interest test.

The Department does not become engaged with any Development Proposal (DP) activity until a DP has been formally published by the Education Authority (EA). No DP has been published for St Malachy’s Primary School, Kilclief or St Joseph’s Primary School, Strangford. The Department’s statutory role only begins when a DP has been formally published by the EA. Until a DP is published, any consultation, analysis, documentation or engagement activity is a matter for the proposing authority, which in this case is the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS). Freedom of Information Requests may be submitted to CCMS, either in writing or by email, to foi@ccmsschool.com or sent by post to CCMS, Third Floor, Linen Hill House, 23 Linenhall Street, Lisburn, BT28 1FJ.

Should a DP be published by the EA, Investment and Infrastructure Directorate within the Department of Education would consider the accommodation implications of the DP and this will be included with the DP submission to the Minister. However, as noted earlier, no DP has been published for St Malachy’s Primary School, Kilclief or St Joseph’s Primary School, Strangford.