

Taking Photographs in Schools

Data Protection Act

Introduction

The Data Protection Act 1998 (the DPA) is based around eight principles of good information handling. These give people specific rights in relation to their personal information and place certain obligations on those organisations that are responsible for processing it.

An overview of the main provisions of the DPA can be found in [The Guide to Data Protection](#).

This is part of a series of guidance, which goes into more detail than the Guide, to help data controllers to fully understand their obligations and promote good practice.

This guidance is aimed at Local Education Authorities and those working within schools, colleges and universities. It gives advice on taking photographs in educational institutions and whether doing so must comply with the DPA.

Recommended good practice

The DPA is unlikely to apply in many cases where photographs are taken in schools and other educational institutions. Fear of breaching the provisions of the DPA should not be wrongly used to stop people taking photographs or videos which provide many with much pleasure.

Where the DPA does apply, a common sense approach suggests that if the photographer asks for permission to take a photograph, this will usually be enough to ensure compliance.

- Photos taken for official school use may be covered by the DPA and pupils and students should be advised why they are being taken.

- Photos taken purely for personal use are exempt from the DPA.

Examples

Personal use:

- A parent takes a photograph of their child and some friends taking part in the school Sports Day to be put in the family photo album. These images are for personal use and the DPA does not apply.
- Grandparents are invited to the school nativity play and wish to video it. These images are for personal use and the DPA does not apply.

Official school use:

- Photographs of pupils or students are taken for building passes. These images are likely to be stored electronically with other personal data and the terms of the DPA will apply.
- A small group of pupils are photographed during a science lesson and the photo is to be used in the school prospectus. This will be personal data but will not breach the DPA as long as the children and/or their guardians are aware this is happening and the context in which the photo will be used.

Media use:

- A photograph is taken by a local newspaper of a school awards ceremony. As long as the school has agreed to this, and the children and/or their guardians are aware that photographs of those attending the ceremony may appear in the newspaper, this will not breach the DPA.

More information

Additional guidance is available on [our guidance pages](#) if you need further information on other parts of the DPA.

This guidance has been developed drawing on ICO experience. Because of this it may provide more detail on issues that are often referred to the Information Commissioner than on those we rarely see. The guidance will be reviewed and considered from time to time in line with new decisions of the Information Commissioner, Tribunals and courts.

It is a guide to our general recommended approach, although individual cases will always be decided on the basis of their particular circumstances.

If you need any more information about this or any other aspect of data protection, please [contact us](#), or visit our website at www.ico.org.uk.