

POLICY FOR	16 to 19 Bursary Fund 2026–27
PERSON RESPONSIBLE	Headteacher
REVIEW DATE	August 2026
NEXT REVIEW DATE	August 2027
APPROVED BY	Headteacher
APPROVAL DATE	August 2026

1. Aims

The school aims to:

- have clear and transparent processes for the use and allocation of 16 to 19 Bursary Fund funding;
- make clear to students and parents/carers the support available and how to apply;
- ensure applications are assessed fairly, consistently and without discrimination;
- make reasonable adjustments where appropriate so that disabled students can access the application process; and
- make clear any reasonable attendance, participation and behaviour conditions attached to bursary support.

The school will comply with the Equality Act 2010 and will not discriminate directly or indirectly because of a protected characteristic.

2. Guidance

This policy is based on the Department for Education (DfE) 16 to 19 Bursary Fund guide: 2026 to 2027 and the applicable post-16 funding rules. The school will administer the fund in accordance with current DfE guidance and any subsequent updates.

The 16 to 19 Bursary Fund exists to help students overcome specific financial barriers to participation so that they can remain in education. There are two types of bursary: bursaries for defined vulnerable groups and discretionary bursaries.

3. Definitions

- ‘In care’ means a child looked after by a local authority on a voluntary basis under section 20 of the Children Act 1989 or under a care order under section 31.
- A ‘looked after child’ is a child in the care of a local authority, or provided with accommodation by a local authority in the exercise of its social services functions for more than 24 hours, within section 22 of the Children Act 1989.
- A ‘care leaver’ for bursary purposes is a young person aged 16 or 17 who was previously looked after for at least 13 weeks (consecutively or in total), with at least part of that period falling after their 14th birthday and with the period of care ending after their 16th birthday; or a young person aged 18 or over who was looked after before becoming 18 for at least 13 weeks, with at least part of that period falling after their 14th birthday and with the period of care ending after their 16th birthday. A young person does not need to have entered care after their 14th birthday.

A child who is privately fostered is not classed as looked after for the purposes of the defined vulnerable group bursary.

4. Roles and responsibilities

4.1 Governing body

The governing body has overall oversight of the school's financial arrangements. Approval of this policy is delegated to the Headteacher.

4.2 Headteacher

The Headteacher is responsible for approving this policy, ensuring relevant staff are familiar with it and ensuring it is applied consistently.

4.3 Staff

Relevant staff are responsible for implementing this policy consistently. The senior leadership team will ensure appropriate training and guidance are available.

4.4 Students and parents/carers

Students and parents/carers should provide accurate information, notify the school promptly of relevant changes in circumstances and raise any queries or concerns with the Finance Office or Headteacher.

5. How we use the bursary fund

Bursary funding is available to eligible students to meet essential participation costs. Meeting an eligibility criterion does not guarantee an award or a particular level of funding. Awards are based on the student's actual financial need, evidenced participation costs and, for discretionary bursaries, the funds available.

Support may include:

- travel to and from school or an essential placement;
- essential books, study materials, specialist equipment or clothing required for the study programme;
- essential educational visits and course-related costs that are clearly linked to study programme goals or course objectives;
- UCAS application fees and essential costs of attending university interviews or open days;
- essential industry-placement costs;
- temporary emergency meal or travel support in cases of severe hardship; and
- an exceptional top-up towards eligible childcare costs where these exceed the maximum available through Care to Learn, where permitted by DfE rules. Any such top-up will comply with Care to Learn requirements and will be paid directly to the childcare provider.

The fund will not be used for general living or household costs, non-essential extracurricular activities, learning or pastoral services normally provided by the school, servicing laptops or tablets, or costs already met from another source. Bursary funding will not be used as a reward or incentive for attendance or achievement.

Receipt of support from the 16 to 19 Bursary Fund does not normally affect means-tested benefits paid to families. Students or parents/carers who are unsure about their individual circumstances should seek appropriate benefits advice.

6. Eligibility criteria

6.1 Age

For the 2026–27 academic year, a student must normally be aged 16 or over but under 19 on 31 August 2026.

A student aged 19 or over is eligible only for a discretionary bursary where they have an Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan or are continuing on the same study programme they began when aged 16 to 18. Students aged 19 or over are not eligible for a defined vulnerable group bursary.

In exceptional circumstances, the school may use its discretion to support a student under 16 who is participating in an eligible funded 16 to 19 study programme. Funding will not be awarded where another institution receives public funding for that student. Students under 19 enrolled on higher education qualifications are not eligible for the 16 to 19 Bursary Fund.

6.2 Eligible education provision

Students must be participating in provision that is subject to inspection by a public body that assures quality (e.g. Ofsted). The provision must also fall into one of these groups:

- Be funded directly by the ESFA or local authority;
- Otherwise publicly funded and lead to a qualification up to and including level 3 and is accredited by Ofqual or other on the list available at <https://www.qualifications.education.gov.uk>

Non-employed students aged 16 to 19 participating in a King's Trust Team Programme may also be eligible.

Students on apprenticeship programmes or other waged training are not eligible. Students on distance-learning provision will normally have limited eligible participation costs; where genuine financial help is needed, support will normally be provided in kind.

6.3 Residency

Students must meet the residency criteria in the current DfE funding rules for post-16 provision. The school will retain appropriate evidence for audit purposes.

6.4 Asylum seekers

The school will assess applications from asylum seekers in accordance with current DfE bursary guidance and applicable immigration and public-funds rules. Where permitted, support will normally be provided in kind, such as books, equipment or a travel pass. Cash must not be provided to an asylum seeker unless they are an unaccompanied asylum-seeking child and the payment is permitted under the current guidance.

Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children are the responsibility of the local authority and are treated as looked after children. They may therefore qualify for the defined vulnerable group bursary where they have an assessed financial need. Their eligibility will be reconsidered when they reach 18 in light of their immigration and care-leaver status.

6.5 Bursaries for young people in defined vulnerable groups

A student who meets the general eligibility requirements and has an assessed financial need may qualify if they are:

- in care;
- a care leaver;

- receiving Income Support or Universal Credit in their own right because they are financially supporting themselves, or themselves and a dependant living with them; or
- receiving Disability Living Allowance or Personal Independence Payment in their own right as well as Employment and Support Allowance or Universal Credit in their own right.

Meeting one of these criteria does not automatically entitle a student to financial support. The school will assess the student's actual participation costs, other support available and individual circumstances. Where costs are already met from another source, the school may make a zero award.

For a study programme lasting 30 weeks or more, support for a student in a defined vulnerable group may be up to £1,200 per academic year where evidenced need reaches that level. The school will not automatically award or claim £1,200. For shorter or part-time programmes, the amount will reflect actual need, programme length, hours and any fixed participation costs.

Where assessed need exceeds £1,200, additional support may be provided from the discretionary bursary allocation or the school's own funds, subject to the relevant eligibility and assessment requirements. Eligibility and need will be reviewed in each academic year.

6.6 Discretionary bursaries

The school does not operate a single household-income threshold for discretionary bursary eligibility. Household income will be considered alongside the student's individual circumstances and actual participation costs to determine whether there is a financial barrier to participation. A lower household income will normally indicate a greater level of financial need, but all applications will be assessed individually.

Evidence that may help establish financial circumstances includes receipt of Universal Credit, income-related Employment and Support Allowance, income-based Jobseeker's Allowance, Income Support, Pension Credit, Child Tax Credit where applicable, or eligibility for free school meals. Receipt of a particular benefit or free school meals does not by itself guarantee an award.

In assessing an application, the school will consider, as relevant:

- household income and available financial support;
- the distance and cost of travel between home, school and any essential placement;
- the number of dependants in the household;
- the requirements and essential costs of the student's study programme; and
- caring responsibilities, exceptional circumstances or other factors affecting the student's ability to participate.

When assessing support for travel, the school will take account of the relevant local authority's post-16 transport arrangements and any other transport support available, so that bursary funding does not duplicate support available from another source.

There is no fixed maximum discretionary bursary award. The amount awarded will reflect evidenced actual need and the school's available allocation. The school will manage the number and value of awards so that expenditure remains within budget.

The school may retain a small emergency fund to support eligible students whose circumstances change unexpectedly during the year. Temporary emergency meal or travel support may be provided in severe hardship in accordance with DfE rules, with the required audit records retained.

6.7 Evidence and assessment

Applications must be supported by appropriate evidence of eligibility and, where applicable, household income, financial need and participation costs. The school may request further evidence where necessary.

Evidence may include:

- recent Universal Credit statements, benefit award notices, payslips or other appropriate household-income evidence;
- evidence of free school meal eligibility where relevant;
- travel costs, receipts, quotations or travel-pass information;
- evidence of costs for essential books, equipment, specialist clothing, educational visits or placements;
- written confirmation from the relevant local authority of current or previous looked-after status or care-leaver status; and
- benefit award notices in the student's own name where required for defined vulnerable group eligibility.

Where the school chooses not to repeat a household-income check annually for a continuing discretionary bursary student, it will obtain a signed and dated declaration confirming that household circumstances have not changed, in line with DfE guidance. Actual financial need and participation costs will still be reviewed each year.

False or misleading information may result in an application being refused, an award being withdrawn and, where appropriate, recovery of funds already paid.

7. Application, decision and payment process

7.1 Applications

Applications should ideally be submitted by Friday 25 September 2026 so that the school can assess overall demand and make discretionary awards fairly. The application process will remain open throughout the academic year because students' circumstances may change.

Applications will be handled confidentially. Personal information and evidence will be accessed and used only by authorised staff for assessing and administering bursary support, in accordance with the school's data protection arrangements.

Applications should be made to the Finance Office using the school's bursary application form. The student must sign the application form. The student and, where applicable, their parent/carer will be required to confirm that the information and evidence provided are complete and accurate to the best of their knowledge and belief. Decisions will be made objectively and fairly. A member of staff with a potential conflict of interest will not participate in the decision.

Applicants will be notified in writing of the outcome and, where successful, the amount and purpose of support awarded.

7.2 Review and complaints

A student who wishes to request a review of a bursary decision should write to the Headteacher within 10 working days of notification, setting out the reasons for the request. Wherever practicable, the review will be undertaken by a senior member of staff who was not involved in the original decision. The outcome will be confirmed in writing.

If the student or parent/carer remains dissatisfied with the way the application or review has been handled, they may use the school's Complaints Policy.

7.3 Payment and provision of support

Wherever possible, support will be provided in kind, for example through travel passes, books, equipment, food vouchers or direct payment to suppliers. Where a direct payment is appropriate, it will normally be made by BACS to the student's own bank account. Other cash payments will be exceptional and used only where they are an appropriate and effective way of meeting evidenced participation costs.

Where support is provided in kind, the student will be informed of its value and, where applicable, how that value has been taken into account within the total bursary award.

Receipts and other evidence of actual costs will be retained where required. For regular costs such as travel, the school may use evidenced unit costs and expected attendance to calculate appropriate reimbursement in line with DfE guidance.

Where bursary funding is used to provide reusable equipment that remains the property of the school, the student may be required to return it when it is no longer required or when they leave or complete their study programme. Any such requirement will be made clear when the equipment is provided.

7.4 Conditions for continued support

Continued bursary support is conditional on satisfactory attendance, punctuality, participation and conduct. Students are expected to comply with the school's behaviour expectations and participate fully in their study programme.

The school will not apply attendance conditions mechanically. Before suspending, reducing or withholding support, it will consider the student's individual circumstances, including illness, disability, caring responsibilities and other exceptional circumstances, and whether the decision could create a further barrier to participation.

Support may cease where a student withdraws from their study programme or is absent for a sustained period and no longer incurs the participation costs for which support was awarded. Any decision will be considered individually and confirmed in writing.

The school may seek to recover funds where money has not been used for the purpose for which it was awarded, after considering the individual circumstances.

8. Change in circumstances

Students and/or parents/carers must notify the school without delay of any change in circumstances that may affect eligibility, financial need or the level of support required. The school may reassess, vary or end an award where circumstances change.

Where an award has been obtained through false or misleading information, the school may withdraw the award and recover funds already paid.

9. Record keeping, audit and data protection

The school will maintain an auditable record of each bursary decision, including eligibility evidence, the assessment of actual financial need, relevant participation costs, the decision and rationale, the amount and purpose of support, and evidence of payment or provision.

Application forms, supporting evidence, receipts and other bursary records required for audit will be retained securely for six years, in accordance with DfE requirements and the school's record retention arrangements.

Personal data will be processed securely and in accordance with UK GDPR, the Data Protection Act 2018, the school's privacy notices and its Record Retention Schedule.

10. Monitoring arrangements

The effectiveness of this policy and the allocation of bursary funding will be monitored annually to ensure that funds are distributed fairly, consistently and in accordance with DfE guidance.

The Business Team will review the policy annually. It will be approved by the Headteacher and reported to the governing body in accordance with the school's governance arrangements.

11. Associated policies and documents

- Finance Policy
- Attendance Policy
- Behaviour Policy and Sixth Form Code of Conduct
- Complaints Policy
- Data Protection Policy and privacy notices
- Record Retention Schedule
- Accessibility Plan
- UK GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018
- DfE 16 to 19 Bursary Fund guide: 2026 to 2027