Frances Bardsley Academy for Girls Sixth Form

16-19 Bursary Fund Policy **2026/27**

Policy adopted by LGBs for implementation	October 2026
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Policy Source	Dfe Guidance

1. Introduction

This policy ensures that deprivation is not a barrier to participation in Sixth Form learning. We aim to ensure a consistent, fair, and transparent approach to the allocation of the 16-19 Bursary Fund, so that all students can access and benefit from post-16 education.

The fund supports students with essential participation costs such as travel, required books, equipment, or specialist clothing. It is not intended to cover general living costs, extra-curricular activities, or services such as counselling or mentoring.

The Department for Education (DfE) allocates bursary funding each year. The school administers the fund in line with the 16 to 19 Bursary Fund Guide (2026–2027), which can be found here:

https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/16-to-19-bursary-fund-provider-guide/16-to-19-bursary-fund-guide-2026-to-2027

There are two types of bursary:

Bursaries for students in defined vulnerable groups
Discretionary bursaries for other students who face financial barriers to participation.

For both types of bursary, **eligibility does not create an automatic entitlement to a fixed sum of money.** The amount and type of support provided must be based on an individual assessment of the student's actual financial need and evidenced participation costs. The school will not make blanket, flat-rate or fixed-rate awards.

2. Eligibility

2.1 General Criteria

To be eligible for help from the bursary fund, a student must:

- Be aged 16 or over but under 19 on 31 August 2026;
- Meet the residency criteria for post-16 provision set out in the DfE's Funding Regulations for Post-16 Provision (2026–27).
- Be participating in eligible education provision. Students undertaking an apprenticeship or other waged training are not eligible for support from the 16 to 19 Bursary Fund.
- Students aged 19 or over are only eligible for the discretionary bursary if they have an Education, Health and Care (EHC) Plan or are a 19+ continuer on the same study programme they began before their 19th birthday. Students aged 19 or over are not eligible for the defined vulnerable group bursary.
- Students aged under 19 enrolled on higher education qualifications are not eligible.
- The school will apply the DfE rules relating to asylum-seeking students. Where an accompanied asylum seeker is eligible for support, this must be provided in kind; cash must not be given. Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children who are looked after by a local authority may qualify for the defined vulnerable group bursary as a student 'in care', subject to financial need.

2.2 Bursaries for defined vulnerable groups

Students may receive a bursary if they meet the DfE's definition of being in a vulnerable group and have an actual financial need. The defined groups are those who are:

- In care

- Care leavers
- Receiving Income Support (IS) or Universal Credit (UC) in their own name because they are financially supporting themselves and/or someone dependent on them
- Receiving Disability Living Allowance (DLA) or Personal Independence Payment (PIP) **and** Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) or Universal Credit (UC) in their own right

Students must meet one of the defined vulnerable group categories in full and eligibility must be checked in each year that support is required.

Students in these groups must not automatically receive or be allocated £1,200. Support is available up to £1,200 where the student's individually assessed and evidenced participation costs require this level of support. A student may receive a lower amount or no bursary support where they have no actual financial need or their participation costs are met from another source.

Evidence required:

- Written confirmation from the local authority for 'in care' or 'care leaver' status; or
- DWP or UC evidence in the student's name showing entitlement to the relevant benefits. Evidence of PIP or DLA alone is not sufficient for this category; the student must also receive ESA or UC in their own right.
- Any further evidence reasonably required to confirm that the relevant eligibility category is met and to assess actual participation need.

2.3 Discretionary bursaries

Discretionary bursaries are available for students who face genuine financial barriers to learning. The school will assess each case individually based on household income and actual participation costs.

As a guide, students from households with a total annual income of £23,000 or below are encouraged to apply, but awards will not be automatic.

Household income is used to establish eligibility, but the amount of support will also take account of the student's individual circumstances and actual participation needs, which may include factors such as travel distance, the number of dependent children in the household and the requirements of the student's study programme.

Evidence may include:

- P60 and last 3 months' payslips
- 3 most recent Universal Credit statements showing income
- Tax Credit Award Notice, or SA302/self-employment accounts
- Confirmation that the student is eligible for and in receipt of Free School Meals (FSM) may be used as an indicator of potential eligibility. Additional household income evidence may be required to establish that the household meets the school's discretionary bursary income criteria.

The school may assess household income annually or, for a typical two-year study programme, at the beginning of the programme. Where a full household income assessment is not repeated in the second year, the student must provide a signed and dated declaration confirming that household circumstances have not changed. Actual financial need and participation costs will still be assessed each year.

2.4 Evidence and audit

All eligibility and evidence documents will be retained for six years for audit purposes. This includes application forms, household income evidence, individual need assessments, receipts for purchases

made with bursary funds, evidence supporting payments and records of the value, purpose and type of support provided.

All expenditure must be supported by appropriate evidence. For regular costs such as travel or food, an initial receipt or other evidence of the actual cost may be used with attendance records to calculate subsequent support. Actual reimbursement must be linked to attendance.

2.5 Change in circumstances

If there is a change in personal or household circumstances which may affect eligibility or financial need, it is the responsibility of the student and, where applicable, their parent/carer to inform Mrs Black in the Sixth Form.

2.6 Individual assessment and availability of funding

The school determines eligibility for the discretionary bursary within the DfE rules and determines the amount and form of support for both bursary types following an individual assessment. Decisions will reflect actual financial need, evidenced participation costs, value for money and available funding. There is no fixed individual allocation, personal account or reserved balance attached to bursary eligibility.

Discretionary awards may be limited by the overall level of demand and the funding available. The school may retain a small emergency fund to respond to changes in circumstances during the year.

3. Categories and Types of Support

1. Defined Vulnerable Group Bursary - individually assessed support of up to £1,200 where actual financial need and evidenced participation costs require it. Students must not automatically receive £1,200 and may receive less or no support.
2. Discretionary Bursary - based on household income, individual actual financial need, evidenced participation costs and total fund availability.
3. Short-term/Emergency Support - available in exceptional cases where a student faces temporary severe hardship affecting participation. In a small number of cases, temporary meal or travel support may be provided before the full household income assessment is completed, but a full discretionary bursary assessment will still be required.

Examples of support that may be considered include:

- Travel to and from school where travel costs present an evidenced financial barrier to participation.
- Essential books, equipment and specialist clothing required for the study programme.
- Contributions to essential industry placement costs, university interviews or open days.
- UCAS application fees.
- Essential field trips that are clearly linked to study programme goals or course objectives.
- In exceptional circumstances, essential clothing or footwear where the school is satisfied that the cost is genuinely and directly necessary for the student to access education.

The bursary fund cannot be used for general household or living costs, rent, bills or Wi-Fi; non-essential or extra-curricular activities; counselling, mentoring or extra tutoring; servicing laptops/tablets; attendance or achievement bonuses; costs that should be met from another school budget; or foreign/overseas trips where the activity is not essential or equivalent content can be accessed in England at significantly lower cost.

Where support is provided for books, equipment or materials, students may be offered a list or range of appropriate items identified by the school. Where appropriate, the school may purchase items in bulk or through preferred suppliers to ensure fairness and equity, secure value for money and maintain clear audit records.

3.1 Travel support

Travel support may be provided where the cost of travelling to and from school creates an evidenced financial barrier to participation.

The school's usual form of travel support will be the provision of, or a contribution towards, an appropriate bus or public transport pass. The school will determine the most appropriate and cost-effective form and level of support according to the student's individual circumstances, actual participation needs and evidenced travel costs.

Where a student is unable to use the usual public transport arrangements because of their individual circumstances, alternative forms of travel support may be considered on an individual basis. The school may request appropriate supporting evidence and will consider whether the proposed arrangement is reasonable, proportionate and represents appropriate use of bursary funding.

Eligibility for bursary support does not create an automatic entitlement to reimbursement for private transport, taxi, petrol or mileage costs. Any alternative travel arrangement must be agreed by the school in advance.

Where relevant, the school will take account of any transport assistance available through the local authority or other schemes to avoid duplication of support.

Where regular travel costs are reimbursed, support will relate to the student's actual attendance and the travel costs incurred.

4. Applications and payment process

4.1 Applications

Applications should be made using the Bursary+ Programme https://fbasixthformbursary.applicaa.com/1. All applications for the main assessment round should be submitted by 31 October 2026.

Applications made after this date will be considered where funding remains available. The school will retain provision for in-year or emergency applications because students' circumstances and needs may change during the academic year.

The application must provide sufficient information to establish eligibility, household income where applicable, and the student's actual financial needs and participation costs. The student must sign the application.

The school will support students who may have difficulty completing the bursary application process due to disability, learning difficulty, or lack of parental/carer support. Staff will assist these students to ensure they are not disadvantaged in applying.

Applicants must confirm that the information and evidence supplied is correct and complete to the best of their knowledge. False, misleading or incomplete information that results in an incorrect award or overpayment may lead to future support being stopped and recovery of incorrectly paid funds, and may be dealt with under the DfE fraud requirements.

4.2 Assessment process

An Assessment Panel consisting of the Head of Sixth Form, Senior Leader overseeing Sixth Form, and the School Business Manager will review applications and determine awards. Decisions will be based on verified evidence of eligibility, financial need and actual participation costs.

For each successful application, the school will communicate the amount or value of support, its purpose, how it will be provided or claimed, and any conditions that apply.

Applicants will normally be informed in writing of the Assessment Panel's decision within two weeks of its meeting.

4.3 Payments and provision of support

Support will be provided in kind where possible, for example through travel passes, meal credits, books or equipment. The school will not normally make payments into another person's account. In exceptional circumstances, where a student is unable to administer their own account, the school may consider an appropriate alternative arrangement.

To support fairness, equity, value for money and clear audit arrangements, the school may identify a reasonable range of appropriate books, equipment, materials or other items from which students can choose, according to their assessed participation needs. Where appropriate, the school may purchase items in bulk or through preferred suppliers to secure better value for bursary funding. The school will determine the appropriate item or level of support; bursary eligibility does not create an entitlement to the cash equivalent of an item or to a more expensive alternative.

The school will explain the value and purpose of support provided. Bursary funding must only be used for the specific participation costs for which it has been awarded.

Large or lump-sum cash bursary payments will not be made. Where cash support is appropriate, the timing and frequency of payments will reflect the purpose of the award, the student's circumstances and local arrangements.

Students and parents/carers should seek approval before making purchases where they expect bursary support. The school will normally arrange support in kind or agree the cost in advance rather than requiring a student to incur an unaffordable cost first. Retrospective reimbursement is not automatic and will only be made where it has been agreed or where the school considers it appropriate within the DfE rules.

Receipts and other evidence may be required throughout the year. Equipment purchased from the bursary fund may remain the property of the school and may be required to be returned at the end of the study programme where it can or should be reused.

4.4 Conditions of funding

Successful bursary applicants remain eligible for one academic year, subject to continuing eligibility, actual financial need and the agreed purpose of the support. Students must apply or confirm their circumstances as required for each academic year.

Where bursary support relates to a recurring participation cost, such as travel, the amount provided may reflect the student's actual participation and the costs incurred. Bursary funding will not be used as a reward or incentive for attendance, behaviour or attainment.

4.5 In-year and emergency applications

Students who experience a change in circumstances during the year may make an in-year application. These will be considered promptly by the Assessment Panel and are subject to available funding.

In cases of severe hardship, the school may provide temporary emergency meal or travel support on days the student attends their study programme before completing the usual household income checks. This will be exceptional and temporary, and a full discretionary bursary assessment will still be required. The school will retain the records required by the DfE for any such support.

5. Complaints

If a student or parent/carer is dissatisfied with how a bursary application has been managed, the decision reached, or the support provided, they should use the school's published Complaints Procedure. Complaints relating to the bursary fund will be managed through the same formal process as other school complaints.

The DfE does not normally have a role in the administration of bursary support to individual students because this is the responsibility of the institution. The DfE may become involved where there is an allegation that bursary eligibility criteria or the funding guidance have been disregarded.

6. Confidentiality

Applications and supporting evidence will be treated confidentially and accessed only by staff who require the information to assess, administer, audit or review bursary support. If additional information needs to be obtained or shared in order to reach a decision, this will be handled in accordance with the school's data protection arrangements.

The application process and supporting information will make clear that applications are confidential so that students feel able to seek support.

7. Financial Management, Audit and Unspent Funds

The school will maintain robust student-level records of applications, eligibility decisions, actual financial need, expenditure and support. Records will include the value, purpose and type of cost, whether support was paid/provided, and a brief justification for the decision. Relevant documentation will be retained for six years.

The school may use up to 5% of its discretionary bursary allocation for administration in accordance with DfE rules.

Bursary funding is not an individual student's personal allocation. Unused funding will be managed in accordance with DfE rules, including the rules on recycling vulnerable-group funding and returning unspent funds. Bursary funding cannot be carried forward for more than one year. The school will identify and report unspent funds to the DfE within the required timescales.

The school will complete the required school census/data returns for students receiving bursary support, including eligible defined vulnerable-group students assessed as requiring no financial support ('zero bursary' students), where required by the DfE.

8. Equality and Compliance

The school will ensure that decisions comply with the Equality Act 2010, applying eligibility and assessment criteria consistently and fairly. Decisions will take account of individual circumstances where relevant and no student will be discriminated against because of a protected characteristic.

This policy will be reviewed against the DfE 16 to 19 Bursary Fund guidance each academic year and updated where required.