16-19 Bursary Policy

Swale ACADEMIES TRUST

Equalities Statement

In our Trust we work to ensure that there is equality of opportunity for all members of our community who hold a range of protected characteristics as defined by the Equality Act 2010, as well as having regard to other factors which have the potential to cause inequality, such as socio-economic factors.

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Introduction

The 16-19 Bursary Fund provides financial support to help students overcome specific barriers to participation so they can remain in education or training. Funding is received from the Department for Education (DFE). 5% of the grant allocated is retained to cover administrative costs.

There are two types of bursary available:

Vulnerable Bursary
A vulnerable bursary of up to £1,200 per academic year is available to the most vulnerable groups as defined under the eligibility criteria.

Discretionary Bursary
A discretionary bursary is available to qualifying students who do not meet the criteria of the vulnerable bursary. The amount awarded will be variable and is given to meet individual needs such as the costs of transport, meals, books and equipment.

Eligibility

To be eligible for either type of bursary, the student must:

- Be aged 16 or over but under 19 on 31 August 2026 for the 2026-27 academic year.
- Be aged 19 or over and have an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP), or be continuing on a course started aged 16 to 18. Students aged 19 or over are not eligible for bursaries for defined vulnerable groups.
- Meet the residency criteria in the DFE funding regulations for post-16 provision

Additional Eligibility – Vulnerable Bursary

In addition to the general eligibility above, a student must fall into one or more of the following categories to qualify for a vulnerable bursary:

- Be in care, or a care leaver
- Be in receipt of Income Support (IS), or Universal Credit (UC) because they are financially supporting themselves or financially supporting themselves and someone who is dependent on them and living with them, such as a child or partner.
- Be in receipt of receiving Disability Living Allowance (DLA) or Personal Independence Payments (PIP) in their own right as well as Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) or UC in their own right.

Students who meet the criteria for a bursary for vulnerable groups are not automatically entitled to a bursary. Students will not receive the bursary if they do not have any actual financial need (for example, because their financial needs are met from other sources and/or because they have no relevant costs).

Where a bursary is provided, the funds will generally be up to £1,200 per year for study programmes lasting 30 weeks or more. When calculating the amount, cases will be looked at individually and base the outcome based on a particular student's needs. Students will only receive the amount they actually need to participate and will not automatically receive £1,200 if they do not need the full amount.

We can use our discretion, on a case-by-case basis, and provide more than £1,200 per year if such would be necessary in all the circumstances for the student to remain in education. Any such additional payment will be paid either from our discretionary bursary allocation or our own funds.

If a student's study programme lasts for less than 30 weeks, they will be paid a pro-rata amount. We will also consider the number of hours involved in a student's study programme when deciding whether a pro-rata payment is more appropriate.

We will review the student's eligibility position each academic year. Students will only continue to receive a bursary for vulnerable groups if they continue to satisfy the criteria.

We will provide this support for students from the bursary fund by making payments in kind where possible. It will not be provided as regular payments for living costs.

Additional Eligibility – Discretionary Bursary

In addition to the general eligibility above, a student must satisfy one or more of the following criteria to be considered for a discretionary bursary:

- Have been in receipt of free school meals in Year 11
- Have parents in receipt of pension credit or income support, income based job seekers allowance, child tax credit or employment support allowance
- Have a household income below £35,000 per annum, or are able to demonstrate financial hardship.

Students who do not satisfy these criteria may be awarded a bursary on a case-by-case basis.

The amount of discretionary bursary awarded will be based on individual need and will depend on funds available. A discretionary bursary is not guaranteed to be awarded even if all eligibility criteria are met.

Evidence

All applications to access the 16-19 bursary must be supported by appropriate evidence. Examples of acceptable evidence are:

- Written confirmation from the local authority of current/previous looked-after status
- Written confirmation of benefit award/tax credit notice, in the name of the student (vulnerable or discretionary) or parent (discretionary)
- P60 End of Year certificate or self-assessment equivalent for adults in the household
- Previous 3 months' payslips of adults in the household

Application

Applications must be made on the correct form (appendix 1). Applications should be submitted within six weeks of the start of term. Whilst year-round applications will be accepted, it should be understood that funds may have been fully allocated before late applications are received and as such late applications may not receive an award. A proportion of the allocation may be withheld for students who join or transfer in-year, who legitimately could not apply at the start of term.

Applications will be reviewed by the post-16 team and a decision will be notified within two weeks of receipt.

Payments

Payments will be made by bank transfer into a bank account ideally held in the name of the student, or will be made in-kind by the direct provision or supply of goods or services. Cash payments will not be made.

The amount and frequency of payment will be determined by the award given and will vary according to the agreed need. Where a general award is made, regular payments will be paid into bank accounts on a weekly, monthly or termly basis provided the conditions of payment are met.

Where specific needs are identified, payments will be reimbursed on an ad-hoc basis when supported by evidence such as receipts, if the school is not able to purchase the required goods or services directly.

Where a student leaves a programme of study prior to completion, payments will be pro-rata to the date of leaving.

Examples of appropriate discretionary bursary use are as follows:

- Books/equipment required for the programme of study
- Transport (to enable school attendance)
- Meals
- Educational trips
- University open days and interview costs

This list is not exhaustive however any expenditure must be connected to the student's education. Expenditure must be pre-approved by the school or may not be reimbursed.

The bursary fund may NOT be used for any of the following:

- Gifts cards/vouchers
- Attendance rewards
- Goods and services benefitting the whole student body including those not qualifying for a bursary award
- Blanket cash payments not linked to individual need

Further information on use of the grant can be found here:

16 to 19 Bursary Fund guide: 2026 to 2027 - GOV.UK

Conditions

Students in receipt of a bursary award must adhere to the terms and conditions set out in the Student Agreement of each school. Students in breach of this agreement, for example not meeting the minimum expected standards of behaviour or attendance, may have their bursary award reduced or withdrawn. Such a decision will be confirmed to the student in writing.

Appeals

Students have the right to appeal a decision to either refuse the award of a bursary or to reduce or revoke an award previously granted.

All appeals should be made in line with the school's complaints procedure.

Change in Circumstances

If there are changes in circumstances which may affect eligibility for a bursary, applicants and/or parents/carers must notify the school without delay.

Record Keeping

Any paperwork and documents we retain for audit purposes (for example, copies of application forms, documents as evidence and any agreements signed by students) will be kept securely in line with our data protection policy, privacy notices and record retention schedule.