COLMERS SCHOOL
& SIXTH FORM COLLEGE

Colmers School & Sixth Form College

16-19 Bursary Fund Policy

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Policy Owner: Business Manager

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Statement of intent

At Colmers School & Sixth Form College, we are committed to ensuring that financial barriers do not prevent eligible students from participating fully in 16 to 19 education. The 16 to 19 Bursary Fund is intended to help students with essential participation costs such as travel, essential books, specialist equipment or clothing required for their study programme.

The School will administer the fund fairly, transparently and consistently, while recognising that awards must be based on each student's individual circumstances and actual financial need.

- make information about the 16 to 19 Bursary Fund, eligibility and the application process readily available;
- assess applications confidentially and on an individual basis;
- ensure awards reflect evidenced participation costs rather than blanket or flat-rate payments;
- maintain appropriate records for audit and assurance; and
- review this policy annually against the current DfE funding rules.

1. Legal framework

This policy has due regard to relevant legislation and current statutory/funding guidance, including:

- Department for Education (2026), '16 to 19 Bursary Fund guide: 2026 to 2027';
- Department for Education (2026), 'Advice: funding rules for 16 to 19 provision 2026 to 2027';
- Department for Education, '16 to 19 Bursary Fund: checklist';
- Equality Act 2010; and
- UK GDPR and Data Protection Act 2018.

This policy operates alongside the School's Complaints Procedures Policy, Attendance Policy, Behaviour Policy and Data Protection Policy.

2. The School's responsibilities

The School will determine its discretionary bursary criteria within the DfE funding rules and will assess the actual financial need of every applicant. Eligibility alone does not create an automatic entitlement to a fixed payment.

The School will obtain and retain appropriate evidence to support eligibility, household income where relevant, actual participation costs and the value and purpose of support provided.

For students in a defined vulnerable group, the School will verify that the student fully meets one of the DfE categories and has an actual financial need before submitting a funding claim directly to DfE during the published claim windows.

The School will comply with the Equality Act 2010 and will administer applications confidentially and in accordance with data protection requirements.

The School will make its bursary policy or statement available early enough to support students making decisions about post-16 study.

The School will identify and report unspent bursary funding in accordance with the current DfE rules and deadlines.

3. Raising awareness and take-up of the 16-19 Bursary Fund

The School will promote the bursary through appropriate channels, which may include the School website, sixth form information, open evenings, enrolment materials, tutors and direct communication with students and families.

The School will work, where appropriate and lawfully, with local authority services, social workers, care-leaver services and other relevant professionals to help identify students who may need financial support.

Previous receipt of free school meals, Pupil Premium or SEND support may help identify students who could benefit from information about the bursary, but it will not in itself determine eligibility or the level of award. Each student's actual need will be assessed individually.

4. Bursary fund statement

The School will publish clear information setting out how the 16 to 19 Bursary Fund will be used. This will include:

- the School's eligibility criteria;
- how students can apply and any preferred application date;
- the requirement to assess individual actual financial need;
- the types of participation costs that may be supported;
- the conditions attached to awards, including any attendance, behaviour, receipt or equipment-return requirements; and
- confirmation that support is provided through the 16 to 19 Bursary Fund.

5. Eligibility

For the 2026 to 2027 academic year, a student must normally be aged 16 or over but under 19 on 31 August 2026 and meet the DfE residency and eligible provision requirements.

A student aged 19 or over may only receive 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 younger student participating in an eligible 16 to 19 study programme. Bursary funds will not be awarded where another publicly funded institution receives funding for the same student.

Students on apprenticeships or other waged training are employed and are not eligible for the 16 to 19 Bursary Fund.

Students may apply again if their circumstances change during the academic year. Any further award will be based on a fresh assessment of actual financial need.

6. Young offenders

Young offenders may apply for a bursary if they are serving a non-custodial sentence, have been released early from a custodial sentence other than on temporary licence, or have been remanded to a non-secure institution.

Young offenders are not eligible while serving a custodial sentence, while released on temporary licence, or while remanded to a secure institution. In-kind support will be used wherever possible.

7. Discretionary bursaries

Discretionary bursary funding will be targeted at students facing the greatest financial barriers to participation. The School may consider factors such as household income, travel costs, essential course costs, caring responsibilities and other relevant individual circumstances.

The School will set and publish its local household income criteria. Meeting an income threshold will not automatically result in a fixed award: the amount of support will be based on the student's evidenced actual participation costs.

The School will not make blanket, flat-rate or fixed payments simply because a student falls within an income band or receives a particular benefit.

The School may check household income annually or, for a typical two-year programme, at the start of the student's programme. Where a full household income check is not repeated in a subsequent year, the School will obtain a signed and dated declaration confirming whether household circumstances have changed.

The School will normally provide support in-kind where practical, for example travel passes, meal credits, essential books or equipment. Cash payments may be used where appropriate and must be supported by evidence of the agreed participation costs.

The School may retain a small emergency fund to support students whose circumstances change during the year. In cases of severe hardship, temporary meal or travel support may be provided before the usual household income checks are completed, but a full discretionary bursary assessment should follow. Required audit records will be retained.

The School will manage awards so that expenditure remains within the available allocation. There is no fixed maximum discretionary award where a student's evidenced actual participation costs justify a higher level of support.

8. Bursaries for defined vulnerable groups

A student may be eligible for a defined vulnerable group bursary where they are:

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

The School will verify the required evidence and assess the student's actual financial need before submitting a claim. A student who meets a vulnerable group category is not automatically entitled to £1,200 or to any fixed amount.

For an eligible student on a programme lasting 30 weeks or more, support may be up to £1,200 where the assessed actual participation costs justify that amount. A lower amount will be claimed where the student's need is lower. For shorter programmes, the School will consider whether a pro-rata amount is appropriate.

Where an eligible student's actual participation costs exceed £1,200, the School may provide additional support from its discretionary bursary allocation or its own funds, provided the need and rationale are evidenced.

The School will submit claims for defined vulnerable group bursaries directly to DfE within the claim windows published for the academic year. The School may provide support once eligibility and actual need have been assessed and does not need to wait for the DfE payment before supporting the student.

9. Paying bursary funding to eligible students

The School will normally provide support in-kind rather than cash where this is practical and appropriate. In-kind support may include travel passes, meal vouchers or credits, and essential books, equipment or clothing.

Where cash payments are made, it is good practice for payments to be made by BACS to the student's own bank account. Payment to another person's account will only be considered in exceptional circumstances where the student cannot administer their own account.

The School will tell the student the amount and purpose of their award, how support will be provided, and any conditions that apply. Students must use cash payments only for the agreed participation costs.

Payments will be made regularly where appropriate and will not be made as large lump sums. The frequency will reflect the purpose of the award, the student's circumstances and local arrangements.

The School will retain receipts or other evidence of actual costs. For recurring costs such as travel or food, an initial receipt may be used with an evidenced calculation linked to the student's expected and actual attendance. Students will not normally be required to incur unaffordable expenditure before support is provided.

Up to 5% of the School's 2026 to 2027 discretionary bursary allocation may be used for administration of the fund.

10. Conditions for receiving bursary funding

The School may make bursary support conditional on students meeting clearly communicated standards of attendance and behaviour and complying with conditions such as providing receipts or returning reusable equipment.

The School will obtain evidence that the student has seen and agreed to the conditions, for example through a signed application or award agreement.

Before withholding support because a condition has not been met, the School will consider the student's individual circumstances, including illness, caring responsibilities, disability, safeguarding concerns and other exceptional circumstances. Decisions must not undermine the purpose of the bursary, which is to remove financial barriers to participation.

The School will not use bursary payments as a reward or incentive for achieving attendance targets.

Support will normally stop where a student withdraws from their study programme. The School may seek recovery of funding that has not been used for its agreed purpose, taking account of the student's individual circumstances.

Where reusable equipment is purchased, the School may require it to be returned at the end of the study programme. This requirement will be communicated when the award is made.

11. Unspent funds and carry forward

The School may carry unspent bursary funding forward to the next academic year, but funding may not be carried forward for more than one year and must remain ring-fenced for eligible student support. It must not be transferred into the School's general funds.

The School will use carried-forward funding in accordance with the current DfE funding rules and will report and return unspent funding when required. Unspent funding that has exceeded the permitted one-year carry-forward period will be reported to DfE no later than the applicable deadline.

12. Student declarations and records

Students will sign the application form or declaration confirming that the information and evidence supplied are accurate and that they understand the conditions attached to any award.

The School will retain hard-copy or electronic records supporting eligibility, financial need and expenditure for six years, in accordance with DfE audit requirements.

Records may include application forms, household income evidence, vulnerable-group evidence, individual needs assessments, award decisions, DfE claim information, payment/remittance evidence, receipts, records of in-kind support and attendance evidence where relevant.

All personal information will be handled confidentially and securely in accordance with the School's Data Protection Policy and applicable data protection legislation.

13. Managing applications

The School will use an application form that captures the information needed to assess eligibility and actual financial need, including household income where relevant, the student's participation costs and the student's signed declaration.

The School may set a preferred date for applications so that overall demand can be assessed fairly, but will continue to consider applications made later in the year where needs arise or circumstances change.

Application outcomes will be communicated to students and will explain the amount and purpose of support, how it will be provided and any conditions attached to the award.

14. Quality assurance

The School will use the current DfE 16 to 19 Bursary Fund checklist, or an equivalent internal checklist that covers the same requirements, to support consistent assessment and maintain a clear audit trail.

The School will maintain records of applications received, decisions made, the value and purpose of awards, the rationale for decisions and the support actually provided.

The School will review its administration of the fund periodically to identify errors, inconsistent practice or areas requiring improvement.

15. Auditing, assurance and fraud

The School will maintain student-level records sufficient to demonstrate eligibility, assessment of actual financial need, the rationale for each award and the value and purpose of support provided.

The School is responsible for investigating suspected fraud relating to bursary applications. Where a student or parent has knowingly provided misleading or fraudulent information resulting in an incorrect award, further payments will be stopped and the School will seek to recover any overpayment where appropriate.

Significant fraud will be reported to DfE in accordance with the current funding rules. This may include fraud over £1,200, fraud that is novel, unusual, systemic or complex, or a case likely to attract significant public interest.

The School recognises that DfE may recover funding where audit identifies funding errors, insufficient evidence, ineligible awards or duplicate claims.

16. Conditions for using the bursary

Bursary funding will only be used to remove genuine financial barriers to participation in education and for eligible participation costs.

The bursary fund will not be used for learning support or pastoral services that the School should otherwise provide; general household or living costs; non-essential extracurricular activities; costs that should be met from another budget; or to gain a competitive advantage over other institutions.

The fund will not be used for block subsidies, blanket travel support regardless of need, block provision of equipment or books, or bonus payments to reward attendance or achievement.

The School will consider other available support, including local authority transport arrangements and free meals provision, to avoid double funding.

17. Complaints and appeals

Students or parents/carers who are dissatisfied with the handling of an application, award decision or support provided should use the School's Complaints Procedures Policy.

The School is responsible for the administration of bursary support to its students. DfE does not routinely determine individual complaints about institutional decisions, although it may become involved where there is an allegation that the bursary eligibility criteria or funding rules have been disregarded.

18. Monitoring and review

This policy will be reviewed annually by the Headteacher and School Business Manager and presented to the appropriate Governing Board committee for approval. The next scheduled review date is October 2027.

The School will review the policy sooner where DfE changes the funding rules or administrative arrangements during the academic year and will communicate material changes to relevant staff, students and families.