Watford Grammar School for Girls

16 to 19 Bursary Policy

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1. Aims

Watford Grammar School for Girls is committed to administering the 16 to 19 Bursary Fund fairly, transparently and in accordance with the Department for Education (DfE) funding rules. The purpose of the fund is to help students overcome specific financial barriers to participation so that they can remain in education. The school aims to:

- ensure bursary funding is targeted at students who genuinely need financial support to participate in their study programme;
- assess each student's actual participation costs and individual circumstances;
- operate clear, consistent and auditable application, decision-making and payment arrangements;
- make students and parents/carers aware of the support available and how to apply; and
- ensure public funds are used only for permitted purposes and in accordance with current DfE guidance.

2. Guidance

This policy has been prepared with reference to the Department for Education 16 to 19 Bursary Fund Guide: 2026 to 2027, updated 7 September 2026, and the DfE funding rules for post-16 provision.

Where national guidance is amended, the school will administer the fund in accordance with the most recent mandatory funding rules.

The fund comprises two forms of support: bursaries for defined vulnerable groups and discretionary bursaries. Both are intended to meet essential participation costs, not general living costs.

3. Administration

The 16 to 19 Bursary Fund will be administered fairly, consistently and transparently, in accordance with Department for Education guidance:

- eligibility alone does not create an automatic entitlement to a bursary award;
- awards will be based on an assessment of the student's actual financial need and essential participation costs;
- the school will not make blanket, flat-rate or fixed payments that are unrelated to evidenced need;
- awards are subject to available DfE funding, and the school may need to prioritise support where demand exceeds the school's funding allocation;
- support will normally be provided in kind, through direct payment or reimbursement against approved costs where practical; and
- the school will retain appropriate evidence and records for audit and assurance purposes.

4. Roles and responsibilities

4.1 Trustees

The Trustees retain overall oversight of the school's arrangements for the proper use of public funds. The Trustees have delegated approval of this policy to the Headteacher.

4.2 Headteacher

The Headteacher will:

- approve this policy under delegated authority from the Trustees;
- ensure appropriate arrangements are in place for the fair, consistent and compliant administration of the fund;
- ensure staff responsible for administering the fund understand the relevant funding requirements; and
- ensure appropriate financial controls, record keeping, and audit arrangements are maintained.

4.3 Director of Sixth Form

The Director of Sixth Form will:

- review this policy annually and recommend changes where required;
- oversee administration of the 16 to 19 Bursary Fund;
- ensure applications are assessed consistently against this policy and current DfE guidance;
- ensure actual need and participation costs are assessed and appropriately evidenced;
- ensure records of applications, decisions, awards and expenditure are maintained;
- monitor take-up, expenditure and the sufficiency of available funding; and
- inform students of the bursary award decision and any conditions attached to awards.

4.4 Students and Parents/Carers

Students and parents/carers must:

- provide complete and accurate information and evidence requested by the school;
- notify the school promptly of relevant changes in circumstances;
- use support only for the purpose for which it has been awarded; and
- provide receipts or other evidence of expenditure where required.

5. How we use the bursary fund

The bursary fund is used to support students with the essential costs of participating in their study programme. Depending on individual need, this may include:

- travel to and from school;
- essential books and course materials;
- specialist equipment or clothing required for a study programme;
- essential educational visits or fieldwork that form part of the study programme;
- approved travel or other essential costs associated with work experience;
- reasonable participation costs associated with university interviews or open days where the school is satisfied that the cost presents a genuine barrier;

- exceptional childcare top-up support where permitted by DfE rules and Care to Learn conditions; and
- other essential participation costs approved by the school following an individual assessment.

6. Eligibility criteria for a 16-19 bursary

6.1 Age

A student must be aged 16 or over, but under 19 on 31 August to be eligible for help from the bursary fund during the academic year.

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

In exceptional circumstances, the school may use discretion to support a younger student participating in an eligible 16 to 19 study programme, subject to DfE rules. Bursary funding cannot be awarded where another institution receives public funding for that student.

6.2 Residency

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

6.3 Asylum seeking children

Accompanied asylum-seeking children (under age 18 with an adult relative or partner) are entitled to education, but not to public funds.

Where permitted by DfE rules, the school may provide support in kind, such as essential books, equipment or a travel pass, provided the young person's asylum application has not been refused. Cash must not be paid to an asylum seeker unless the student is an unaccompanied asylum-seeking child, and the funding rules permit it.

Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children are treated as looked-after children and may be eligible for the defined vulnerable group bursary where they have an assessed financial need.

7. Bursaries for defined vulnerable groups

A student must meet one of the DfE defined vulnerable group categories in full and must also have a financial need. The defined vulnerable groups are students who are:

- in care;
- care leavers;
- receiving Income Support (IS) or Universal Credit (UC) because they are financially supporting themselves, or themselves and someone dependent on them who lives with them, such as a child or partner; and
- receiving Disability Living Allowance (DLA) or Personal Independence Payment (PIP) in their own right and also receiving Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) or Universal Credit (UC) in their own right.

Receipt of DLA or PIP alone does not meet the vulnerable group criteria. The school will verify eligibility and assess actual participation costs each academic year.

Up to £1,200 may be available for a student on a programme lasting 30 weeks or more where assessed costs justify that amount. A student will not automatically receive £1,200. Where assessed need is lower, the award will be lower.

Where a vulnerable student has evidenced participation costs above £1,200, additional support may be considered from the discretionary bursary fund or other school funds, subject to the relevant eligibility and assessment requirements.

7.1 Defining in care and care leavers

'In care' is defined as children looked after by a local authority on a voluntary basis (section 20 of the Children Act 1989) or under a care order (section 31 of the Children Act 1989). The term 'looked after child' is defined in section 22 of the Children Act 1989.

A 'care leaver' is defined as either a young person aged:

- 16 and 17 who was previously looked after for a period of 13 weeks consecutively (or periods amounting to at least 13 weeks), which began after the age of 14 and ended after the age of 16, or
- 18 or above who was looked after before turning 18 for a period of at least 13 weeks consecutively (or periods amounting to at least 13 weeks), which began after the age of 14 and ended after the age of 16.

8. Discretionary bursaries

The discretionary bursary is intended to support students who face financial barriers to participation but do not qualify for the defined vulnerable group bursary.

Consideration will be given to students whose salaried household income is £30,000 or less. This is a school eligibility threshold for prioritising applications and does not create an automatic entitlement to an award.

The school may also consider an application from a student above the income threshold where there is evidenced exceptional hardship or a significant change in circumstances.

In deciding whether support is required and the amount of any award, the school may consider:

- salaried household income and benefits;
- the student's actual and essential participation costs;
- distance and travel costs between home and school;
- the number of dependent children in the household;
- the requirements and costs of the student's study programme;
- caring responsibilities or other relevant responsibilities;
- exceptional financial circumstances, including a recent loss of household income; and
- other financial support available to the student.

The school may review its household income threshold where funding levels, demand or local circumstances make this necessary. Any change will be applied fairly and transparently.

There is no set limit for the amount of discretionary bursary that can be awarded to students.

9. Evidence and assessment of need

All applications must be supported by sufficient evidence to allow the school to establish eligibility and assess actual need. Evidence may include:

- the most recent three months of Universal Credit statements;
- the most recent three months payslips and/or a P60;
- benefit or pension award notices;
- evidence of self-employed income;
- evidence of other household income where relevant to the assessment;
- local authority confirmation of looked-after or care-leaver status;
- evidence of qualifying benefits in the student's own name for vulnerable-group applications; and
- evidence of actual participation costs, such as travel fares, quotes, invoices, course equipment lists or receipts.

The school may request additional evidence where this is reasonably necessary to make a fair assessment. Documents will be handled in accordance with the school's data-protection arrangements.

For students on a two-year study programme, the school may choose either to reassess household income annually or to check income at the beginning of the programme and obtain a signed and dated self-declaration in Year 13 confirming that household circumstances have not changed. Actual financial need and participation costs will still be assessed each academic year.

10. Application process

Students should apply by completing the bursary application form and submitting this with supporting evidence by 31 October 2026. This date enables the school to assess demand and allocate available funding fairly.

The fund will remain open throughout the academic year, and late applications will be considered after the main application period.

Applicants will be informed in writing of the outcome. Where support is approved, the notification will confirm the purpose and value of support and any relevant conditions.

11. Emergency meal and travel support

In a small number of cases involving severe hardship, the school may provide temporary discretionary support for food or travel on days when the student attends their study programme before the usual household-income checks are complete. This is an exceptional, short-term arrangement, and a full discretionary bursary assessment must follow.

The school will retain the records required by DfE guidance, including the student, dates, value and reason for support and signed confirmation of receipt where applicable.

12. Payment process

Payments (vulnerable and discretionary bursaries) will be made using the following process:

- receipts for expenditure and purchases are submitted with a claim form. Students are encouraged to submit weekly claims to help them manage their finances;
- claims are checked to ensure that the student meets the conditions of their award; and
- payments are made by BACs transfer to the student's bank account.

Receipts and other evidence of expenditure will be retained where required. For regular costs such as travel, the school may establish and evidence a reasonable unit cost and use the student's expected attendance pattern to calculate support, in accordance with DfE guidance.

13. Conditions for the receipt of bursary payments

Payment of the bursary is conditional on students meeting the following criteria in relation to their attendance and behavior:

- attendance 90% unless absence if authorised;
- excellent punctuality;
- meet the requirements of their Sixth Form Agreement of Planned Study: and
- attend all timetabled lessons.

Any attendance or participation condition will be applied reasonably. Before support is withheld, suspended or withdrawn, the school will consider the individual circumstances, including authorised absence, illness, disability, bereavement, caring responsibilities, safeguarding concerns and other exceptional circumstances.

Support may be withdrawn or reviewed where a student leaves the study programme, no longer has the relevant participation cost, provides materially inaccurate information, or uses funding for a purpose other than that approved. The student will be notified of the decision.

14. What the bursary fund cannot be used for

The Bursary fund (vulnerable and discretionary) must not be used for:

- general living costs or household bills;
- learning support or pastoral services that the school provides, such as counselling, mentoring or extra tutoring;
- non-essential extracurricular activities;
- non-essential trips or activities; and
- costs that are unrelated to the students study programme.

15. Changes in circumstances

Students and/or parents/carers must notify the school promptly of changes that may affect eligibility or the level of support required, including changes in household income, benefits, living arrangements or the student's programme.

The school may reassess an award where circumstances change. Students may a review of their award if an unexpected change creates additional financial hardship or participation costs.

16. Record keeping

The school will maintain sufficient records to demonstrate eligibility, assessment of actual need, the decision made, the purpose and value of awards, payments or in-kind support, and relevant receipts or cost evidence. Records will be retained securely in accordance with DfE audit requirements, the school's data-protection policy, privacy notices and retention schedule.

19. Monitoring and review

The Director of Sixth Form will review this policy annually, taking account of changes to DfE guidance, funding levels, demand and the operation of the scheme during the previous year. The Headteacher approves this policy under delegated authority from the Trustees. The next scheduled review is September 2027.

20. Key Reference

This policy has been reviewed and updated with reference to the Department for Education's 16 to 19 Bursary Fund guide: 2026 to 2027, updated 7 September 2026, GOV.UK.

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