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16-19 BURSARY FUND STATEMENT 2024-25

Introduction

The 16-19 Bursary Fund is a government funded scheme which provides financial support to help students overcome specific financial barriers to participation they may face so they can remain in education. The bursary fund is money that the student, or the school, can use to pay for essential costs associated with attending school or college for example, meals, transport between home and school/college, educational visits which form an essential part of the study course, UCAS fees, travel for university interviews, stationery, printing, books or equipment. It cannot be used to fund a student's general living costs.

There are two types of bursaries available: for defined vulnerable groups and discretionary. Each bursary is allocated based on students meeting the eligibility criteria and an individual assessment of financial need. The government sets out specific funding criteria for the vulnerable bursary, whilst the eligibility criteria for the discretionary bursary are awarded by the school in line with funding guidelines. In **both** cases, the school is responsible for determining whether a student's application has been successful.

St Nicholas Catholic High is dedicated to:

- Distributing 16-19 bursaries via a fair and equal process that is transparent, accountable, and easily understood.
- Ensuring that information regarding the application, award, and administration of 16-19 bursaries is available to all.
- Widening access to, and participation in, sixth form education.
- Ensuring all students who are eligible for funding have access to it.

Eligibility

Students who are resident in England and aged 16 but under 19 on 31 August before the academic year in question, will qualify for bursaries for that academic year. Students must meet the residency criteria in ESFA funding regulations for post 16 provision.

Students who are 19 or over can apply, but only for a discretionary bursary if they are continuing a course, they started aged 16 to 18 (19+ continuers), or have an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP), as long as their eligibility continues, and they are assessed to require continued financial support. Students under 16 will only receive bursaries in exceptional circumstances

Where a student's circumstances change, they can apply more than once.

All students will be assessed individually for either bursary. Evidence must be provided to support applications – a full list of supporting evidence is outlined in the 'Applying for a bursary' section below.

Vulnerable Bursary

This bursary award can pay up to £1,200 per year for eligible students if they are in one of the following defined vulnerable groups:

In care or a care leaver who has recently left local authority care receiving Income support or Universal Credit 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

- receiving Disability Living Allowance or Personal Independence Payments in their own right as well as Employment and Support Allowance or Universal Credit in their own right

Any student who is in a vulnerable defined group can apply for a vulnerable bursary, but it is not an automatic entitlement. Any award made will be the amount the student actually needs to participate in study. This may be pro-rated where the school deems it appropriate to do so, for example, if a student is undertaking a part-time course (study programme lasting less than 30 weeks). Alternatively, we may decide to allocate more than £1,200 if a student needs extra help to remain in education.

The school is responsible for determining whether a student is eligible for a vulnerable bursary, based on an assessment of actual financial need on an individual case by case basis. If a student meets the above criteria, but we believe a bursary is not required as they do not have any financial need and do not need further support, we may decide not to distribute a bursary to this student. This may include, for example, where:

- A student is attending specialist residential provision that covers their educational costs in full
- A student is taking a distance learning programme who has no financial barriers to participation, e.g., no travel or food costs.
- A student is in local authority care whose educational costs are covered in full by the local authority.
- A student is financially supported by their partner.

Discretionary bursary

Discretionary bursaries can be awarded to help with the costs associated with participating in education at school and will be based on an assessment of a student's individual circumstances and their actual financial need. There is no flat rate for the level of funding that can be awarded and will be based on the amount the student needs to participate in education however allocation of funds will only be decided once all applications have been processed to ensure fairness and equality. This is because the funding provided by the government is a fixed sum allocated to the school in advance and is not based on the number of applicants.

Household income will be used to establish individual student financial need as well as distance to travel to school, the number of dependent children in the household and actual participation needs the student has.

Students who are eligible to receive free school meals can apply however other sources of school funding for free meals will be considered when assessing their overall need for support from the bursary fund. In individual cases of severe hardship, the bursary fund can be used to provide food support.

Application process

All students joining or continuing in the schools sixth form at the start of September will be given the opportunity to apply. They must complete the 16-19 Bursary Application form and provide the necessary supporting documentation including a statement of actual participating costs. The school does understand that student's circumstances and needs can change at any time, so we do not implement a cut-off date for applications. However, wherever possible, applications should be submitted by 30th September of each academic year. Applications will be reviewed and approved by the School Business Manager and Director of Sixth Form. The school will endeavour to assess all applications received at the earliest opportunity.

Verifying the eligibility of all applicants is an integral feature of the assessment process. Students must supply suitable evidence to support their application. Copies of this evidence will be retained for six years for auditing purposes.

Evidence should be provided as follows:

Vulnerable bursary

Students must provide evidence that they are in receipt of the specified benefits in their own name or that they fully meet the definitions as follows.

- for students who are in care or a care leaver, written confirmation of their current or previous looked-after status from the relevant local authority - this is the local authority that looks after them or provides their leaving care services. The evidence could be a letter or an email but must be clearly from the local authority
- for students in receipt of Income Support or Universal Credit, a copy of their Income Support or UC award notice. This must clearly state that the claim is in the student's name/confirm they are entitled to the benefits in their own right. The evidence must not state any conditions that prevent them from participating in further education or training.
- for students receiving Universal Credit/Employment Support Allowance and Disability Living Allowance and Personal Independence Payments, a copy of their UC claim from DWP. Evidence of receipt of Disability Living Allowance or Personal Independence Payment must also be provided.

Discretionary bursary

Applicants must provide the type of evidence needed to verify their household income and/or transport costs. Documents will include 3 most recent monthly Tax Credits or Universal Credit award statements for example. Students eligible for Free School Meals do not need to provide any evidence as the Local Authority provides the school with confirmation of all eligible students.

Students should submit the documentation to the Finance Office as soon as possible after completing the application form. Documents should be placed in a sealed, clearly marked envelope 'For the attention of the Finance Office' and either hand-delivered to school reception or posted to the school.

Please note that providing false or incomplete information that leads to incorrect/overpayment may result in future payments being stopped and any incorrectly paid funds being recovered. This may also result in a referral to the Police with the possibility of the student and/or their family facing prosecution.

Conditions for receiving the bursary

Students must only spend bursary payments awarded to them to help them participate in education whilst attending St Nicholas Catholic High School as identified and agreed in their application.

All bursary awards will also be subject to students adhering to the Sixth Form Code of Conduct which includes expected standards of attendance, behaviour, and attainment. 100% attendance will be expected unless acceptable reason(s) are provided for it falling lower or absences are authorised. Bursary payments will be weighted 50% on attendance and 50% on behaviour/attainment (this will be judged based on SSA grades awarded in lessons where a minimum grade 2 will be considered acceptable). Payments may therefore be withheld/ stopped when:

- A student is absent for a period of four continuous weeks or more, excluding holidays or if there is evidence that they do not intend to return.

- A student withdraws themselves from a study programme.
- Money is not being spent for the reasons it was awarded.
- A student breaches any of the conditions for payment.

Students will be notified of any deductions and the reason(s) behind them and have the right to appeal against them through the usual appeal channels if they feel they have been unfairly treated. Before withholding any payments, the school will consider the effect that this may have on students' individual circumstances.

Paying the bursary

Where possible, payments will be paid in-kind rather than in cash – this may include, for example, school managed bus service passes, required books and equipment. Where cash payments are to be made to students, rather than in-kind, the funding will be paid by BACS transfer to the student's own bank account. Students will be provided with a payment schedule and will be required to provide receipts for cash expenditure where practicable.

Maintaining confidentiality

Any information given to the school will **only** be used for the purpose of processing your application for a 16-19 bursary. Your information, eligibility, or application (whether successful or not) **will not** be shared with other students or staff members. Where we deem it necessary to share this information, we will only do this with your **consent**, unless the law permits us to do so. We understand the need for maintaining confidentiality and appreciate that applications for the bursary are sensitive.

The school has the duty to protect public funds that are handled by the school. The information provided on the 16-19 Bursary Application form may be used to prevent and detect fraud. For the same reason, the information provided may be shared with third party organisations who handle public money. You will be informed if your information is being shared in accordance with the GDPR. The information will be held in accordance with storage requirements defined by the GDPR and will be held for as long as necessary.

Appeals process

If students disagree with the outcome of their application, or where payment has been withheld due to not meeting the outlined conditions, they should follow the schools complaints procedure, detailed in our Complaints Procedures Policy, available on the school website.

Further information

Full details and guidance are available on the government website: <https://www.gov.uk/1619-bursary-fund>. If you have any queries regarding the schools 16-19 bursary policy, please contact school via email to finance@st-nicholas.cheshire.sch.uk