St. Mark's Catholic School

SIXTH FORM BURSARY FUND POLICY

Effective Date:	Review Date:	Prepared by:	Designated SLT:	Governor's Committee:
Sept 2025	Sept 2027	JWI	JWI/WSH	Pastoral & Safeguarding, Finance & Resources

1. Aims

This policy sits firmly within the context of our school mission:

St Mark's is a Catholic community inspired by Gospel values where relationships are rooted in love. At the heart of our mission is a commitment to live out our faith and a dedication to embrace excellence in all that we do. We believe in education that instils possibilities, transforms lives and enables all to fulfil their potential.

We aim to:

- Have clear and transparent processes for the use and allocation of 16 to 19 bursary funds
- Make clear to parents/carers and students the type of support that is available and the means of applying for it
- Make clear to parents/carers and students the attendance and behaviour conditions for receiving the funds

2. Guidance

This policy is based on advice from the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) on the 16 to 19 bursary fund for the 2026 to 2027 academic year.

This policy complies with our funding agreement and articles of association.

3. Definitions

- '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)
- 'Looked after child' is defined as: a child in the care of a local authority or who is provided with accommodation by the authority in the exercise of any functions for more than 24 hours (section 22 of the Children Act 1989)
- 'Care leaver' is defined as:
    - A young person aged 16 and 17 who was previously looked after for a period of 13 weeks consecutively (or periods amounting to 13 weeks), which began after the age of 14 and ended after the age of 16, or
    - A young person aged 18 or above who was looked after prior to becoming 18 for a period of 13 weeks consecutively (or periods amounting to 13 weeks), which began after the age of 14 and ended after the age of 16

4. Roles and responsibilities

4.1 The governing body

The governing body has overall responsibility for approving this 16 to 19 bursary fund policy, and this will be reviewed by the Pastoral & Safeguarding and Finance & Resources committees.

The governing body also has overall responsibility for monitoring the implementation of this policy.

4.2 The headteacher

The headteacher is responsible for ensuring staff are familiar with this 16 to 19 bursary fund policy, and that it is being applied consistently.

4.3 Staff

Our staff are responsible for implementing this 16 to 19 bursary fund policy consistently.

The senior leadership team (SLT) will provide staff with appropriate training in relation to this policy and its implementation.

4.4 Parents/carers

Parents/carers are expected to notify staff or the headteacher of any concerns or queries regarding this 16 to 19 bursary fund policy.

5. How we use the bursary fund

Financial support is available to eligible students from the 16 to 19 bursary fund. See section 6 below for details of our eligibility criteria.

The fund is intended to support students aged 16 to 19 in overcoming specific financial barriers to participation so they can remain in education.

There are 2 types of 16 to 19 bursaries:

- Bursaries for defined vulnerable groups; and
- Discretionary bursaries

5.1 Bursary amounts

The 16-19 Bursary Fund is a limited fund determined by the ESFA. For 2026-27, the school has been allocated a total 16-19 Bursary Fund of £12876 . We use this money to support students annually.

The school will retain at least 10% of the 16-19 Bursary Fund to use as a hardship contingency fund to respond to exceptional or circumstantial in-year changes. The contingency fund will be reviewed in April 2027 and any remaining funds may be distributed to eligible young people.

We use the fund to provide students with support to fund:

- Transport
- Books
- Equipment

- Sixth Form Uniform
- Field trips and other course-related costs
- The costs of attending university interviews and open days
- Payment for submission of UCAS applications
- We will consider other costs that are essential to the completion of the Sixth form study programme.

6. Eligibility criteria for the 16 to 19 bursaries

Please note: the following eligibility criteria will be assessed **in addition** to the individual student's actual financial needs. No student will automatically be awarded an amount of funding without an assessment of the level of actual financial need they have.

6.1 Age

To be eligible for either bursary in the 2026 to 2027 academic year, students must be at least 16 years old but under 19 years old on 31 August 2026.

Students aged 19 or over are eligible only for a discretionary bursary if they:

- Are continuing on a study programme or course that they began when they were aged 16 to 18-years-old, or
- Have an education, health and care (EHC) plan

Students aged 19 or over are not eligible for bursaries for defined vulnerable groups.

In exceptional circumstances, where students under 16 years old are on a funded 16 to 19 study programme at our school, we may use our discretion to pay bursaries to these younger students. However, if these students are enrolled at another institution that receives public funding for them, they will not be eligible for bursary funding.

6.2 Eligible education provision

Students must be participating in provision that is subject to inspection by a public body that assures quality (e.g. Ofsted). The provision must also fall into 1 of these groups:

- Be funded directly by the ESFA or by the ESFA via a local authority;
- Be funded or co-financed by the European Social Fund;
- Be otherwise publicly funded and lead to a qualification (up to and including level 3) that is accredited by Ofqual or is on the ESFA's list of qualifications approved for funding 14 to 19; or
- Be a 16 to 19 traineeship programme

Non-employed students aged 16 to 19 who are participating in a Prince's Trust Team Programme are also eligible to receive a bursary in the same way as any other student participating in an eligible, publicly funded course.

Students are not eligible if:

- They are on an apprenticeship programme; or
- Are on any waged training

Students who are studying via distance learning are eligible for either 16 to 19 bursary, but are likely to require financial help on a more infrequent basis (e.g. travel to exams). If this is the case, we will provide support in-kind, such as a travel pass, details of which shall be decided on a case-by-case basis.

6.3 Residency

Students must meet the residency criteria in the ESFA funding regulations for post-16 provision.

6.4 Asylum seekers

Accompanied asylum seekers under 18 with an adult relative or partner, and asylum seekers aged 18 and above are entitled to education but are not entitled to public funds. If necessary, they can apply to the Home Office for suitable housing and cash for essentials.

We will provide in-kind support such as books, equipment and a travel pass to asylum seekers who have not had asylum refused.

Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children:

- Are the responsibility of the local authority;
- Are to be treated as 'looked after' children; and
- Are eligible for a bursary for vulnerable groups, where they have a financial need

When these students reach 18-years-old, we will consider their immigration status. They will still be eligible for a bursary as a student from a defined vulnerable group if the asylum claim is in their favour and will be treated as a 'care leaver' until they reach the upper age limit.

6.5 Bursaries for young people in defined vulnerable groups

Students with a financial need, who meet 1 of the following 4 criteria below, in addition to the criteria outlined in sections 6.1, 6.2 and 6.3 above, can apply for a bursary for vulnerable groups.

The defined vulnerable groups are students who are:

- In care (NB: those who are privately fostered are not classed as looked after);
- Care leavers;
- Receiving 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; or
- Receiving Disability Living Allowance (DLA) or Personal Independence Payments (PIPs) in their own right, as well as Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) or UC in their own right

UC has now replaced IS, as well as other benefits above, for current and future young people aged 16 to 18. However, students aged 19 to 25 and funded from the 16 to 19 budget (19+ continuers and students with an EHC plan) may still receive the legacy benefits listed above.

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 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.

6.6 Discretionary bursaries

In addition to the criteria outlined in sections 6.1, 6.2 and 6.3 above, students can apply for a discretionary bursary if they satisfy 1 or more of the following criteria:

- Their gross annual household income, as assessed by HM Revenue & Customs, does not exceed £29,500
- and/or; where the young person, or a sibling, qualifies for Free School Meals (FSM).
- If they receive a means tested benefit.
- We will also consider applications from any household in the postcode with an Index of Multiple Deprivation Decile between 1-3.

Students who were previously in receipt of pupil premium funding will be considered as having a strong indicator of potential financial need and are encouraged to apply. All applications will be assessed based on current household circumstances and actual financial need. The school will proactively contact all students who were previously in receipt of pupil premium funding to inform them of the bursary scheme and encourage them to apply if they have financial need.

Students who do not satisfy any of the criteria listed in this section, but who are able to demonstrate financial hardship arising from other reasons, may apply for a discretionary bursary under the Contingency fund:

"Any young person meeting general eligibility requirements and facing financial hardship due to exceptional reason or circumstance change (for example unexpected homelessness or sudden

change in household income) can apply to access the contingency funds on an individual basis by submitting an application in writing."

Applications for the contingency fund are completed in the same way as all other applications (see section 7 below). Applicants should clearly indicate on their application form that they are applying for contingency fund support due to exceptional circumstances.

In assessing any application for a discretionary bursary, we will consider:

- Level of household income
- Distance to travel between the student's home and the institution, or a location for a placement
- The number of dependent children in the student's household
- The requirements of their study programme
- Whether the student has additional responsibilities that may mean they need extra help

There is no set limit for the amount of discretionary bursary that can be awarded to students. We will base all decisions around which students receive a discretionary bursary, and how much bursary they receive, on each student's individual circumstances and their actual financial need.

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

6.7 Evidence

All applications to access the 16-19 Bursary Fund must be supported by appropriate evidence. Copies of evidence shall be retained by the school to provide financial assurance as required. All evidence will be treated as confidential and destroyed after 6 years of the young person leaving the school.

Examples of acceptable supporting evidence for the **Vulnerable Bursary** are:

- 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, copies of the relevant award notices. They must be entitled to the benefit in their own right and the evidence must not specify any conditions that prevent the young person from being in further education or training (some young people in receipt of benefits are not allowed to participate)
- for students in receipt of Universal Credit, a copy of their Universal Credit Award notice. They must be entitled to the benefit in their own right. They must also provide additional documentation to confirm their independent status, for example a tenancy agreement in the student's name, a child benefit receipt, children's birth certificates, utility bills etc
- for students receiving Universal Credit/Employment and Support Allowance and Disability Living Allowance and Personal Independence Payments, a copy of the student's Universal Credit or ESA award from DWP (UC claimants will be able to print off details of their award from their journal). Evidence of receipt of Disability Living Allowance or Personal Independence Payment, must also be provided

Examples of acceptable supporting evidence of total household income for the **Discretionary Bursary** are:

- A full T602E Tax Credit Award Notice (TCAN) for the young person's household. This document from HM Revenue & Customs details entitlement to Tax Credits and shows the total income for the year.
- Other Income Support or Universal Credit award letters that show evidence of income. For Universal Credit the 3 most recent award statements should be provided.
- P60 End of Year Certificate for all adults in the young person's household who contribute to household costs. This certificate is a statement of earnings from an employer. It must be for the correct adult(s) and for the correct Tax Year (to 5 April 2026). The income will be shown as Total for the Year.
- Pay slips from the previous 3 months.
- Self Assessment Tax Calculation (SA302). This is the equivalent of the P60 for self employed people. It must be for the correct adult(s) and for the correct Tax Year (to 5 April 2026). The income will be shown as Total for the Year.
- Evidence of other benefits, pension awards, etc.
- Confirmation from the Local Authority of entitlement to Free School Meals (FSM). provided.
- A check to ensure the Students home postcode is between deciles 1-3 as per the information provided by the Ministry for Housing for Financial Disadvantage.

7. Application and payment process

7.1 Applications

Initial applications should ideally be submitted by 31st October to a member of the Sixth Form leadership team to allow enough time for our school to assess the overall level of demand and make discretionary awards on a fair basis. This date will be clearly stated on the application form.

However, we acknowledge that students' circumstances may change and therefore the application process will remain open for the whole school year, both for the discretionary bursary and contingency fund. Late applications will be considered on a case-by-case basis and assessed using the same eligibility criteria. However, awards will be subject to available funding at the time of application. Applications for contingency fund support due to exceptional circumstances will be prioritised and assessed within 10 working days.

Applicants will be notified in writing (either via email or via letter) whether their application has been successful, together with the amount of funding awarded. If a student wishes to appeal the outcome of their application for a bursary, they must follow the school's complaints procedure.

7.2 Payment process

Payments are made using either of the following process:

- Payments will be via BACS payment to a bank account in the name of the young person. The young person must have a valid account in their name unless there are exceptional reasons which mean an appointee has been named to manage the affairs of the young person.

7.3 Conditions for the receipt of bursary payments

- Make in-kind payments, such as travel passes, books, Sixth form Uniform, equipment or vouchers for meals

Payments of the bursary are conditional on students meeting the following conditions in relation to their standards of attendance and behaviour:

- All Students in receipt of a Bursary must meet punctuality and attendance requirements of 90% to ensure continued support.
- In addition, all Students in receipt of a Bursary must behave appropriately and submit work of an appropriate level and to required deadlines.
- All Students in receipt of a bursary are to follow St Mark's Sixth-form code of conduct.

All students are required to sign a declaration confirming that they agree to these conditions.

Students who fail to meet these conditions may have their payment withheld, but we will always take students' individual circumstances into consideration. This includes considering the impact on attendance that might be caused by illness, caring responsibilities or other exceptional circumstances.

We will stop payments where students have been absent for a period of 4 continuous weeks or more (excluding holidays) and where students have decided to withdraw from a study programme.

We reserve the right to take back money from students where it is not spent for the reasons it was awarded.

We will consider the impact of such an action on the individual student before taking a final decision to do so, and any decision will be confirmed to the student in writing.

8. Change in circumstances

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

9. 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.These policies are outlined on our school website.

10. Unspent funds

Funding for discretionary bursary funding cannot be carried forward for more than 1 year. Unspent funding must be reported to the ESFA using the online enquiry form, specifying the amount of funding and the year/s it relates to, no later than 31 March each year. The ESFA will recover all unspent funds.

11. Monitoring arrangements

This policy will be reviewed by Jamie Windmill (Assistant Headteacher) and Wendy Sherriff (School Business Manager) every year. At every review, the policy will be approved by the Governing board and Andrea Waugh Lucas (Headteacher).