
16-19

BURSARY POLICY

ACADEMIC YEAR 26/27

Contents

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1. Purpose, scope and policy basis

The 16 to 19 Bursary Fund provides financial support to help students overcome specific financial barriers to participation so that they can remain in education. This policy sets out how Thornleigh Salesian College Sixth Form will administer both the bursary for defined vulnerable groups and the discretionary bursary during academic year 2026 to 2027.

All awards are subject to eligibility, an individual assessment of actual participation costs, available funding and the Department for Education (DfE) funding rules. The fund is ring-fenced and will not be used for purposes outside those rules.

This policy must be read alongside the DfE 16 to 19 Bursary Fund guide: 2026 to 2027 and the DfE funding rules for post-16 provision. Where national guidance changes, the national rules take precedence and this policy will be updated as soon as practicable.

Core rule: Eligibility alone does not create an automatic entitlement to a payment. Every award must reflect the student's actual, evidenced financial need to participate in their study programme. Flat-rate or blanket awards are not permitted.

2. Eligibility applying to all bursaries

2.1 Age

- For academic year 2026 to 2027, a student must normally be aged 16 or over but under 19 on 31 August 2026.
- Students aged 19 or over are eligible only for the discretionary bursary where they have an Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan or are continuing on the same study programme they started when aged 16 to 18 (a 19+ continuer).
- Students aged 19 or over are not eligible for the defined vulnerable group bursary.
- In exceptional circumstances, the College may use discretion to support a younger student who is participating in an eligible 16 to 19 study programme at the College.
- Students under 19 enrolled on higher education qualifications are not eligible.

2.2 Eligible education provision

- The student must be enrolled on eligible, publicly funded education or training that meets DfE funding rules and is subject to inspection by an appropriate public body.
- Students on apprenticeships or other waged training are employed rather than in education and are not eligible for the 16 to 19 Bursary Fund.
- Students enrolled at another institution that receives public funding for them are not eligible to receive a duplicate bursary from Thornleigh.

2.3 Residency

Students must meet the residency criteria in the DfE funding rules for post-16 provision. The College will see and retain the evidence required by those rules for audit purposes.

2.4 Asylum seekers and cross-border students

- Accompanied asylum-seeking students may receive in-kind support such as books, equipment or a travel pass while their asylum claim is live, but must not be given cash unless they are an unaccompanied asylum-seeking child (UASC).
- A UASC is treated as a looked-after child and may qualify for the defined vulnerable group bursary if they have financial need. Their immigration status must be reconsidered when they reach age 18.

3. Types of Bursary

3.1 Bursary for defined vulnerable groups

A student may qualify if they are in one of the following defined groups and have an evidenced financial need:

- in care (looked after by a local authority)
- a care leaver
- receiving Income Support or Universal Credit in their own right because they are financially supporting themselves, or themselves and a dependent living with them
- 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 in their own right

For this scheme, a care leaver is a young person who meets the DfE definition, including the relevant requirement to have been looked after for at least 13 weeks after age 14 and to have left care after age 16. Privately fostered students are not automatically classed as looked after for this purpose.

Support can be up to £1,200 for a full academic year where the student has eligible participation costs to that amount. The College must not automatically claim or award £1,200. Shorter or part-time programmes will normally result in a lower assessment unless fixed costs justify otherwise. Where actual need exceeds £1,200, additional support may be considered from the discretionary allocation or College funds, subject to the relevant eligibility and evidence rules.

A student may meet a vulnerable-group category but receive a zero bursary if their participation costs are already met or they have no relevant financial need. Zero-bursary students will still be recorded in the DfE funding claim and relevant data returns.

Evidence for defined vulnerable groups

- In care or care leaver: written confirmation (letter or email) from the relevant local authority of current or previous looked-after status or leaving-care services.
- Income Support or Universal Credit: an award notice or online statement showing the student's name and entitlement in their own right, with no condition that prevents participation in further education or training.
- DLA/PIP plus ESA/UC: evidence of both elements. DLA or PIP alone is not sufficient.

Eligibility and actual financial need will be checked for each academic year in which support is required. Copies of evidence will be retained for audit.

3.2 Discretionary bursary

The discretionary bursary is for students who need financial help with essential participation costs but do not qualify for the defined vulnerable group bursary, or who need additional eligible support beyond it.

At Thornleigh, students are eligible to apply where they are in receipt of Free School Meals (FSM) or the combined household gross income is £28,000 or below per annum. Meeting the threshold permits an application but does not guarantee an award.

Household income is an eligibility indicator. The amount of any award will be based on the student's individual circumstances and actual participation costs, for example travel distance, study-programme requirements and other relevant household pressures.

If available funds are insufficient to meet all eligible requests, the College will prioritise support according to the level and urgency of evidenced financial need and the extent to which the cost is a barrier to the student's participation in education. The College will use reasonable discretion to direct available funding to students most in need.

Household-income evidence

- The College may use evidence such as recent payslips, P60s, self-employment accounts, tax-credit or benefit award letters and Universal Credit statements.
- For Universal Credit, the College may request the 3 most recent monthly statements and consider take-home pay together with Universal Credit after deductions to estimate annual household income.
- Students must submit a bursary application for each academic year. For a continuing Year 2 student whose household income was evidenced and checked at the start of their study programme, the College may accept a signed and dated declaration confirming that household circumstances have not changed instead of requesting the same income evidence again. Fresh evidence will be required where circumstances have changed or where the College considers it necessary. An individual assessment of actual participation needs will still be completed each year.
- FSM history may indicate possible need but will not replace an individual assessment of current financial need.

4. Application and assessment process

4.1 How to apply

Applications and claims must be made through the College's Applicaa bursary portal: <https://thornleighsixthformbursary.applicaa.com/>

Students must submit the required supporting evidence and complete the declaration within the application.

- Applications are treated confidentially and information is shared only where necessary for verification, administration, safeguarding, audit or where required by law.
- Students are encouraged to submit their bursary application by 31 October 2026 so that the College can assess overall demand and put support in place promptly. Applications will remain open throughout the academic year and students may apply later where financial or home circumstances change, an unexpected need arises, or they become newly eligible.
- The application must capture eligibility, household income where relevant, and the student's actual financial barriers and participation costs.
- The student must sign or electronically confirm the application. The declaration confirms that information and evidence are complete and accurate and that false or incomplete information may lead to payments being stopped, recovery of overpayments and possible referral to the police.
- Application support, alternative formats, translated guidance and reasonable adjustments will be provided on request.
- The College will try to process complete applications and claims within 15 working days of receiving all required evidence. Where further information is needed or there is an unavoidable delay, the student will be advised.

4.2 Assessment of actual need

For every application, the College will record the planned amount required for each participation need and the calculation supporting it. Decisions will be based on actual costs and individual circumstances, not on a fixed allowance or income band.

- The College will take account of costs already met from other sources, including local authority support, free meals, Care to Learn or SEND funding, to avoid double-funding.
- For travel, the College will consider the relevant local authority post-16 transport statement and local offers and will seek best value before bursary funding is used.
- For shorter or part-time study programmes, the length and weekly hours of study will be considered alongside any fixed course costs.

4.3 Decision and award notification

The College will communicate the outcome of each application. Where support is approved, the award notification will state the value, purpose, method of support or payment, frequency where relevant, and the conditions that apply. The College will make clear that funding is not guaranteed and may be reduced, withheld or withdrawn if eligibility, need or agreed conditions change.

5. What the bursary can and cannot fund

5.1 Eligible support

Bursary funding may be used only for essential costs a student would otherwise need to meet in order to participate in their study programme. Examples include:

- travel to and from the College, including eligible local public-transport costs and industry-placement travel
- essential books, stationery, course materials and specialist equipment
- specialist clothing required for the study programme, and in exceptional cases clothing or footwear that is genuinely necessary to access education
- essential field trips and activities that are clearly mapped to study-programme goals or course objectives
- costs of attending industry placements, university interviews or open days where needed for participation or progression
- UCAS application fees
- meals where appropriate and not already fully met through free-meals provision
- a top-up to Care to Learn childcare support only where the Care to Learn maximum is already being paid, the top-up is necessary and all Care to Learn rules are met; any top-up will be paid directly to the childcare provider
- a Chromebook, laptop or other essential device where required for the study programme. Where suitable for reuse, equipment remains College property and must be returned under the loan agreement

5.2 Costs that must not be funded

The bursary fund will not be used for:

- general living or household costs, including rent, bills or broadband/Wi-Fi
- learning-support or pastoral services the College provides, such as counselling, mentoring or extra tutoring
- servicing or routine maintenance of laptops or tablets
- non-essential extra-curricular or enrichment activities that are not necessary for study-programme goals or course objectives
- foreign or overseas field trips where the learning can be achieved in England at materially lower cost, or trips that are not an essential part of study-programme goals or course objectives
- replacing a local authority's statutory transport duty
- blanket subsidies, such as canteen subsidies, facilities fees, or block provision of books/equipment to all students
- travel support for all students regardless of financial need
- bonus payments or other incentives for attendance or achievement
- marketing or recruitment incentives designed to give the College a competitive advantage

6. Payments, in-kind support and evidence of expenditure

6.1 Preferred methods

The College will normally provide support in-kind wherever practical, for example by purchasing travel passes, meals, books or equipment. Where in-kind support is provided, students will be told its value and how it counts toward their agreed bursary support.

Where a monetary payment or reimbursement is made to a student, it will be paid by BACS to the student's own bank account. The College will not make cash payments. Payment to another person's account will only be considered in exceptional circumstances where the student cannot manage their own funds and suitable arrangements have been agreed.

Large or lump-sum bursary payments will not be made. Regular BACS payments may be used where appropriate, taking account of the reason for the award, the student's circumstances and local arrangements.

6.2 Receipts and evidence

- All expenditure must be supported by evidence of actual cost. Receipts will be retained for audit.
- For regular costs such as travel or food, the College may retain initial evidence of the unit cost and calculate expected support by reference to the student's actual attendance pattern rather than collect a receipt for every transaction.
- The College may request additional receipts at agreed points during the year.
- Where asking a student to pay first would itself create a barrier, the College will use in-kind or advance arrangements rather than require the student to incur the cost before support is provided.

7. Emergency hardship support

The College may retain a small emergency element of its discretionary allocation for students whose circumstances change unexpectedly and affect their ability to participate. Emergency awards remain subject to the funding rules and must be evidenced.

In cases of severe hardship, temporary meal or travel support may be provided on attendance days before the usual household-income evidence checks are complete. This is limited to food or travel and a full discretionary bursary assessment must follow. For audit, the College will retain the number of students supported, number of days, value provided to each student, the reason, and signed confirmation that the funding was received for food or travel.

8. Conditions of award, attendance and withdrawal

Attendance and engagement will be monitored to ensure bursary support continues to help the student participate in their study programme. The College does not apply a fixed attendance percentage threshold for bursary eligibility or payment. Where attendance or engagement gives cause for concern, the student's individual circumstances will be considered before any decision is made to withhold, suspend or withdraw support.

- Students are expected to attend required classes and activities, maintain appropriate standards of punctuality and conduct, and engage reasonably with their study programme. These expectations will be communicated clearly to students and will not be used as an attendance incentive or bonus.
- The student must sign or electronically accept the relevant conditions. The College will retain evidence of that agreement.
- Any decision to withhold, suspend or withdraw support will consider the student's individual circumstances, including disability, SEND, health, safeguarding and other contextual factors.
- Where equipment is provided for reuse, return at the end of the study programme (or earlier if support ends) may be a condition of the award.
- A decision to suspend or withdraw support will be communicated with reasons and information about review/appeal arrangements.

9. Appeals and complaints

9.1 Appeals

A student, parent or guardian may request a review of a bursary decision by writing to the Head of Sixth Form within 21 days of the decision, explaining the grounds for review and any relevant new evidence. The review will be considered by staff who were not solely responsible for the original decision wherever practicable, and an outcome will normally be issued within 14 school days.

9.2 Complaints

Complaints about how an application or support has been managed should follow the College's published Complaints Procedure. The DfE does not normally administer individual student complaints; it may become involved where there is an allegation that national eligibility criteria or funding guidance have been disregarded.

10. Safeguarding, equality and data protection

- Administration of the bursary will follow the College Safeguarding Policy and Data Protection Policy. Personal information will be processed lawfully and stored securely.
- The College will comply with the Equality Act 2010 and will not discriminate directly or indirectly because of protected characteristics.
- Reasonable adjustments will be made for disabled students and students with SEND, language barriers or other access needs. Where support is properly funded through SEND or another statutory route, the bursary will not duplicate that funding.
- Safeguarding considerations will inform the choice of payment method and arrangements for vulnerable students.

11. Governance, records, audit and fraud

11.1 Governance and administration

- Operational responsibility rests with the Headteacher and School Business Manager, with appropriate oversight by the governing body.
- The governing body will receive annual monitoring information including applications, awards, total spend, unspent balances, appeals and relevant audit findings.
- No more than 5% of the College's 2026 to 2027 discretionary bursary allocation may be used for administration of the scheme, subject to the DfE rules where bursary and free-meals allocations are combined.

11.2 Records and retention

The College will keep robust student-level records showing eligibility, the individual assessment of actual need, the amount planned for each need, the amount and purpose of support, whether it was paid/provided, the justification for the decision, receipts/evidence of cost, and any attendance evidence required to support payments.

Hard-copy or electronic evidence supporting eligibility and funding will be retained for 6 years, including application forms, household-income evidence, evidence of actual financial need, signed terms/conditions and payment documentation.

11.3 Fraud and recovery

- If a student or parent knowingly provides misleading or fraudulent information, the College will stop future payments where appropriate and seek recovery of any overpayment.
- The College may refer suspected fraud to the police and will report significant fraud to DfE where required. Significant fraud may include cases over £1,200, novel/unusual/systemic/complex fraud, or cases likely to attract significant public interest.

12. DfE funding claims, data returns and unspent funds

12.1 Defined vulnerable group funding claims

Before a claim is submitted, the College must have verified the student's eligibility and actual financial need and must have calculated the actual amount required. Claims must not default to £1,200.

The expected DfE claim windows for 2026 to 2027 are: 7 September to 11 November 2026; 4 January to 10 February 2027; and 17 May to 30 June 2027. DfE may change these dates and College staff will follow the latest DfE communications. Claims will be submitted through DfE Sign-in.

Unused vulnerable-group funding will be recycled to support other eligible students where permitted. From 1 May 2027, unused correctly claimed vulnerable-group funding may be added to the discretionary bursary or returned to DfE. Incorrectly claimed funding that cannot be appropriately recycled must be reported to DfE for recovery.

12.2 Unspent discretionary funding

Unspent bursary funding may be carried forward for no more than one academic year and must continue to be used only for purposes permitted by the bursary rules. Funds older than the permitted carry-forward period must be reported and returned in accordance with DfE instructions, normally no later than 31 March once identified.

12.3 Data returns

The College will complete the school census and any other required returns to record students receiving support. This includes eligible vulnerable-group students who receive a zero bursary and any relevant industry-placement fields. Records will be maintained so that DfE claims can be validated against census data.

13. Free meals and avoiding double-funding

Where a student is eligible for free meals, the value of that provision will be considered when assessing their overall bursary need. A student who qualifies for a defined vulnerable group bursary is not automatically entitled to free meals because free meals have separate eligibility criteria. Where bursary and free-meals funding are treated as a single allocation, the College will ensure eligible students continue to receive free meals, including during eligible work placements.

14. Specific groups and circumstances

14.1 Young offenders

- A young offender may apply if serving a non-custodial sentence, released early from custody other than on temporary licence, or remanded to a non-secure institution.
- A young offender is not eligible while serving a custodial sentence, released on temporary licence, or remanded to a secure institution.
- Where support is provided to a young offender, in-kind support will be preferred wherever possible.

14.2 Distance learning

Distance-learning students will normally have fewer participation costs. Where a genuine financial barrier is identified, support will normally be provided in-kind, for example a temporary travel pass to attend examinations.

15. Transparency, communications and support

- This policy will be published early enough to inform students considering their post-16 options. It will clearly identify the support as being provided from the 16 to 19 Bursary Fund.
- The College will publicise the bursary through appropriate channels, including enrolment information and direct communications to students, and may work with local authority and support services to identify students who may be eligible.
- The College will maintain confidentiality in promotional and application materials so students feel able to seek support.
- The School Business Manager is the primary contact for bursary administration. Application support and reasonable adjustments are available on request.

16. Review

This policy will be reviewed annually and approved through the College's governance arrangements. It will be reviewed sooner where DfE guidance, funding rules, local transport arrangements, legal requirements or operational circumstances change.

Appendix A - Reference

Department for Education, "16 to 19 Bursary Fund guide: 2026 to 2027", updated 4 August 2026: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/16-to-19-bursary-fund-provider-guide/16-to-19-bursary-fund-guide-2026-to-2027>