2026 -27 Student Bursary and Free College Meals Guidelines and Information

2026-27 Student Bursary and Free College Meals Information

These guidelines are for any young person who will be attending St John Rigby College from September 2026 and any Parents/Carers who are financially responsible for the young person.

What is the Student Bursary?

The Government provide College with an allocation of funds to help students who face financial barriers to continue in full-time education. St John Rigby College ensures that this money is awarded to those students who are in most financial need.

All applications for the Student Bursary and Free College Meals are assessed on an individual basis and the support offered will vary according to each student's individual circumstances. There is not an automatic entitlement to the bursary fund even if all criteria are met; students must demonstrate an actual financial need.

The Student Bursary can assist with the costs of food and refreshments, essential trips and visits, travelling to College, stationery, text books, print credits and other associated costs related to attending a programme of study.

Who can apply for the Student Bursary?

A student can apply for the bursary if they are enrolled on a full-time course at St John Rigby College, and also meet the following eligibility criteria:

- Aged 16-18
- Aged 19+ who are in the second year of a course that they started when they were aged 16-18
- Aged 19+ who have an Education Health Care Plan (EHCP)
- Students who are settled in the UK and have been ordinarily resident in the UK for at least three years prior to the start of their course.

Will the Student Bursary be Income Assessed?

There are certain instances where the application will not be income assessed, for example, if the student is in care or lives with a foster carer (more details are available on the following page). However, the Student Bursary will be assessed on household income in the following instances:

- Applications from students who live with both parents/carers will be assessed on the household income of both parents/carers combined
- Applications from students who live with a parent/carer and a step-parent/carer will be assessed on the income of both adults combined
- Applications from students who live with a lone parent/carer, will be assessed on the income of the lone parent
- If a student lives with a partner, the household income of both the student and partner will be assessed
- If a student lives independently, and their parents/carers do not contribute towards their living costs, only the student's income will be assessed.

Where a student lives with somebody other than those mentioned above, the application will be considered on a case by case basis.

What are the different types of bursary available at St John Rigby College?

<table>
<tr><th></th><th>Bursary Name</th><th>Eligibility Criteria</th><th>Other Information</th></tr>
<tr><td>1</td><td>Enhanced Bursary
The Enhanced Bursary can be up to a maximum of £1,200 a year to assist with the costs of studying at College (such as meals, travel, books, equipment etc.).</td><td>This bursary is available to any student who meets one of the following eligibility criteria:
Students who are in care (including a young person placed with a foster carer by the local authority and unaccompanied asylum seekers
Care Leavers (please see appendix A for the Government's definition of a Care leaver)
Students who receive Income Support (IS), or Universal Credit (UC) because they are financially supporting themselves and live independently OR financially supporting themselves and someone living with them such as a child or partner
Students who receive Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) or Universal Credit (UC) in their own right AND Personal Independence Payments (PIP) r Disability Living Allowance (DLA).</td><td>It should be noted that even if a student meets the criteria for the Enhanced Bursary this does not necessarily mean that they will automatically receive a financial award (as this would be dependant upon their actual financial need). Some students may be entitled to:
all elements of the bursary (travel, meals, essential trips and other associated costs)
one element of the bursary (such as travel)
and others could potentially not be entitled to any.</td></tr>
<tr><td>2</td><td>Income Assessed Bursary
This bursary is available to any student who does not meet any of the above criteria for the Enhanced Bursary, and lives in a household where the total household income (including earnings, benefits, pensions, lettings and other sources) is beneath a set amount per year. When assessing whether a student is eligible for financial support from the Income Assessed Bursary, St John Rigby College will take into consideration:
the number of dependents within the household
distance needed to travel to College
costs associated with the student's programme of study.</td><td>The table below shows the household income thresholds for 2026-27 that will be used to assess the Income Assessed Bursary.<table><tr><th>No. of Dependants</th><th>Household Income Threshold</th></tr><tr><td>1</td><td>Below £37,001</td></tr><tr><td>2</td><td>£37,001 - £42,000</td></tr><tr><td>3</td><td>£42,001 - £47,000</td></tr><tr><td>4</td><td>£47,001 - £52,000</td></tr><tr><td>5</td><td>£52,001 - £57,000</td></tr><tr><td>6</td><td>£57,001 - £62,000</td></tr><tr><td>7 +</td><td>£62,001 - £67,000</td></tr></table></td><td>A dependent is defined as a child/young person that resides in the household and for whom child benefit is received.

When calculating the total household income, St John Rigby College uses net earnings (rather than gross) and does not include any PIP or DLA payments as part of the calculation.

The amount, and type, of financial support provided will be confirmed if your Income Assessed Bursary application is successful. Therefore, any bursary provided will be based on an assessment of circumstances and actual financial need.</td></tr>
</table>

	Bursary Name	Eligibility Criteria	Other Information
3	**Free College Meals** Students can apply for Free College Meals as a standalone entitlement (when they are not eligible for the Enhanced or Income Assessed Bursary).	Students who are between 16-18 on 31st August 2026 will be eligible for Free College Meals if they, or their parents/carers, are in receipt of at least one of the following benefits (students who turn 19 during the academic year are still eligible for that year): • Universal Credit • Income-related Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) • Support under Part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 • The **guaranteed element** of State Pension Credit	**N.B.** If the student received Free School Meals in Year 11 Of High School this does **not** mean that they will be eligible to receive Free College Meals. The Government rules relating to Free School and College Meals have now changed and a new assessment of eligibility has to be undertaken when the student enters Further Education.

What other forms of financial support may be available to students?

1. Childcare Costs

Students aged 16-19, as of the 31st August 2026, can apply for support with childcare via Care to Learn (C2L). This is a government scheme that helps with childcare costs so that a student can attend a course of their choice. The maximum amount of money that a student can get is up to £180 per week per child which is paid directly to the chosen childcare provider. C2L not only helps with the costs of daily childcare, it can also help with the cost of a deposit and registration fees, a taster session for up to 5 days, keeping the childcare place over the summer holidays and travel expenses associated with taking the child to the provider. Payments are made on a monthly basis after the childcare provider has confirmed that the child is attending nursery and after we have confirmed that the student is attending college. All students who wish to apply for C2L must complete a separate application form (available on request) and provide certain evidence, such as, the child's full birth certificate and proof that the student receives child benefit for them.

In exceptional cases, the bursary fund may be used to provide further help with childcare costs for those young parents already in receipt of C2L. This would only occur if the childcare costs exceed the C2L scheme's weekly maximum rates (i.e., £180 per week). Only childcare provision eligible under the C2L scheme rules can be used and the College must hold evidence that the maximum amount is already being paid, thus confirming that a top up is required. Any such top-up will be paid directly to the childcare provider, not to the student.

You can find out more information about C2L by visiting https://www.gov.uk/care-to-learn.

N.B. Applying for C2L does not affect the bursary application because the two are totally separate.

2. Our Pass Travel Scheme

'Our Pass' is a free bus travel scheme for 16-18 year olds who live and travel within the Greater Manchester area. Visit www.ourpass.co.uk for more information on the scheme and to apply.

It is always advisable to apply for this as soon as possible so that the student will have their Our Pass when they start their college course. An 'Our Pass' will cost £10 and this fee will be reimbursed by the Bursary Fund if the bursary application is successful and the student is applying for an Our Pass for the first time. If a student is returning for a second year at College and had an 'Our Pass' during the last academic year, they can continue to use it again this academic year but will not receive a further refund.

Please note: if a student uses an 'Our Pass' for journeys to and from college, they will not be eligible for a travel contribution from the bursary (other than claiming back the £10 administration fee).

The pass can be used from the 1st September following the student's 16th birthday until 31st August following their 18th birthday.

If the student lives outside the Greater Manchester area, is not eligible for an 'Our Pass' or needs to use alternative transport methods they may be eligible for financial support for travel from the bursary fund.

3. Emergency Support

Where a student is experiencing severe financial hardship, due to a domestic emergency for example, St John Rigby College may be able to provide emergency support on a short-term basis. This support could be providing meal support on the days that the student attends College, or alternatively, by covering the cost of other items such as print credits or an essential text book.

Such emergency support can only be awarded for a student that St John Rigby College considers to be in real need without undertaking the usual checks on household income or gathering of other evidence that would normally be required. These awards are therefore exceptional and will be made on a case by case basis and are at the discretion of the Vice Principal for Students.

When can I apply to the Bursary Fund?

New Students or New Programmes of Study - applications for the 2026-27 Student Bursary can only be made after enrolment (this is usually 24 hours after a student has enrolled).

New Applications are made through the PayMyStudent Portal (a separate guide is available regarding how to set up an account on PayMyStudent). This is a one-stop system you can use to apply for a range of financial support (detailed on the previous pages) which may be available to a student aged 16-19, subject to personal circumstances and eligibility. Applying for financial support through PayMyStudent is simple – you fill out one application form and submit this together with the supporting evidence we use to determine your eligibility for the different types of financial support available.

The deadline date for the first phase of applications is **31st August 2026**. (Note: the second phase is explained in a later section of this document).

[*Returning students who are continuing a previous programme of study will be sent individual instructions regarding the application process for 2026-27*].

Will I need to provide evidence when I apply for the bursary?

Evidence will be required to provide proof of earnings, benefits, number of dependents, proof of care status and any other sources of income coming into the household. If all required evidence is not received, then the application for funds cannot be assessed. The bursary office will contact the applicant, or their parents/carers, to request any missing evidence, but please attempt to provide as much as possible when the application is submitted.

After answering the questions in the PayMyStudent portal, you will be told which documents are needed. Please make sure that any images / files are complete before you upload them to your application, as incomplete documents will delay your application being assessed.

I have uploaded my documents to the system – do I also need to take paper copies into College?

We will get in touch if we need to see paper copies of any documents. It should be noted that such a request would be unlikely and may only occur if an evidence document / image has a section missing when it is uploaded.

The PayMyStudent Portal will not let me register or says that the information I am providing is incorrect:

To activate your account we need to have an email address for you on our system – this will be the email you provided when you applied to St John Rigby College. If you still cannot register, let us know and we will investigate further.

What if I have already submitted an application and I need to change something on the Student Portal?

You will continue to have access to your application so if changes need to be made, please access your account and make the necessary amendments.

How will I know if I have been successful and when will I receive my bursary?

We will write to all applicants to let them know whether their application has been successful. If successful, the letter will contain details of the student's individual Bursary Entitlement for the academic year 2026-27.

All applications from students who have not received financial assistance from the bursary fund previously will be treated as successful during September 2026 (i.e., they will receive the meal and travel entitlement for this month). Therefore, a letter will be sent to all new applicants at the end of September to let them know whether the bursary entitlement will be continuing for the rest of the academic year.

It is hoped that those students who received a bursary entitlement in 2025-26 will be made aware of whether their application for 2026-27 is successful before the start of September 2026.

Bursary awards will be backdated to the date that the application is ready to be processed (i.e., when the application form and all required evidence has been received).

Please note that a successful award in one year does not guarantee a future award. New evidence of eligibility must be submitted each academic year.

Bank Details

BACS transfers (Bankers Automated Clearing Services) are one method of ensuring that students receive their bursary entitlement (for example, if a student requires a refund for their Our Pass or UCAS application). **Such BACS transfers can only be made into the student's own bank account – they cannot be paid into a parents/carers account.** Students can open a basic bank account at aged 16 which will allow BACS transfers - a request for bank account details is included on the Student Bursary Application Form.

Changes in Circumstances

It is very important that St John Rigby College is notified of any changes to the student's, and or parents/carers, personal or financial circumstances. This is especially important if these changes result in the student no longer being eligible for bursary funding. Failure to notify College of such changes may make the student and or parents/carers liable to repay the cost of funds already received.

What should I do if I am not happy with any decision relating to my bursary application?

If a student (or parent/carer) wishes to appeal against a decision, they should write to the Vice Principal (Students) within 10 days of the decision, stating fully their reasons for the appeal.

If I miss the initial deadline of 31st August 2026 can I apply later in the year?

Students can apply at any time during the academic year for the Student Bursary. However, as stated above they will only start to receive any awards when their application and evidence have been received in full so that the assessment process can be undertaken.

In addition, it should be noted that the amount of money that the College receives from the Government is fixed and is not increased at any point during the academic year. St John Rigby College aim to provide financial assistance to as many students as possible, but it is always advisable to apply as soon as possible.

In the event that there is a shortfall in funding and St John Rigby College is unable to make awards to all eligible applicants, the College will prioritise eligible students based on their individual needs and circumstances.

Can I only apply for the Student Bursary once during an academic year?

If an application for the Student Bursary has been rejected, students can apply again at any point during the remainder of the year if their circumstances have changed, or if their parents/carers financial circumstances have changed.

Are there any conditions for receiving support from the Student Bursary?

Bursary Funds are available to support the costs of attending College and associated study. Therefore, if a student's attendance or behaviour is not deemed to be satisfactory, or assessed work is not being handed in on time, then the bursary support may be suspended until improvements are evident. It is important that all applicants are aware that they may be asked to repay funds, and could be billed accordingly, if the student fails to complete the course.

Confidentiality and Data Protection

The data requested on the bursary application form, and any associated evidence, will only be used for the purpose of assessing a student's eligibility for financial support from the bursary fund and will be treated with the strictest confidence. The applications and evidence are only seen by staff involved in the implementation and monitoring of the Student Bursary. All such information is stored securely.

Government auditors can request to see the bursary application data. This is to ensure that St John Rigby College are complying with Government guidelines in relation to administering the 16-19 Student Bursary.

Our external catering company must be informed of successful applicants so that the students can receive any necessary food and refreshment entitlements. They will only be provided with the assessment decision and no information relating to the application and associated evidence.

St John Rigby College may report cases to the ESFA (Education and Skills Funding Agency) where Bursary Awards have been made, and the application is subsequently found to be fraudulent.

Bursary applications and supporting documentation will be retained for six years after the student has left College and will then be securely destroyed.

If you have any queries relating to the need and use of the data provided as part of the application process, please contact the Data Protection Officer, St John Rigby College, Gathurst Lane, Orrell, WN5 9LJ.

Appendix A

The Government Guidelines define a Care Leaver as either:

- A young person aged 16 and 17 who was previously looked after 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 - they do not need to have entered care after their 14th birthday to be eligible, they can have entered care at any age, but they must have spent at least 13 weeks in care after their 14th birthday before leaving after the age of 16

- 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