



Student Bursary, Free College Meals and Care to Learn Policy

Mission Statement

We are a Catholic College dedicated to the education and development of the whole person and supporting all students to realise their full potential. As an outstanding learning organisation SJR will have a strong sense of purpose and a commitment to shared values within a Christian community. We will establish a unique, safe and challenging environment where every individual is valued, talents are recognised and nurtured, achievements are celebrated and dedication is rewarded. To achieve this as a community we will:

- Welcome all students who are happy to be educated within a Christian environment
- Value the uniqueness and dignity of each individual
- Deliver the highest standards of teaching and learning
- All show a commitment to our work, to the Christian values of the College and to the safety of all in our community
- Provide equality of opportunity, with mutual respect and positive encouragement
- Build and further develop local, national and international partnerships.

Policy Statement

This document sets out the 16-19 Bursary Fund guidance issued by the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) and the College's eligibility criteria for students attending St John Rigby College as determined by the College for Discretionary Awards. A copy of the ESFA's 16-19 Bursary Fund Guide for 2026-27 can be accessed via the gov.uk website: [16 to 19 education: financial support for students - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/16-to-19-education-financial-support-for-students). Please note that any information that is gathered to check the eligibility of a student is treated as confidential.

Summary of the 16-19 Bursary Fund for 2026 -2027

1. Purpose and scope

St John Rigby College is committed to ensuring that financial hardship does not prevent students from participating in education, progressing on programme or achieving positive outcomes. In line with the College mission to support the education and development of the whole person, this policy sets out the framework for administering the 16 to 19 Bursary Fund, Free Meals in Further Education (referred to in this policy as Free College Meals) and Care to Learn during the 2026 to 2027 academic year.

This policy is intended for students, parents and carers, staff and governors. It provides a clear operating framework for eligibility, assessment, decision making, payment controls, audit requirements and review. Where a point is not explicitly covered in this document, the relevant Department for Education funding rules and conditions of grant will take precedence.

2. Regulatory framework

This policy has been aligned to the current national funding framework for 2026 to 2027. In particular, the College will administer support in accordance with the Department for Education 16 to 19 Bursary Fund guide: 2026 to

2027, the Care to Learn academic year 2026 to 2027 conditions of grant funding, post 16 funding rules, the Equality Act 2010 and the UK General Data Protection Regulation and Data Protection Act 2018.

3. Core principles

- Support will be targeted at essential participation costs so that eligible students can take part in education and remain on programme.
- Every bursary decision will be based on an assessment of individual need and actual participation costs, not on automatic entitlement.
- The College will not make blanket, flat rate or fixed rate bursary awards that are not evidenced by actual cost and need.
- Household income is an important assessment factor for the discretionary bursary, but income alone will not determine the amount awarded.
- Where possible, support will be provided in kind, for example by travel passes, meal credits, equipment purchase or direct payment to a supplier or provider.
- The College will operate a fair, confidential and auditable process and will retain appropriate evidence to support decisions and payments.
- The College will manage its bursary budget prudently and may prioritise the highest need cases where demand exceeds available funding.

Important: Meeting an eligibility threshold or belonging to a defined vulnerable group does not create an automatic entitlement to a fixed award. Support will only be agreed where there is evidenced financial need and identified participation cost.

4. General eligibility

To receive support from the 16 to 19 Bursary Fund, students must meet the age, residency and eligible provision requirements set by the Department for Education.

- Students will normally be aged 16 or over but under 19 on 31 August 2026.
- For the discretionary bursary only, the College may also support eligible 19+ continuers on the same programme and students aged 19 or over who have an Education, Health and Care Plan, where national rules allow.
- Students must be enrolled on eligible publicly funded 16 to 19 provision at St John Rigby College.

The College may request evidence of residency, funding eligibility and enrolment status as part of the application process. Students and families must notify the College promptly if circumstances change.

5. Types of support available

5.1 Enhanced Bursary (for defined vulnerable groups)

A bursary for defined vulnerable groups is available to students who meet the national criteria and who have a genuine financial need. The College will apply the national definitions in full. As at 2026 to 2027, the defined vulnerable groups are students who are:

- in care (including a young person placed with a foster carer by the local authority and unaccompanied asylum seekers)
- care leavers
- receiving Income Support or Universal Credit because they are financially supporting themselves, or themselves and a dependant such as a child or partner

- receiving Disability Living Allowance or Personal Independence Payment AND Employment and Support Allowance or Universal Credit in their own right.

This bursary can provide up to £1,200 for a student on a full programme of 30 weeks or more; however, the College will not automatically award £1,200. The award will be based on the student's actual participation costs and may therefore be lower, or in some cases nil, where the student has no relevant costs. If a student needs support above £1,200, the College may consider additional discretionary bursary support or College funding where appropriate and affordable.

Students in this category will not be subject to a household income assessment for the purpose of the Enhanced Bursary, but the College will still assess actual participation needs. Evidence will normally include written confirmation from the relevant local authority or benefit evidence in the student's own name, together with any further information needed to confirm actual cost and need.

5.2 Income Assessed Bursary (Discretionary)

The Income Assessed Bursary is the main route through which the College supports students who face financial barriers to participation but do not fall within the defined vulnerable groups. Discretionary awards are intended to target students with the greatest financial need and to support essential costs associated with attending College and completing a study programme.

For 2026 to 2027, the College will use the following household income thresholds as the initial gateway for consideration of a discretionary bursary application:

Number of dependants in the household*	Household income threshold for initial consideration
1 dependant	Below £37,000 (<i>UK Median annual salary</i>)
2 dependants	Below £42,000
3 dependants	Below £47,000
4 dependants	Below £52,000
5 dependants	Below £57,000
6 dependants	Below £62,000
7 dependants	Below £67,000

** The College will use the number of dependant children or other financial dependants in the household, including the applicant where they are financially dependent on a parent or carer, as declared on the application form and evidenced where required. Additional 5k per dependant.*

Meeting the relevant threshold means that an application will be considered under the discretionary bursary scheme. It does not guarantee that support will be awarded, nor does it determine the amount of support. Every application will be assessed on a case by case basis against actual participation costs and the evidence provided.

In assessing discretionary bursary applications, the College will normally consider the following factors:

- assessable household income and household composition
- whether the student lives with a parent or carer, independently or with a partner
- actual distance to travel, the cheapest reasonable mode of transport and the availability of other travel support such as local authority or regional transport schemes
- the attendance pattern and whether the student has compulsory industry placements or work placements
- course related costs, including books, specialist kit, essential visits and equipment
- whether the student is already supported through Free College Meals or another source of funding
- exceptional circumstances, including safeguarding, caring responsibilities, disability related access needs and sudden financial hardship.

Where the College chooses not to recheck household income annually for a returning second year student on the same programme, it will obtain a signed self declaration confirming that household circumstances have not changed. Even where a self declaration is used, the College will still assess actual participation needs in each academic year.

5.3 Free College Meals

Students may apply for Free College Meals as a standalone entitlement where they meet the national Free Meals in Further Education criteria. Receiving Free College Meals does not automatically create an entitlement to a bursary, and receiving a bursary does not automatically create an entitlement to Free College Meals.

Where approved, Free College Meals will be at the nationally prescribed rate and will normally be delivered through meal credits on the student's College ID card or through another approved local arrangement. When the College assesses a student's bursary need, it will take account of any meal support already being provided so that double funding does not arise.

In a very small number of cases of severe hardship, the College may provide short term emergency meal support without undertaking the full discretionary income assessment at the outset. This flexibility will only be used for immediate food support, will be time limited and will be supported by an appropriate audit trail.

5.4 Care to Learn

Care to Learn supports young parents under the age of 20 to remain in education by helping with childcare costs. St John Rigby College is responsible for managing Care to Learn applications, determining eligibility, confirming approved costs and making payments to childcare providers in line with the national scheme rules.

Care to Learn may support eligible childcare costs up to the national maximum, together with approved deposits, registration fees, summer retainers and additional travel linked to the childcare arrangement, subject to the scheme rules. Payments will be made directly to childcare providers and never as cash payments to students or families, except where national rules expressly permit otherwise.

In exceptional cases, and only where the student is already receiving the maximum Care to Learn support available under the scheme, the College may consider a bursary top up to cover additional approved childcare costs. Any such top up will be paid directly to the childcare provider and will require full evidence that the Care to Learn maximum has already been reached.

6. Support that may be approved

Examples of the support that may be approved, subject to eligibility, evidence, actual need and available budget, are set out below. The list is illustrative rather than exhaustive.

Support category	Examples of support that may be approved
Travel	Bus passes, contribution towards the cheapest reasonable travel option, and additional travel for compulsory industry placements or work placements.
Meals	Free College Meals where the national criteria are met, meal credits or short term emergency meal support where severe hardship is evidenced.
Course materials	Essential textbooks, stationery, print credits, subject specific materials, software or other study resources required to participate.

Equipment and kit	Specialist equipment, PPE, safety footwear, protective clothing, art materials, musical or technical kit, and essential digital access items where directly required for study.
Checks and fees	DBS checks, UCAS application fees, and selected progression related costs where approved by the College as necessary and proportionate.
Trips and visits	Essential trips, visits and fieldwork that are clearly linked to the study programme or course objectives and represent value for money.
Print Credits	If additional credits are needed that are over and above any free Credit awarded to all students.
Placements	Travel and, where appropriate, meal support for compulsory work placements, industry placements or similar programme requirements.
Childcare top up	Exceptional top up support for eligible young parents who already receive Care to Learn and whose approved childcare costs exceed the scheme maximum. Any top up will be paid directly to the childcare provider.

Control point: Where equipment is purchased using bursary funding, the College may require the student to return that equipment at the end of their programme so that it can be reused, where appropriate.

7. Costs that will not normally be funded

Bursary funding is restricted to essential participation costs. It will not normally be used for the following:

- general living costs such as rent, utility bills, household food, wi fi or other everyday household expenditure
- learning support services provided by the College, such as counselling, mentoring, extra tutoring or the servicing of laptops or tablets
- extra curricular or non essential activities that are not necessary for the student's study programme
- non essential trips or overseas visits where comparable learning can be achieved within England at materially lower cost
- blanket travel subsidies for all students, or travel awards that do not reflect individual need and actual cost
- bonus or incentive payments for attendance, behaviour or achievement
- marketing offers designed to influence students to choose the College
- any other expenditure that falls outside the purpose of removing financial barriers to participation.

8. Application process and evidence requirements

Applications must be made by Year 13s using the College's approved bursary, Free College Meals or Care to Learn forms and submitted with the required supporting evidence. Applications must be made by Year 12s and any new students by the Pay My Student portal. Applications will be treated confidentially.

For students joining the College in September 2026, the College will operate an initial priority deadline of 31 August 2026 for Bursary and Free College Meals applications, after which the system will be closed for a month. All applications received by this deadline will be treated as successful during September 2026 whilst the applications are reviewed and assessed; the relevant students will receive meal support during September. On 1 October 2026, this support will cease for those students whose applications have been unsuccessful.

Applications received after the initial deadline of 31 August 2026 will only be reviewed in October 2026. Applications can then be made throughout the year.

Care to Learn applications may be submitted at any point in the academic year.

The College may request any of the following evidence, depending on the type of support being sought:

- payslips for the most recent three months for each working adult in the household
- self assessment tax calculations or tax returns for self employed adults
- the three most recent Universal Credit full award statements
- current benefit award letters, tax credit notices, child benefit evidence and evidence of child maintenance or pension income where relevant
- evidence of care status, care leaver status or qualifying benefits for defined vulnerable group applications;
- travel cost information, course or placement requirements, and quotations or receipts for books, kit, equipment or other approved costs
- for Care to Learn, evidence that the student is the main carer for the child, together with childcare provider registration and cost information.

The College reserves the right to request original documents, further evidence or clarification at any stage. Providing false, misleading or incomplete information may result in support being withdrawn, overpayments being recovered and, where appropriate, the matter being referred for investigation.

9. Assessment, decision making and payment arrangements

All applications will be assessed on an individual basis. The College will consider both eligibility and actual participation need before agreeing support. For discretionary bursaries, household income will be used as an important part of the assessment, but awards will always be tied to evidenced cost and need rather than to a tariff or automatic banded payment.

The College will normally prioritise in kind support. Depending on the nature of the cost, support may be delivered through travel passes, meal credits, direct purchase of books or equipment, payment to a supplier, reimbursement of approved expenditure or BACS payments to the student's own bank account. Where BACS payments are used, the College will normally pay the student rather than a parent or carer, unless exceptional circumstances mean the student cannot manage their own funds.

The College may retain a small emergency fund to address exceptional in year hardship.

Students will be informed in writing of the outcome of their application. The decision notice will set out the approved support, the purpose of the award, the payment method and any conditions attached to it.

10. Conditions of award and review of support

All bursary, Free College Meals and Care to Learn awards are subject to appropriate conditions. These conditions are intended to ensure that public funds are used properly and that support remains targeted at students who need it.

- Students are expected to maintain reasonable attendance, punctuality, behaviour and engagement, taking account of any individual circumstances.
- Students must use any bursary support only for the purpose for which it was awarded.
- The College may ask students to provide receipts, tickets or other evidence to confirm that support has been used appropriately.
- Students must inform the College promptly if there is any material change to household income, living arrangements, course, attendance pattern, transport arrangements or other circumstances relevant to the award.
- Where equipment or other goods are purchased by the College, the student may be required to return them at the end of the course or when they are no longer needed.
- If a student withdraws from College, becomes ineligible or no longer requires the support, payments will stop and any overpayment may be recovered.

Where the College considers withholding, reducing or withdrawing an award, it will take account of the student's individual circumstances, including safeguarding, wellbeing and any other mitigating factors.

11. Data protection, audit and records

The College will process personal and financial data for the purpose of administering student support in accordance with its Privacy Notice and applicable data protection legislation. Information will be handled in confidence and will only be shared where there is a lawful basis to do so, including with internal and external auditors, the Department for Education or other relevant public bodies.

The College will keep a clear audit trail for applications, evidence, assessment decisions, payment records, attendance checks, receipts and any recovery action. Records supporting bursary and Care to Learn decisions will be retained for six years in line with funding requirements. The College may apply the permitted administration contribution from the bursary allocation, and the separate permitted administration contribution for Care to Learn, in line with national rules.

12. Appeals and complaints

Any student, parent or carer who is dissatisfied with a bursary, Free College Meals or Care to Learn decision should first contact the bursary team in writing, setting out the grounds for review and providing any additional evidence. The College will arrange for the decision to be reconsidered by an appropriate senior member of staff

If the student or family remains dissatisfied after the internal review, the matter should be raised under the College's formal Complaints Procedure. The Department for Education does not normally determine individual bursary appeals, as the administration of student support is the responsibility of the institution.

13. Governance, monitoring and review

The policy owner is responsible for ensuring that the College's student support arrangements remain compliant with national guidance. Operational administration will be managed through the College bursary team, with support from relevant curriculum, finance and student services colleagues as required.

The College will monitor the distribution of support, the adequacy of budget provision, audit outcomes, complaints and appeals, and any changes in Department for Education guidance. This policy will be reviewed annually, or sooner if a change in legislation, funding rules or operational practice makes this necessary.

The college will claim 5% of the fund allocation per annum to cover the costs of administration. In addition, St John Rigby College will receive 5% on top of the total amount claimed for Care to Learn to contribute towards the additional administration activities associated with managing the scheme.

14. Contact details

Bursary Team
St John Rigby College
Gathurst Road
Orrell
Wigan
WN5 0LJ

Email: bursary@sjr.ac.uk
Telephone: 01942 214797
Website: www.sjr.ac.uk

15. Reference documents

Reference	Document
National guidance	Department for Education, 16 to 19 Bursary Fund guide: 2026 to 2027.
Childcare scheme	Department for Education, Care to Learn academic year 2026 to 2027: conditions of grant funding.

Final note: This policy summarises the College's local arrangements for 2026 to 2027. Where a matter is governed directly by Department for Education funding rules or conditions of grant, those national rules will apply and take precedence over local wording.