

St Nicholas' School

Whole School Policy on the award of means tested bursaries

Charitable Objects of St. Nicholas' School

The Objects for which the School is established are to promote and provide for the advancement of education by providing, conducting, governing, carrying on and maintaining in the United Kingdom, or elsewhere, a school or schools for girls, and if thought fit for boys to the age of 11 years. The School currently educates girls to the age of 16 years and boys to 7 years.

Background

This policy was introduced in March 2009 to formalise the way in which bursaries are granted. It has been written in line with the requirements of the Charities Act 2006. Following the publication of the revised ISI Handbook (second cycle) Regulatory Amendments were made in August 2009, June 2012 and October 2019. This edition was reviewed in November 2021.

The Governors of St Nicholas' School are committed to broadening access to the School by offering to eligible parents/guardians means tested financial support ("bursaries") to assist with the payment of school fees. Bursaries are available to those families with children in the Junior and Senior School. The School advertises the availability of means tested bursaries:

- in the School prospectus
- on the School website; and in
- the local press by means of advertisements

How does the Scheme work?

Every bursary is means tested and the value of the bursary is related to the income and financial resources of a pupil's family. Parents/guardians are asked to complete a Declaration of Income Form to disclose details of the family income, assets and liabilities. We require that parents/guardians corroborate all the figures disclosed in this declaration with original documentation such as P60s, bank statements and mortgage statements. The School Bursar and/or Headmistress will usually meet with the family, sometimes at the School but on occasion at the family home, to ensure the information has been correctly interpreted and the basis of the financial assessment has been fair.

Bursaries may be of any value up to that of a fully funded place, depending on the financial, compassionate or other relevant circumstances of applicants. The bursary will continue for every year the pupil remains at the School, subject to their sustained academic performance, good behaviour and also changes in the financial circumstances of the family.

Requests for financial support usually fall into two categories:

- New applicants to the School where a place may be offered but parents/guardians are unable to fund the tuition fees.

- Existing pupils where a change in parents'/guardians' circumstances has resulted in difficulty in meeting tuition fees and may result in the child being withdrawn part way through a stage of education.

The Initial Application Process

Bursaries may be made available to parents/guardians of children entering the School. They are awarded at the discretion of the School and are appraised by the Bursar and Headmistress. The Bursar is responsible for the management and coordination of the process.

- Step One - Parents/guardians asking for a bursary are required to complete an application form which seeks to establish the financial circumstances of the household. The form, which requests details of income and capital, must be accompanied by full documentary evidence. This form may be found on our website under admissions. The completed forms, together with the necessary documentary evidence, are to be submitted to the Bursar after payment of the registration fee.
- Step Two – The Bursar assesses all applications in order to establish the likely level of support which will be required in order to allow the child to attend the School and prepares a recommendation.
- Step Three – The Bursar and Headmistress meet to assess the application and agree a level of support or the need for further information.
- Step Four - The parents/guardians are advised whether their child is to be offered a place at the School and of the outcome of the application for a bursary after the entrance examination has been marked.
- Step Five –Parents/guardians are then required to sign a letter accepting the place at the School and an acknowledgement agreeing to any conditions relating to the bursary. All bursary places should be acknowledged and accepted/declined within a week of the offer to allow for any unaccepted funds to be redistributed to other applicants.

How much financial help can a family expect?

St Nicholas' School does not have a large endowment fund so all bursaries are funded out of income. This inevitably places a limit on the total number and value of bursaries the School can award.

New applicants to the School are asked to discuss their need early in the application process. Late applications will not be successful if insufficient funds are available to fund the grant.

Each case is assessed on its own merits and bursaries are awarded accordingly, subject to the School's ability to fund these. Factors which will be considered in determining the level of bursary include

- any opportunities to release capital. Significant capital savings and investments would be expected to be used for the payment of school fees, as would equity values in properties;

- the ability to improve the financial position or earning power of the family. Where there are two partners, both would be expected to be employed unless one is prevented from doing so through incapacity, the need to care for children under school age or other dependants, or the requirements of their partner's work;
- where parents are separated, a contribution may be expected from the absent parent;
- any contribution to fees by other family members, any adults unrelated to the child or by outside sources;
- any fees being paid to other schools (or universities).

Other Factors

It is recognised that, in addition to academic ability and financial constraints, there may be other circumstances which should be considered. These include:

- Where the social needs of the child are relevant (e.g., may be suffering from bullying at her present school).
- Where a parent/guardian is terminally ill or is unable to secure permanent employment due to poor health.
- Where a separation has resulted in the child having to be withdrawn from the School adding to the stress of coping with the parents/guardians separating.

It is recognised that judgements about what sacrifices a family should make to pay school fees will be personal. However, the School has a duty to ensure that all bursaries are well focused and that bursaries are not being sought to maintain a family lifestyle. Therefore the School considers that the following would not be consistent with receipt of a bursary:

- frequent or expensive holidays;
- new or luxury cars;
- investment in significant home improvements;
- a second property/land holdings;
- ownership of expensive "hobby" assets, such as horses, boats etc

Is academic achievement important?

A child's suitability for the School is the first consideration in granting support. The School will refer to the result of the School entrance examination and/or references of each applicant, but potential will also be considered as well as actual achievement. Because bursary funds are limited, those judged most suitable will be given priority as they will be most likely to gain from attending the School.

Will a bursary continue for all of my child's time at St Nicholas'?

Repeat testing of family means takes place in April/May each year and bursaries may be varied upwards or downwards, depending on a family's financial circumstances or at the discretion of the School.

If a pupil's progress, attitude or behaviour has been unsatisfactory and also where the parents/guardians have failed to fulfil the terms of the Parent Contract, for example by the late payment of any contribution they are making to the fees, then the bursary may be reduced or withdrawn. A bursary may also be withdrawn if parents/guardians knowingly or recklessly provide the School with false information on income/assets.

If your child is offered a part bursary you must decide whether you can afford to pay the balance of fees due together with all additional expenses such as uniform and educational trips. You should bear in mind that school fees are a significant commitment which continues until a child leaves the School at 16.

What if a family fall on hard times once a child is a pupil?

The School may award bursaries to existing pupils whose families suffer an unexpected financial difficulty and are no longer able to pay the school fees in full. This may be due to a period of ill health, a bereavement or unemployment. These bursaries are designed to avoid a pupil's education being disrupted during an important stage of their education or to cover a temporary difficulty.

Consideration of these awards is at the discretion of the School at all times.

Confidentiality

Bursaries are awarded on condition that the award remains confidential both on the part of the parents/guardians and also the School. The School respects the confidentiality of bursaries awarded and teaching staff are not aware of those children receiving support. Bursaries may be withdrawn if parents breach this confidentiality condition.

Other Sources of Bursary Assistance

In addition to the School's Bursary Fund, there are a number of educational and charitable trusts which provide assistance with tuition fees. In the majority of cases, these are to assist children who are already attending a fee-paying school and due to a change of circumstances may be unable to remain. St Nicholas School encourages parents/guardians to apply for support where it is felt a good case can be made for assistance.

Reviewed and updated November 2021

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