

STUDENT WELFARE & PARTICIPATION SUPPORT FUND POLICY

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1. PURPOSE

The Rutland and District Schools' Federation is committed to ensuring that financial hardship does not unnecessarily prevent students from participating fully in education and wider school life.

The Student Welfare and Participation Support Fund ("the Fund") has been established to provide limited, short-term financial assistance where a student's attendance, educational participation, wellbeing, inclusion or access to opportunities may otherwise be adversely affected by exceptional financial circumstances.

The Fund exists to remove barriers to participation and educational opportunity and to support students whose educational experience may be negatively impacted by financial hardship.

The Fund is discretionary in nature and is intended to provide support in exceptional circumstances only.

2. PRINCIPLES

The Federation will:

- Consider requests fairly, sensitively and confidentially.
- Treat all applicants with dignity and respect.
- Avoid stigma, discrimination or disadvantage arising from financial circumstances.
- Promote equality of access to educational opportunities.
- Ensure that support is targeted towards students whose education, attendance, welfare or participation may be adversely affected by financial hardship.
- Exercise appropriate stewardship of public funds.
- Consider each request on its individual merits.
- Make awards only where resources are available.
- Ensure decisions are proportionate, reasonable and capable of withstanding public scrutiny.
- Make decisions fairly and without discrimination on the grounds of any protected characteristic as defined by the Equality Act 2010.

Support from the Fund is not an entitlement.

3. SCOPE OF SUPPORT

Support may be considered for costs directly connected to a student's education, attendance, participation, welfare or inclusion.

Examples may include:

- Educational visits and residential experiences.

- Essential school uniform.
- Essential clothing or equipment required for participation in learning.
- Educational resources, books or materials.
- Access to extracurricular, sporting, cultural, musical or enrichment activities where financial circumstances create a significant barrier.
- Other exceptional circumstances where support is considered necessary to safeguard a student's welfare, attendance, participation or educational progress.

The Federation reserves the right to determine whether a request falls within the scope of this Policy.

4. EXCLUSIONS

The Fund will not normally be used to provide support for:

- Routine household expenditure.
- Rent, mortgage or housing costs.
- Utility bills.
- Debt repayments.
- Ongoing childcare costs.
- Regular transport arrangements requiring long-term support.
- Costs that would create a recurring financial commitment for the Federation.
- Any expenditure considered outside the educational, welfare or participation interests of the student.

Exceptional circumstances may be considered at the discretion of the Executive Principal.

5. ELIGIBILITY

Applications may be considered where:

- A student is experiencing barriers to education, attendance, participation or wellbeing due to financial hardship; or
- A family is experiencing temporary, unforeseen or exceptional financial circumstances; or
- Failure to provide support may adversely affect the student's educational experience; or
- The Federation considers that support would be in the best interests of the student's education, welfare or participation.

Examples of circumstances that may be considered include, but are not limited to:

- Loss of employment or reduced household income.
- Serious illness or disability affecting family finances.
- Bereavement.

- Family breakdown.
- Homelessness or temporary accommodation.
- Other exceptional circumstances resulting in financial hardship.

Meeting any of these criteria does not automatically guarantee support.

6. EVIDENCE

The Federation may request information or evidence where considered appropriate to support an application.

Examples of supporting evidence may include:

- Universal Credit or other benefit award notices.
- Evidence of Free School Meals eligibility.
- Recent payslips showing reduced income.
- Employer confirmation of redundancy or reduced hours.
- Bank statements demonstrating financial hardship.
- Housing-related documentation.
- Medical evidence where illness or disability has impacted household finances.
- Letters from social workers, family support workers, housing officers, charities or other professionals.
- A written self-declaration where formal evidence is not immediately available.

The Federation recognises that families experiencing genuine hardship may not always be able to provide formal documentation and will consider applications on a case-by-case basis.

7. APPLICATION PROCESS

Requests may be submitted to finance@catmosecollege.com

Applications may be initiated by:

- Parents or carers.
- School staff acting on behalf of a family.
- Pastoral teams.
- Safeguarding staff.
- Other professionals working with the student or family where appropriate.

Applications should include:

- Details of the support requested.
- The circumstances giving rise to the request.
- Any relevant supporting information or evidence.

All applications will be treated in confidence.

8. DECISION MAKING

Applications will be considered by the Chief Finance Officer under delegated authority.

When reaching a decision, consideration may be given to:

- The circumstances presented.
- The impact on the student's education, attendance, welfare or participation.
- Any safeguarding considerations.
- Alternative sources of support that may be available.
- The resources available within the Fund.
- Whether the request represents a one-off or ongoing financial commitment.
- The urgency of the request.
- Previous support provided, where relevant.

Awards may be approved under delegated authority in accordance with the Federation's Scheme of Delegation and Financial Regulations.

8.1 Conflicts of Interest

Any individual involved in the consideration or approval of an application must declare any personal, family, financial or other interest in the matter.

Where a conflict of interest exists, or could reasonably be perceived to exist, the individual concerned shall withdraw from the decision-making process.

All conflicts shall be managed in accordance with the Federation's Conflicts of Interest Policy and any applicable governance requirements.

9. NATURE OF AWARDS

Awards:

- Are entirely discretionary.
- Will be one-off in nature.
- May be made as a full or partial contribution.
- May be provided in kind rather than as a cash payment.
- May be paid directly to suppliers where appropriate.
- Do not establish any expectation of future support.

Receipt of support in one academic year does not create any entitlement to support in subsequent years.

The Federation reserves the right to withdraw, recover or refuse support where information provided is found to be inaccurate, misleading or deliberately withheld.

10. SAFEGUARDING AND EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE

Nothing within this Policy prevents the Federation from providing urgent support where safeguarding concerns are identified and immediate assistance is considered necessary to protect a student's welfare, educational access or wellbeing.

Any such support shall be appropriately authorised, recorded and reported in accordance with Federation procedures.

Emergency awards made under this provision shall be subject to retrospective review by the Chief Finance Officer to ensure appropriate use of Federation funds and maintenance of an appropriate audit trail.

11. REVIEWS OF DECISIONS

As the Fund is discretionary, there is no automatic right of appeal against a funding decision.

Where an applicant believes that material information was not considered, or where significant new information becomes available following a decision, a request for review may be submitted in writing to the Head of School within 10 working days of the original decision.

The Head of School will review the available information and determine whether the original decision should be upheld, amended or reconsidered.

The decision following any review shall be final.

Nothing within this Policy prevents concerns regarding the administration or operation of the Policy from being raised through the Federation's Complaints Policy.

12. FUNDING OF THE FUND

The Fund may be supported through:

- Federation budget allocations.
- Charitable donations.
- Fundraising initiatives.
- Gifts from individuals, organisations or members of the local community.
- Grants or other external funding streams.

All monies received and expended through the Fund shall be administered in accordance with the Federation's financial regulations.

Donations, gifts and charitable contributions received for the purposes of the Fund shall be administered in accordance with the Federation's financial regulations.

Donors shall not influence individual funding decisions, which remain entirely at the discretion of the Federation and will be determined in accordance with this Policy.

13. BUDGET AND ACCOUNTABILITY

The Fund operates subject to available budget.

The Federation reserves the right to:

- Limit the value of any award.
- Refuse any application.
- Prioritise applications according to need.
- Suspend operation of the Fund where resources have been exhausted.

All expenditure must represent an appropriate, reasonable and transparent use of Federation funds and be capable of withstanding public scrutiny.

Trustees acknowledge that the purpose of the Fund is to remove barriers to participation and educational opportunity for students experiencing financial hardship. Awards should therefore be made in a manner that is equitable, proportionate and aligned with the Federation's charitable and educational objectives.

14. MONITORING AND DATA PROTECTION

The Chief Finance Officer will maintain an appropriate record of awards made through the Fund.

Personal information will be processed in accordance with UK GDPR, data protection legislation and the Federation's Data Protection Policy.

Records relating to applications, supporting evidence, decisions and awards shall be retained and disposed of in accordance with the Federation's Data Retention Schedule and applicable data protection legislation.

An anonymised summary of applications, awards and expenditure may be reported periodically to Trustees to support financial oversight and monitoring of the Fund's effectiveness.

15. EQUALITY STATEMENT

The Federation is committed to promoting equality of opportunity and ensuring that financial circumstances do not create unnecessary barriers to participation, achievement, attendance, inclusion or wellbeing.

Applications will be considered fairly and without discrimination.

16. POLICY STATEMENT

The Federation recognises that families may occasionally encounter circumstances that create unexpected barriers to a student's education. Through this Policy, the Federation may provide limited, short-term support where it considers that doing so will assist a student's welfare, attendance, participation, inclusion or educational progress.

Any support provided is wholly discretionary, subject to available resources, and does not constitute an entitlement or ongoing commitment by the Federation.

17. APPENDIX 1 – APPLICATION FORM STUDENT WELFARE & PARTICIPATION SUPPORT FUND



Confidential

Please complete this form if financial circumstances are affecting a student's participation in school life.

Student Details

Student Name	
School	
Year Group	

Parent / Carer Details

Name	
Telephone	
Email	

Support Requested

☐ Educational Visit ☐ Uniform ☐ Equipment ☐ Activity ☐ Other

Brief Description:

Amount requested (if known): £_____

Reason for Request:

Financial Circumstances

☐ Low income ☐ Benefits received ☐ Change in circumstances ☐ Hardship

Supporting Evidence

☐ FSM Eligible ☐ Benefit Evidence ☐ Professional Recommendation ☐ None

Declaration

I confirm the information provided is accurate to the best of my knowledge.

Signature:_____

Date:_____