

Thomas Mills High School

A DfE-designated Academy

Information about the school for Prospective Applicants



Website: www.thomasmills.suffolk.sch.uk

OUR SCHOOL

Thomas Mills High School is a very special, distinctive and successful school. Its focus on an academic education for all, alongside personal and character development for pupils is increasingly, in the current educational landscape, unique. Pupils are able to access a broad and balanced curriculum and all subjects, including the arts, are thriving. Visitors quite rightly comment on the calm and purposeful atmosphere, and one parent observed 'it's cool to learn here'.

Thomas Mills High School was formed in September 1979 by the amalgamation of the Mills Grammar School and Framlingham Modern School. It is a mixed 11-18 comprehensive school and on 1st June 2011 became a state maintained Academy in response to the Department for Education's invitation to Outstanding Schools.

There are, at present, some 1050 pupils on roll including around 225 in the Sixth Form. The school has approx. 74 members of teaching staff which includes a number on part-time hours. Many of our staff joined as NQTs and now have management responsibilities; other NQTs have gone on to Head of Department posts in other schools. For many years we have also been involved in teacher training, having trainees in many of our departments. The school recognises that the staff are its greatest asset and is deeply committed to their professional development. Our INSET system, overseen by Helen Lambert, Staff Development lead and Mat Heath, Professional Tutor, provides a very successful induction programme for new staff and NQTs as well as wider staff development.

In addition, there are a number of support staff, including administrative/finance officers, cover supervisors, LSAs, laboratory and general technicians, caretakers and a site supervisor.

The school is popular. A significant number of pupils are out of catchment. New housing development in the area is likely to have a positive impact in the near future.



ACCOMMODATION AND OTHER FACILITIES

Over the past decade much effort has been put into raising money, and the school has considerably enhanced its accommodation and facilities so that now all departments have specialist rooms and enjoy a first-class teaching environment. Four additional Language rooms were completed in February 2010 and named after a former Headteacher, David Floyd.

The Sixth Form Centre provides purpose-built accommodation for all Sixth Form lessons apart from specialist requirements in Art and DT. There is also a common room, administration suite and interview rooms.

The school stands in its own playing fields with facilities for all major summer and winter sports.

Improvements have also been made to the drainage and electrical systems. The West Block has recently been reclad and classrooms enhanced. Work has also started on a strategic site plan and this will lead to further improvements in the year ahead. A Multi-Use Games Area (MUGA) is now available for school sports as well as community use. In the summer of 2015 a number of solar panels were installed on the flat roofs. In September 2017 we opened a new state of the art Music Technology room. A new Art and Photography room with Apple Macs and a dark room opened in September 2018. A small group has been formed to fundraise for improvements to our Science Facilities (FabLabs) and our refurbished lab was completed in 2020. From 2021 a new fire door project, along with refurbishments to the main toilets and library, has enhanced the work of the original buildings.

Recently a number of site security developments have been undertaken. The focus will return to enhancing the facilities and new labs, a new recording studio and a dance studio are serious considerations.

ACADEMY STATUS

Thomas Mills High School became an academy on 1 June 2011.

As such we are independent of the local authority that used to maintain us and under the authority of our own Academy Trust, which is incorporated as a private limited company (No. 7605059). The Trust is also an exempt charity (i.e. subject to charity law but exempt from regulation by the Charity Commission – because it is regulated by the Department for Education).

We continue to explore the evolving landscape with multi-academy trusts. We have found that many trusts do not understand our important rural context. As a stand-alone academy, we have ensured the maximum amount of money goes towards teaching and learning. We do though work with a number of partnerships and other schools and trusts and value collaboration.

THE SCHOOL'S PHILOSOPHY AND GENERAL AIMS

VISION STATEMENT

We, the staff and governors, aspire to ensure that all our students, irrespective of ability and regardless of anyone's doubts, achieve their potential in full; and we aspire in this way to make Thomas Mills High School the best in the country.

CHARTER OF VALUES

We, the staff, pupils and governors of Thomas Mills High School, regard the following twelve values as central to our purpose :

1. A love of learning for its own sake
2. Vigour and optimism in embracing the future
3. The intrinsic virtue of persistent hard work
4. Acceptance of personal responsibility
5. Equal value accorded to all persons
6. Courtesy, self-discipline and respect for others
7. A determination to achieve excellence in all we do
8. Honesty, moral courage and integrity
9. Good fellowship
10. Service to others
11. Leadership and enterprise
12. Respect for the traditions and the achievements of the school

From 2021 the governors' strategic priorities are

- To connect more
- To achieve more
- To nurture more

From 2022 this is linked to the school priorities which are

- Open Minds
- Big Hearts

OFSTED

We had a full Ofsted inspection in October 2006 and received an outstanding report. A full copy is available on request. From 2011 until 2021, subject to a risk assessment from OFSTED, we were exempt from routine inspection.

In July 2010 Ofsted conducted an Interim Assessment and judged that our performance had been sustained since the previous full inspection.

In February 2012 Ofsted conducted a Subject Inspection of our Religious Studies department. The department was judged to be outstanding in all aspects. The Inspector commented that “students make very good progress as a result of high-quality teaching.”

In May 2016 we contributed to an OFSTED survey visit from an HMI. Although the visit was not graded the Inspector was extremely complementary about the School and the pupils.

In November 2021 we had what could be described as a challenging OFSTED Inspection which led to the grade of Serious Weaknesses. These were mainly around systems and rapid improvement was quickly underway.

There were many positives:

- “Pupils at Thomas Mills receive a good quality of education.”
- Pupils show an eagerness to learn.
- There is strong teaching and pupils value this.
- In most lessons and around the school behaviour is calm and purposeful.
- Bullying does not usually happen and if it does, staff deal with it well.
- Pupils enjoy a wide range of clubs and other opportunities.
- Pupils receive well-considered guidance about their next steps.
- Almost all pupils go on to positive destinations, many going to top universities.
- The curriculum is well planned.
- Teachers have strong knowledge.
- Pupils achieve well across the curriculum.
- Pupils with SEND receive effective support and achieve well.
- There is a culture in which pupils enjoy reading.
- Clubs contribute positively towards pupils’ personal development.
- Students in the Sixth Form thrive both academically and personally.
- Sixth Form students use their independent study times well and develop positive attitudes for learning and for life.
- Pupils learn how to stay safe online.

In September 2021 we received an ungraded inspection visit. This agreed with the school’s self-evaluation and so positive comments were made especially about Safeguarding arrangements.

In January 2023 we had a further graded visit and OFSTED re-judged as ‘Good’ overall. Positive comments were made about safety, tolerance, expectations, the Sixth Form, curriculum and reading. They also added that “staff like working at the school and feel well supported by leaders”. A new 3 year development plan will aim to take the school to outstanding.

CURRICULUM

Students follow a common curriculum – English, Science, Geography, French, German, Mathematics, History, Religious Education, Art, Design Technology (Resistant Materials, Food and Textiles), Music, PE and Games, Drama and Personal Development.

1. All students study French and German in the first two years at a level appropriate to their ability.
2. Latin is offered as an option from Year 9; many pupils go on to sit GCSE.
3. ICT and Citizenship are taught across the curriculum.

Considerable autonomy is allowed to departments to place pupils in groups to suit their particular teaching arrangements; some are setted while others are taught in mixed-ability groups.

In line with national developments the curriculum is under review and is likely to evolve further. At A Level, subjects are amending schemes of work to reflect linear assessments.

Key Stage 4 (From Year Nine)

All students follow a core programme (largely leading to GCSE) which includes English, Mathematics, Science, one Modern Foreign Language and ICT and either History or Geography. They also follow general courses in PE, RE and PSHE. In addition, pupils choose four further subjects, including: History, Geography, a second Foreign Language, Art, Music, PE, Drama, Religious Studies, Computer Science, Resistant Materials, Textiles and Food. Language College status led to the introduction of Spanish as well as French and German. All students also undertake Work Experience and follow a Careers Education programme. Citizenship, Work-Related Learning and Enterprise Education are delivered across the curriculum.

16-19 Provision

Last year, a high proportion of our Year 11 students stayed on into our Sixth Form with the majority of the remainder leaving to continue their education in an FE college. The Sixth Form also recruits students from a number of neighbouring schools, as well as a number of students from the independent sector. Entry to the Sixth Form is open to all full-time students for whom a suitable course is available and who it is thought will benefit by extending their school-based education beyond the age of 16. Sixth Form numbers are buoyant.

Students are able to choose individually tailored courses involving a choice from at least 28 AS/A2 Levels and 3 applied Vocational Subjects, Extension Studies, Work Experience and Community Service, according to need. Students' work and progress are regularly monitored and evaluated through progress reports.

Special Needs

Special Needs education is co-ordinated by a team of staff. The school has developed a detailed Policy for Special Needs. The Learning Support Department provides help through withdrawal, support in mainstream classes as appropriate, and lunchtime Study Club. Teachers adapt their teaching to ensure high outcomes for all.

We operate a six-period day, each period lasting 50 minutes.

THE SIXTH FORM

The Sixth Form operates as a separate unit but maintains extensive involvement with the main school. The Head of Sixth Form, Andrew Cann (Assistant Headteacher), is responsible with his two deputies for all aspects of post-16 education and for organising and developing the varied programme of activities designed to ensure that students receive a full and rounded Sixth Form experience. The Sixth Form have the opportunity to contribute to the leadership of the school, for example, the Head Girl and Head Boy play a key role in a number of events.

EXTRA-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

The school attaches great importance to extra-curricular activities and many students, as well as many members of staff, are involved in such activities at Thomas Mills. We have a strong Music Department which boasts three choirs, two orchestras and a number of ensembles. Director of Music, Richard Hanley organises two major concerts each year (at Christmas and Easter) and there are many other opportunities for musicians to perform. Music is also a great strength of the school and over 140 pupils have regular instrumental tuition. Most years the Performing Arts team also put on a school production – recent successes include “The Sound of Music”, “West Side Story”, “Les Misérables” and “The Addams Family”. There are numerous clubs and societies and a full range of inter-house games and sporting contacts with neighbouring schools.

All departments organise a significant number of school trips throughout the year. Whilst most are local, there are also usually several trips abroad. In addition to an annual ski trip, in Activities Week pupils have the opportunity to go to Holland, Normandy and Berlin, as well as visits to Kent and Thetford Forest for “Forest Challenge”.

PASTORAL AND SOCIAL

The school has a strong tradition of pastoral care. Students in Year 7 are put into mixed-ability Tutor Groups in liaison with feeder schools.

Wherever possible, the Head of Year and the Form Tutor stays with the same group for the next five years. The Form Tutor is the lynchpin in dealings with students and parents and Form Tutors are expected to take responsibility for the welfare of individuals in their Forms. The work of each Form Tutor is co-ordinated by a Head of Year. The Heads of Year work with Mr Nunn, Deputy Headteacher, who ensures consistency of pastoral provision across the Year Groups. We have gradually been developing a tutorial programme.

We firmly believe in the importance of maintaining a clear framework of expectations for all our pupils. We expect them to come to school with the necessary equipment and an eagerness to learn. Staff understand the importance of mutual support and problems are fed through a referral system, starting departmentally and through to SMT. We believe that these are the best ways of establishing a positive commitment to the goals of the school.

Safeguarding is taken seriously. Mr Nunn, Deputy Head, is the Designated Lead for Safeguarding with Miss Armes, deputising. We have moved to an online system called ‘MyConcern’. The Safeguarding Team consists of a number of colleagues including the Head, SENCO and Heads of Year.

DECISION MAKING, RESPONSIBILITIES, STAFFING

All members of teaching staff are in two teams: Department and Year; and all staff have responsibilities in each team. There are regular meetings for departments, Form Tutors, Heads of Department and Heads of Year, as well as whole Staff Meetings. The Senior Management Team meets briefly each morning and at length weekly to discuss policy recommendations, suggestions, etc.

In 2012 Philip Hurst was appointed Headteacher at Thomas Mills. This followed a career in a number of schools in Essex. Mr Hurst is a strong advocate of school improvement and self-evaluation. Teaching, learning and achievement continue to be the priorities for the years ahead. From time to time Mr Hurst has supported other schools as well as contributing to leadership development within other trusts.

The Senior Management Team consists of the following :

Philip Hurst	Headteacher
Louise Armes	Deputy Headteacher (Staff)
Jamie Nunn	Deputy Headteacher (Pastoral)
Matthew Ward	Assistant Headteacher (Curriculum)
Andrew Cann	Assistant Headteacher (Head of Sixth Form)
Adam Chittock	Assistant Headteacher (Community)
Mark Mugliston	Business Manager

This team is supported by other colleagues including Senior Teachers.

Over the past five years a number of well-respected colleagues have retired and the school has thought carefully about succession planning. New Colleagues have maintained the school's strengths whilst thoughtfully leading necessary changes so that the school evolves further.

We have a highly effective team of Support staff, with teams supporting administration, examinations, cover supervision and the site as well as departmental technicians. We also have an experienced team of teaching assistants.

THE SCHOOL AND ITS COMMUNITY

The school attaches great importance to social and community-linked activities. All Sixth Form students are members of the Sixth Form Society which arranges social and fund-raising activities.

Regular overseas exchange trips have been established – for example with Rendsburg in Germany while, in addition to Activities Week trips, the School Orchestra and Choir have taken our musicians to Salzburg, Vienna, Prague and Paris. In the past, trips have visited Israel, New York, Mexico, Canada, Zambia and Madagascar. A new expedition is planned for 2024.

The Friends of Thomas Mills High School further develops these links and provides invaluable extra financial assistance to the school as well as providing support for social and educational activities. In 2003 they raised £25,000 to establish a Trust Fund which will help finance the secondary education of students in developing countries. Over the past five years the Friends have raised over £60,000 for the school. £23,000 was used to assist with funding new buildings and refurbishment. More recently £25,000 was raised to purchase a new minibus. In 2013 the Friends donated money for a fitness trail around the school. From 2023 the Friends has re-grouped and is being led by two senior staff. There is good support from staff as well as the Community.

EXAMINATION RESULTS

We are proud to be a comprehensive school and cater for the full ability range. The school has a well-deserved reputation for academic excellence. The results at all levels are substantially higher than national averages. A value-added analysis of our results demonstrates that nearly all our pupils significantly exceed their potential.

In 2019 the GCSE headline figure was 78% 4+ with English and Mathematics. In 2022, the GCSE headline figure was 77% 4+ with English and Mathematics. 50% regularly achieve 5+ with English and Mathematics. Progress measures are positive. In 2023, 70% achieved 4+ with English and Mathematics.

Results at 'A' Level have been consistently strong with pupils at all ranges of ability achieving well. In 2017 we celebrated record breaking results with 25% A*/A, 55% A*/B, 79% A*-C and 99% A*-E. In 2022 56% of students achieved A*-B grades, representing our best results at this level

The school's results when analysed using the EBAAC measure, usually place us as one of the highest performing state schools in Suffolk as well as East Anglia.

Results from the 2020 and 2021 award of qualifications were excellent enabling many GCSE students to progress to the sixth form, whilst Year 13 moved to a range of destinations including university and employment.

We are also proud of the fact that over the years we have sent more young people to Oxbridge than any other comprehensive school within the region.

THOMAS MILLS

Thomas Mills was born in Bramford in 1623 or 1624. In 1640, halfway through his apprenticeship to a tailor, he made his way to Framlingham and became an apprentice wheelwright. When his master died, Thomas Mills inherited the business. He died in 1703. In his will he left detailed instructions for his money to be used for an almshouse in Framlingham and for the education of poor children in the town.

The first Mills School was begun in 1751; Mills Grammar School for Girls was opened in 1902. Our present school is now part of the succession from the original bequest of Thomas Mills and benefits significantly from annual grants by the Educational Charity that bears his name.

In 2002 former Deputy Head, John Hibberd, published a history of the school entitled "Think on These Things" which traces the origins of the school to the present day.

WORLD CLASS SCHOOLS

We were delighted in 2019 to be awarded the World Class Schools status and reaccredited in 2022. We were pleased that our curriculum, distinctive features, and personal development was recognised. However, most importantly it was because our students are world class.

A NOTE ON OUR BADGE AND MOTTO

The shape and the motto, "Truth, the Daughter of Time", are taken from one of the coins issued by Queen Mary I. She was declared Queen in 1553 whilst she was at Framlingham Castle. The symbols inside the roundel represent our county, district and the town of Framlingham. The symbols are divided by a form of "mill" cross, as on the original coin, which provides a play on words.



FRAMLINGHAM AND AREA

Framlingham is a small, historic market town of some 3,000 inhabitants which serves as the centre for the largely rural, agricultural area of "High Suffolk". The town is continuing to grow but strenuous efforts are being made to retain its special character. Framlingham is surprisingly well catered for in cultural terms with many clubs and societies to suit a wide range of interests. There is a flourishing Sports Club with Football, Cricket, Rifle, Tennis, Croquet and Angling sections.

The Heritage Coast, Snape Maltings and Aldeburgh, and the larger towns of Ipswich and Norwich are within easy reach. Vastly improved roads and the electrification of the main Ipswich/Liverpool Street line have made London very accessible from the area and generally mark East Anglia out as one of the fastest growing areas of the United Kingdom.

The average prices here for family houses are slightly above the national average, but terraced homes offer good value, being generally £10,000 less than the rest of the country. Where Framlingham scores best though is when compared to its coastal neighbours, Aldeburgh and Southwold. There's up to £175,000 difference between a semi-detached property on the coast and the equivalent in Framlingham, despite being only a few miles apart. There are also many properties available to rent in the area. Some staff commute to school from Ipswich, Stowmarket, Woodbridge and Bungay.

