



# THOMAS MILLS HIGH SCHOOL

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Dear Parents,

23<sup>rd</sup> May 2024

## **Headteacher's Update Letter 2023/2024 – Letter 12 (out of 12)**

I trust this letter finds you well. It's been a very short but fast paced half-term. Year Eleven and Year Thirteen examinations are well under way and students have responded well to the change in routines – we wish them well.

It's been a positive month for the county with Ipswich Town Football Club's success. I also enjoyed seeing Essex and Suffolk on the television as Michael Portillo visited the area as part of his Great British Railway Journeys.

Journeys are one theme of this letter with safety being a key feature and other matters of whole school interest.

### **SAFETY: transport to and from school**

Safety must be paramount. A significant number of our students travel by bus or by car and some recent incidents are a cause for concern. There are a few areas I will comment on:

- (a) Dropping off students in the morning in the front school car park
- (b) Parking outside of school
- (c) School buses and the afternoon

Firstly, I understand with the inclement weather why parents drop their children off in the front school car park. Sometimes the car park has become congested and because of the preference for the Crush Hall entrance, a mini tail back has occurred. To move this forward, it is best if parents drive to the furthest part of the school car park closer to the Main Entrance. In very bad weather I would support the use of the Main School entrance for student arrival.

Drivers must be mindful of the surroundings, not only other road users but also pedestrians, as well as any coaches. I hope we can manage this although one strategy would be to only allow coaches, as is the case in the afternoon. I fear though this would only transfer the problem elsewhere. Thank you in advance for your support.

Under no circumstances should any car driver be sounding their horn or flashing lights to our coach drivers.

Secondly, I understand that some cars have been parked very close to junctions or drop kerbs both near the school and opposite the new estate. This has particularly affected visibility and there are understandable worries about safety. Our coach drivers remind me that cars stopping or parking should be leaving 32ft (just under ten metres) away from junctions.

Finally, at the end of the day, the school car park is prioritised for the coaches only. The coaches must be loaded on the school site and I cannot have the coaches waiting outside of school unnecessarily.

Thank you for your support and I hope some reflection about road safety can improve the situation for everybody.



## **Uniform Shorts**

Tutors have given the message that the uniform shorts introduced for last year are acceptable. The uniform is mid-grey. Although we introduced it from May half-term last year, it is an acceptable uniform option. Of course, as I write this, the summer weather has been replaced by rain!

## **Suffolk Constabulary**

The Halesworth Community Police Team have asked me to forward you a letter from them. This can be found [HERE](#). In summary, this is linked to young people's actions and the local community. This is associated with the Framlingham Gala Fest. The key message is that the police are adopting a zero-tolerance approach to anti-social behaviour. I would reinforce all these messages.

## **Banning of smart phones**

Many parents and teachers will share concerns about the use of smart phones. "Smartphone Free Childhood" discuss many harms which are attributed to smartphone usage. Although many of their messages are targeted at parents and they would dissuade parents from purchasing such phones, there are many actions that schools can undertake. Next half-term, we will undertake some consultation about an outright ban for the main school including on the school bus and at any point during the school day. Such phones currently tend to re-appear at 3.45pm but under a ban this would also be forbidden.

Strong arguments to support these changes include:

- Links to anxiety and depression
- Exposure to safeguarding risks
- Effect on attainment

A move in policy of 'no phones visible' to 'phones free' would be much clearer.

We will look at this further next half-term with a view to changing the policy from September 2024. In the meantime, it remains the case that mobile phones should not be seen in school during the day and this also includes the time before school starts. Misuse of the technology can result in high level sanctions including suspensions.

## **Social Media**

Used correctly, social media can be a positive use of technology. In school we have a team who work on promoting the school's achievements across departments and they would like to make you aware of some of the channels.

The school's Instagram account can be accessed at

[https://www.instagram.com/thomasmillshighschoolsixthform?utm\\_source=ig\\_web\\_button\\_share\\_sheet&igsh=ZDNIZDc0MzlxNw==](https://www.instagram.com/thomasmillshighschoolsixthform?utm_source=ig_web_button_share_sheet&igsh=ZDNIZDc0MzlxNw==) and there are also regular posts on Facebook @ThomasMillsHigh.

## **Attending and Readiness for School**

The half-term is a well-deserved break but also an opportunity to get ready for school. With respect to attendance, it is very much the case that high attendance leads to higher progress. There are very few exceptions.

Being absent 10% of the time is the equivalent of missing one day every 2 weeks which, over the course of Year 7 – 11, would be the equivalent of missing half a year of teaching.

We know that sometimes students cannot come to school because they are really unwell - and that's the right thing to do for them and other students. Medical advice is clear however that children with mild illness will

often be well enough to attend - for example if they have a cough, or cold, without a temperature. The NHS guidance [Is my child too ill for school? - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](http://www.nhs.uk) is designed to support parents in their decision making about mild illness. If your child is off school, please do contact the school as soon as possible and by 9 am at the latest.

If you have any concerns about your child’s attendance, please do contact their form tutor in the first instance; we appreciate every family is unique and want to support you in helping your child make the most of the opportunities available to them.

Mrs McCartney, Senior Teacher, with Miss Armes, Deputy Headteacher are currently reviewing some of our procedures. It is proposed to have a focussed attendance fortnight from 17<sup>th</sup> to 28<sup>th</sup> June with achievement points and rewards to celebrate 100% on time attendance for that period.

**Readiness for School**

Half-term is an opportunity to review the equipment and the following list should be a useful checklist for you.

Essential Equipment	Desirable Equipment
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2 Pens</li> <li>• Pencil</li> <li>• Ruler</li> <li>• Scientific Calculator (we recommend the New Casio FX-83GTCW)</li> </ul> <p>all stored in a pencil case</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Highlighter</li> <li>• A different coloured pen for marking work</li> <li>• Eraser</li> <li>• Pencil sharpener</li> <li>• Protractor</li> <li>• Compass</li> <li>• Gluestick</li> </ul>

Please support your child by ensuring they have the correct equipment every day. Being on time and ready to learn is essential for a smooth start to each lesson, making the most of valuable minutes of learning time. Pupils who know how to use their own scientific calculator will be able to use it more proficiently in lessons and exams. There are some available to purchase through the school - please contact Student Services if you would like to arrange. If you are struggling with affordability of these essential items, please do contact the school as we may be able to help.

**Direction of Education**

With national politics increasingly dominating the headlines and political parties raising issues, education does feature from time to time. Irrespective of what happens in a General Election, there is usually much continuity and especially in the field of education. There has though been some discussion about the importance of arts and already schools need to be formulating plans to develop Music for example.

Funding is naturally concerning many schools and Trusts and in summary, any slight increases to school budgets are overshadowed by proposed increases to staff costs. Government benchmarking has clearly highlighted that we are in the lowest 20% of pupil to teacher ratio at 15.73. We have traditionally seen this as a strength, but government analysis is showing this as a weakness. I can assure you that we will consider this carefully and being mindful about all that we value in terms of education and choice. Many providers from colleges to schools have already increased class sizes.

Given that inflation is heading in a better direction and there was some growth in the economy, it maybe that the government will be able to fund any short-falls or reduce costs.

## Summary

A lot to take in! Apologies. As I stated at the beginning it has been a busy term and it was a pleasure recently leading Year Thirteen's final formal assembly. It's been great talking to them about their choice of options, futures as well as all the extra opportunities they have taken advantage of. A holistic education is valuable. We also reflected on the last eighteen years and it's remarkable to think what has taken place since they were born. True millennials they are.

I hope that the half-term provides an opportunity for some recharge, rest and relaxation. I will be enjoying a very short break and looking forward to the usual pastimes. I always think that we are lucky in East Anglia to have some wonderful coast and countryside with a big city not too far away! Whatever you do, I hope you can enjoy some lovely time and activities.

Yours sincerely,



P J Hurst  
Headteacher