



Thomas Mills

High School & Sixth Form

Headteacher: P J Hurst BA MA MBA NPQH

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Saxtead Road, Framlingham, Suffolk, IP13 9HE

T: 01728 723493

E: inmail@thomasmills.suffolk.sch.uk
thomasmills.suffolk.sch.uk

Dear Parents,

13th September 2024

Headteacher's Update Letter 2024/2025 – Letter 1 (out of 1)

Firstly, I hope this letter finds you well and that you enjoyed a nice summer. A warm welcome to everyone in our school community but particularly to new families and students who are joining our school community this year.

I write these letters from time to time on matters of whole school interest and when there are significant updates. We share the positive stories in our termly magazine *Outlook*. Although I address these letters to parents, I also include carers and our wider community including staff, and most importantly our students. Our school is a community of about 1,000 students, 125 staff on the payroll and a balanced budget of about £7 million.

I have had the pleasure of meeting our students in assembly and the term has started well. My underlying theme was 'verbs not nouns' and focuses on the doing – actions speak louder than words. Anyway, it's the words that follow!

Travel to and from school

Safety is paramount for all students including those walking, cycling or as a passenger in a car or bus. With regards to buses, the driver's focus must be on the road ahead and students must behave accordingly. Any behaviour which potentially endangers can not only lead to a ban but the most serious of sanctions.

On a related theme, can I remind you that the estate opposite the school is a private road and should not be used for collecting pupils. A number of residents have contacted the school because they have been unable to use their own driveways. Your assistance in supporting our neighbours would be greatly appreciated.

Behaviour Policy

It is an annual requirement that I inform you about our Behaviour Policy. I think the message above reinforces this. However, there is also a positive element, and it is fair to say that the typical atmosphere is calm and purposeful, and our ethos is underpinned by our Charter of Values. Self-discipline is a key expectation. Our policies can be found on the website under the information tab.

Mobile Phones

Following consultation at the end of last term our stance has changed as follows:

The school site and buildings are a **phone-free space**. Any mobile devices must be kept securely, and lockers are available. Students in Years 7 to 11 should not have phones with them. Where a phone is seen a detention will be given, the phone confiscated, and collection is from the School Office by a parent during office hours. Phones are allowed for travel to and from school.

Expectations and Homework

In assembly, I reminded students about the importance of homework and the value that it leads not only to independent learning but also the consolidation of knowledge and skills. Homework should be recorded in the Logbook. If you have any concerns about homework, please contact the class teacher or tutor in the first instance.

Lockdown or invacuation

It is with some sadness that I feel that the school community will need to practise a 'lockdown.' In this context, we mean a situation where staff and students must stay still, with all buildings secured. The most likely situation

would be an incident within the town where the Police have advised that we all stay still. Initial communication is through a bell in short bursts of 9, 3 times (9,9,9). Instructions will be communicated to staff online.

There is no increased local risk, and the stance is informed by the tragic events in Southport and the subsequent disorder in parts of the country.

Attendance

There is no doubt that excellent attendance leads to excellent outcomes, and this is our aspiration for all students. Following the recent updates to government guidance on attendance, we have a new policy which is available on our website. Students should be in tutor bases at 8.55 am, for the register to be called promptly by 9 am. Late marks will be issued for anyone not present when the register is called. Please note that students will be given an unauthorised absence for the entire morning session if they have not registered by 9.25 am, or 2.05 pm for the afternoon session, without a valid reason. Parents will also need to provide evidence of medical and dental appointments.

The fine for taking a child out of school during term time has risen from £60 to £80 per child. If this fine is not paid in the first 21 days following the penalty notice, it will rise to £160. All schools are now required to consider a fine when a child has missed 10 or more sessions (5 days) for unauthorised reasons, including term time holidays and unauthorised lateness. Fines will be doubled if it happens again within three years. Those with a third fine in a three-year period now face prosecution. There is no right to appeal a penalty notice. If you require any further information or clarification, please do not hesitate to contact us.

In September we moved over to a new administrative system called Arbor and I am sure there will be further developments ahead. For now, I thank you for your support with attendance and punctuality.

Advance Notice of Dates

Our School Calendar is now published and can also be downloaded from the information tab on the website. Some dates just to highlight to you:

Wednesday 18 th September	Friends AGM 6pm. All welcome
Friday 27 th September	Friends of the School Quiz Night – 7pm
Monday 30 th September	Open Week for families of Year 6 children
Thursday 3 rd October	Open Evening
Friday 25 th October	Last school day of this half-term

Summer Holiday Developments

Over the summer both the boys' and girls' changing rooms were totally refurbished thanks to the generosity of the Framlingham Foundation. In addition, the Site Team refurbished many other areas, and I feel we do enjoy a very spacious and 'green' campus.

We were also pleased to celebrate some very pleasing examination outcomes at all levels. At GCSE 74% of students achieved a Grade 4 or above in English and Mathematics. My congratulations to those students, and also our Sixth Form students who have progressed to some excellent destinations.

Summary

As I start to run out of words and my own attention shifts to some actions, I will leave you with the same quote that I used in assembly from Stephen Fry.

"We are not nouns. We are verbs. I am not a thing – an actor, a writer – I am a person who does things – I write, I act – and I never know what I'm going to do next. I think you can be imprisoned if you think of yourself as a noun."

With best wishes for a successful year,

Yours sincerely,



P J Hurst
Headteacher