



# Thomas Mills

High School & Sixth Form

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Dear Parents,

25<sup>th</sup> October 2024

## **Headteacher's Update Letter 2024/2025 – Letter 3 (out of 3)**

I hope this letter finds you well. As this long half-term draws to a close, I write to update you on a few matters of interest.

### **Arbor Parental Portal**

You have hopefully received a letter from Mr Mugliston about the launch of the Arbor App. From 4<sup>th</sup> November the Arbor App will be used to manage many interactions between home and school. Many of you will be used to this from other schools. A key point is that our use of School Gateway will discontinue but all balances will get transferred to the Arbor account.

A copy of Mr Mugliston's letter can be found [HERE](#).

### **Attendance**

Attendance continues to have a national focus, and I am pleased to say there have been some positives this half-term. Although we have set an internal school target - this has been exceeded in some areas.

We recently welcomed Suffolk County Council's Head of Attendance to the school. We were reminded that we must talk about the number of sessions missed and not percentages. In this regard, by Friday 15<sup>th</sup> November we will have had ten school weeks. As per new legislation, schools must consider whether a fine is appropriate when a pupil has had 10 unauthorised sessions (or 5 whole school days) in any rolling 10 week period. I think it is fair to say that the Local Authority would expect the school to give penalty notices for all term time holidays and use fining as a strategy to help improve attendance. At the same time, there is the positive message that higher attendance does equate with higher outcomes.

Thank you for your support with this important focus as we look to return to the levels that were seen in the last decade.

### **Mobile Phone Free School and Newsround**

The new phone-free space has been supported very positively. Only a handful of parents have had to collect phones. BBC Newsround recently featured the school. This was linked to several other schools nationally introducing similar policies as well as a Member of Parliament wanting to change the law.

### **Behaviour**

Changes to computer systems as well as the new 'phone free space' will require us to amend our Behaviour Policy. Although I don't envisage the expectations and principles changing as such, systems will need updating. We will look at the Hierarchy of Sanctions and it is likely that we will simplify the levels.

It is fair to say that the majority of students adhere to our culture and ethos and demonstrate our Charter of Values in all their endeavours.

### **Photography & Use of Student Images**

I am given to understand that parents have confirmed if their child's image may (or not) be used in social media posts. We have a number of events as you know, and we like to update our website as well as other media. If you are unsure, please contact Mrs Parocki in the School Office.

### **Safety**

It's now that time of year where there can be as much darkness as daylight. I would urge everyone to have a reflective coat, and for any cyclists, to make sure they have thought about safety.

## **Open Week and Open Evening**

Our Open Week and Open Evening was very well attended and my thanks to the school community for all their support. We have continued to have parent tours this week. I have enjoyed many great conversations about curriculum opportunities as well as the rich life outside of the classroom.

## **Sixth Form Open Evening – Thursday 21<sup>st</sup> November**

Next half term, all Year 11 students will receive a prospectus detailing all the exciting opportunities available for them in the Sixth Form.

On Thursday 21<sup>st</sup> November, we will hold our Sixth Form Open Evening from 6pm where all Year 11 pupils and parents are invited to hear presentations on the opportunities and courses available. More information will follow from Mr Cann early in the next half term.

Mr Cann also tells me it has been a busy term for our Year 13 students as they plan their post 18 options. So far 76% of the year group have begun an application to a Higher Education university education. 11 students have applied to Oxford or Cambridge Universities. In addition, 5 have applied to study medicine and 2 have applied to veterinary medicine courses throughout the UK. This constitutes our highest number ever applying to such courses.

We wish them all well as they move forward in the application process and consideration of next steps.

## **Parents Survey**

We thought it would be useful to conduct a Parents' Survey. We have adapted the Ofsted survey and included some other areas such as homework. If you were able to spend a few minutes of your time completing it that would be most helpful and can help us focus on priorities.

We will keep the survey open until Monday 4<sup>th</sup> November at 9am. The survey can be accessed [HERE](#).

## **Summary**

When staff returned on the 2<sup>nd</sup> September, I don't think we had quite realised that this was a long half-term. This time last year we were already on the Half-Term Break but many of us were still dealing with the floods from Storm Babet that ended the term quite abruptly. Anyway, there has been some very good work and it's been great seeing many events outside the classroom.

Last week we enjoyed the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Evening Presentation. My congratulations to the students and staff for all their achievements, as well as the support of parents. It was a pleasure welcoming Dennis Tattoo, former Assistant Headteacher, as our Guest. He spoke about the value of voluntary work and how this contributes positively to our lives.

Finally, you will be aware that Beth Vale, our superb Librarian, was nominated for National Librarian of the Year. At a very prestigious celebration event she received two Honours Awards instead. This week she has spoken in the Houses of Parliament about the importance of School Libraries. This seems very timely given it's our Book Week.

With the half-term approaching, I hope to have the chance to lose myself in a book or two! I hope you can too.

With best wishes,

Yours sincerely,



P J Hurst  
Headteacher