

WEEKLY NEWSLETTER

FRIDAY 27TH NOVEMBER 2026

Dear Parents and Carers,

Remembering Maisie

This week has been an incredibly difficult one for our school community, with Maisie's funeral taking place on Tuesday. I would like to thank you all for your understanding and flexibility when we closed the school early to allow students and staff to attend the service and pay their respects to Maisie, who was such a wonderful member of our school community. Whilst the day was deeply emotional and extremely challenging, I took great pride in the way our community came together to say goodbye. Hundreds of students and staff lined Shanklin Drive, and balloons were released as the hearse went by, in what was a touching gesture to pay our respects. We will all miss Maisie dearly.

This Week in School

- Year 9 Safeline Workshops: Our Year 9 students took part in the Safeline Workshops this week. The sessions were brilliantly delivered by Safeline, and we hope students have taken away valuable knowledge on how to keep themselves safe.
- Year 11 Photographs: External photographers visited the school on Wednesday and Thursday. The sessions went very well, capturing Year 11 whole-year-group photos, tutor groups, sports teams, and individual portraits.
- Year 11 Student Progress Evening: Thank you to all Year 11 parents and carers who attended the online Student Progress Evening on Thursday night, which was a great success. Year 11 are on track to achieve some really strong results, but it is crucial now that they maintain their momentum, ensure their revision timetables are in full swing, and prepare thoroughly for their forthcoming examinations.

Upcoming Assessments

We wish the very best of luck to our students sitting upcoming assessments:

- Monday, 7th December: Year 11 Speaking Trial Exams and Year 13 Criminology Controlled Assessments begin.

Changes to the mobile phone policy

As communicated in a separate letter to all parents and carers of Y7-11 students, as part of our commitment to maintain a calm, safe and focused learning environment and following a successful trial period with year 7, we are introducing a daily mobile phone collection for all students in Years 7-11, starting from Monday 7th December 2026. Upon arrival at school mobile phones must be switched off and stored at the bottom of student's bags once on the school site. During morning line up/registration, students will place phones into their designated, padded form-group storage box. Each box will be stored securely for the duration of the school day. We have made a minor alteration to the school day to reduce lunchtime by 5 minutes so that students have time at the end of the day to collect their devices without impacting on lesson time or the timings of the start and end of the school day. Students will return to their form rooms at 3:10pm so they can collect their devices before the end of the school day at 3:15pm. Devices must remain turned off and stored at the bottom of student's bags until they leave school site.

Recommended Reading: The Anxious Generation

For parents and carers interested in youth wellbeing and digital habits, I wanted to share a brief overview of The Anxious Generation: How the Great Rewiring of Childhood Is Causing an Epidemic of Mental Illness (2024) by social psychologist Jonathan Haidt. The book examines the sharp rise in youth mental health struggles since the early 2010s, arguing that between 2010 and 2015, childhood shifted from a play-based model to a phone-based one. Haidt attributes the spike in teenage anxiety, depression, and self-harm to two simultaneous trends:

- Overprotection in the real world: Declining unsupervised outdoor play and independence have deprived children of real-world experiences needed to build resilience and social skills.
- Underprotection in the virtual world: Unrestricted access to smartphones and algorithm-driven social media has exposed developing brains to constant social comparison and online harms.

Please do encourage outdoor play and physical activity and limit and monitor closely screentime; the evidence is clear that this will help your child.

Severe Weather and Snow Arrangements

With the cold weather now firmly here, please be aware of our procedures in the event of snow. The school will make a decision based on the safety of students and staff, using all available information including weather forecasts and updates from our caretaker who lives on-site. If we make the decision to close, we will communicate this as early as possible—typically via our school website and by email, and occasionally by text message. Please check the school website and your emails regularly for updates during severe weather.

Key Dates and Reminders

- Monday, 30th November 2026: School is closed to all students for a scheduled Teacher Training Day.
- Wednesday, 2nd December: Flu vaccinations will take place for students in Years 7 to 11 and Rescheduled Year 10 and Key Stage 5 Art trip to the Tate Modern.
- Thursday, 3rd December: All Year 8 students will take part in STEM workshops led by British Airways. Christmas Carol Service – 6pm at St Nicolas Parish Church
- Thursday, 10th December: Year 8 Student Progress Evening (online, 3:00 pm – 7:00 pm). School will close at 2.15pm.
- Friday, 11th December: Christmas Jumper Day.

Finally, thank you once again to all parents, carers, and members of our school community for your ongoing support during what has been a very difficult period. I wish you and your families a peaceful and lovely weekend.

Yours faithfully,

Michael Gannon
Headteacher – Higham Lane School

