



HIGHDOWN

handbook

2025-2026

Parent/Carer Edition



"The school of choice for parents in Reading, where for every child success is **desirable, demanded and achieved**"



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Headteacher's Welcome

We are delighted that you have chosen Highdown School and Sixth Form Centre for your child.

Highdown is a place where tradition meets innovation, from the 16th century tythe barn to the state-of-the-art computing facilities, and this rich heritage coupled with our dynamic teachers means that Highdown is a place where pupils achieve more than they thought possible.

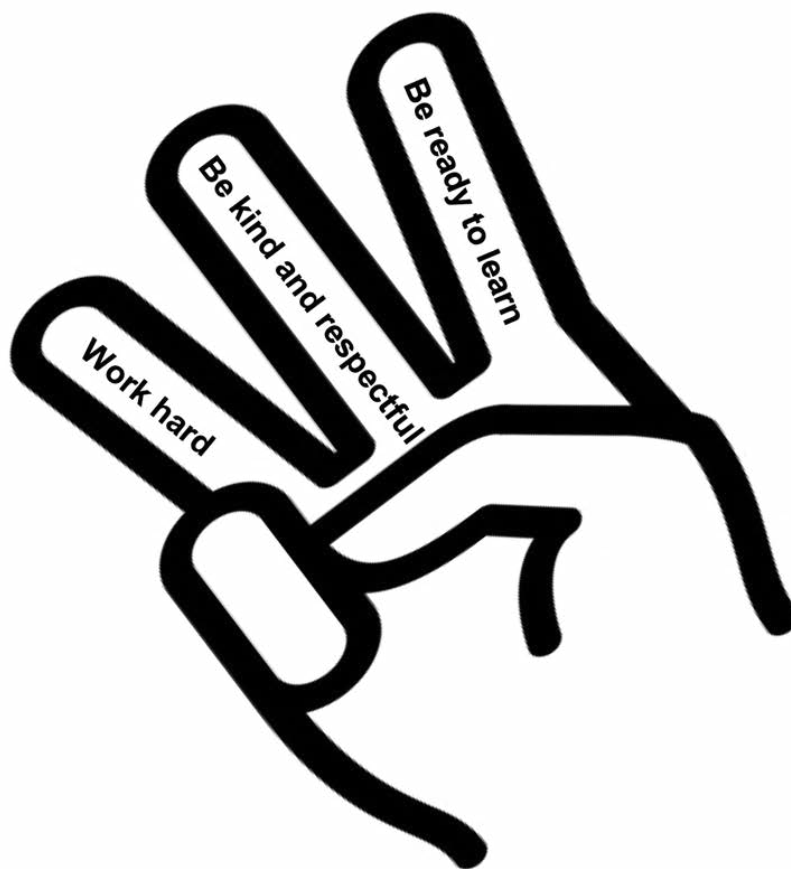
It goes without saying that we enjoy the very best in academic standards, with passionate specialist teachers in every department from Mandarin to Further Maths to Textiles. Last summer, 80% of our students passed English and Maths at GCSE and over 20% of A-Levels were graded at A or A*. But our co-curricular offer is where the school comes alive: from our leadership pathways to our international trips, there is something for every student to excel in and to develop their resources, skills and resilience so they can feel confident in embracing their future.

Whilst they are with us, we take great care to make sure students feel they belong. Our mentor groups and thriving house system ensure they build relationships with staff and peers that are healthy and happy. School life is permeated by our core values of **aspiration, respect and excellence**.

Highdown's success is rooted in the enthusiasm and pride of our staff. We never take for granted the transformative power of education and this is reflected in our commitment to routine and high quality professional development that is rooted in the most recent academic research.

This handbook should answer any questions you and your child might have about Highdown, and I would urge every family to read it together with their child. There is also a wealth of information on the school website: www.highdown.reading.sch.uk.

Ms L Mathews
Headteacher



The Highdown Way

Underpinning all that we do at Highdown are our three core values: aspiration, respect and excellence. We ARE Highdown.

Staff, students, parents and a range of stakeholders work to ensure that they implicitly understand the meaning of the values and can explicitly display them.



ASPIRATION



RESPECT



EXCELLENCE

Timings of the School Day

<p>School Opens for Breakfast Club 8:15am Students should aim to be on site at 8:35am. All gates, except the main front gate, are shut at 8:37am.</p>
<p>Mentor Time Programme 8:40am</p>
<p>Period 1 9:05 - 10:05am</p>
<p>Period 2 10:05 - 11:05am</p>
<p>BREAK</p>
<p>Period 3 11:25 - 12:25pm</p>
<p>Period 4 12:25 - 1:25pm</p>
<p>LUNCH</p>
<p>Period 5 2:10 - 3:10pm</p>
<p>End of School Day Excellence Club 3:10 - 4:10pm</p>

Term Dates

Term 1: Autumn		
Student Term Starts	Student Term Ends	Holiday Period
Wednesday, 3 September 2025 Year 7 and 12 only on first day of term	Thursday, 23 October 2025	Friday, 24 October to Monday, 3 November 2025
Tuesday, 4 November 2025	Friday, 19 December 2025	Monday, 22 December to Friday, 2 January 2026

Term 2: Spring		
Student Term Starts	Student Term Ends	Holiday Period
Monday, 5 January 2026	Friday, 13 February 2026	Monday, 16 February to Friday, 20 February 2026
Monday, 23 February 2026	Friday, 27 March 2026	Monday, 30 March to Monday, 13 April 2026

Term 3: Summer		
Student Term Starts	Student Term Ends	Holiday Period
Tuesday, 14 April 2026 Bank Holiday: Monday, 4 May 2026	Friday, 22 May 2026	Monday, 25 May to Friday, 29 May 2026
Monday, 1 June 2026	Friday, 17 July 2026	Monday, 20 July 2026 until the start of next school year

Professional Learning Days (INSET Days)		
Term 1	Term 5	Term 6
Monday, 1 September 2025 Tuesday, 2 September 2025 Friday, 3 October 2025	Monday, 13 April 2026	Friday, 26 June 2026

Please note: Wednesday, 3 September 2025 is an INSET day for **Years 8 - 11 and Year 13**

Attendance & Absence

"Every day counts"

Your child's attendance target is 97%+

Regular attendance at school is vital to help your child achieve and get the best possible start in life. There are 30 days in a 6 week term. If your child has one and a half days off school, their attendance will be 95%. Good attendance is central to students' academic achievement and personal development. Please support your child and encourage them to achieve 97%+.

Should your child need to be absent, please remember it is your responsibility as a parent/carer to notify the academy by logging the absence on the Class Charts app. It is imperative you inform the academy of any absence to ensure we know your child is safe and well. This also enables us to offer support should you require it.

The academy will contact parents/carers when we have not been informed of a student absence. In addition, the Pastoral Team may make regular contact should absence continue.

Following student absence, a member of the Pastoral Team will meet the student to review their attendance and ensure they are supported to secure a future attendance which is as high as possible.

Attendance during one school year	Equal days absent	Which is approximately weeks absent	Which means the number of lessons missed	Absence over five years
95%	9 days	2 weeks	50 lessons	1/4 year
90%	19 days	4 weeks	100 lessons	1/2 year
80%	38 days	8 weeks	200 lessons	1 year
70%	57 days	11 1/2 weeks	288 lessons	1 1/4 years
60%	80 days	16 weeks	400 lessons	2 years
50%	100 days	20 weeks	500 lessons	2 1/2 years

Research suggests that 17 missed days a school year = 1 GCSE grade DROP in achievement. The greater the attendance, the greater the achievement.

Leave of Absence

Due to the impact missed learning has on student progress, the academy will no longer provide leave of absence for family holidays. If you are considering a holiday, you must notify the academy and request a form from the Attendance Team.

Medical Appointments

To ensure your child does not miss important learning, any medical appointments should be arranged to take place outside academy learning hours.

If medical appointment times during the school day are unavoidable, your child should attend school either before or after their appointment. Evidence will need to be shown to the Attendance Officer to show that your child has a medical appointment to attend.

Parents Evenings, Welcome Evenings and Events

The personal development and academic progress of your child is extremely important and throughout the academic year parents are invited and expected to attend parents' evening and other events to review their child's academic progress, achievement and development as a young person. During these events parents are provided with information about their child's engagement, progress and achievement in their academic studies, attendance, general behaviour and contribution to and demonstration of the school values. Many of these events take place virtually to support parents to attend.

Safeguarding and Child Protection

Highdown School is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people and expects all staff, volunteers and visitors to share this commitment. All academies have a statutory duty under the Children Act 1989 (and 2004 amendment) to assist Social Service Departments acting on behalf of children in need or enquiring into allegations of child abuse.

Safeguarding and child protection is everyone's responsibility.

Children cannot learn effectively unless they feel happy, safe and secure. At Highdown School we will ensure that:

- appropriate action is taken in a timely manner to safeguard and promote children's welfare
- all staff are aware of their statutory responsibilities with respect to safeguarding
- staff are properly trained in recognising and reporting safeguarding issues

If you have any safeguarding and/or child protection concerns, you should contact the school's Child Protection Team on **dso@highdown.reading.sch.uk**:

Designated Safeguarding Lead - Mrs S Capaldi

Deputy Designated Safeguarding Lead - Mrs R Boys and Mr D Clawson

Who can help me?

If something is troubling you at school, there are lots of people that can help.

Your Mentor

Your mentor is the first person to go to if you are having problems. They are the people that know you best, and this helps them arrange the best support for you. You meet with them every morning, and they will be pleased to see you at break, lunch or after school if you need them.

Head of Achievement

Your Head and Assistant Heads of Achievement make sure that all the students in your year group are doing their very best in lessons. They work with mentors to make sure students have the support they need to achieve their potential.

Safeguarding Team

The Safeguarding Team can help you if you are being harmed by someone (in or out of school) or are at risk of being harmed. You can email the safeguarding team at safeguarding@highdown.reading.sch.uk or use the wellbeing function on Class Charts.

Safeguarding Team



Mrs Boys
Deputy
Safeguarding
Lead



Dr Capaldi
Safeguarding
Lead



Mrs Birru
Lead
Behaviour
Advocate



Ms Smith
Attendance
Officer



Mrs Sawdon-Smith
Sixth Form
Welfare Lead



Mr Clawson
Designated
Teacher

Heads of Achievement for Year 7



Mr Flynn
Head of Achievement



Mrs Birru
Assistant Head of
Achievement -
Pastoral



Mr Scobey
Assistant Head of
Achievement -
Academic



Supporting Families

We can support families in a range of ways, with the support below made available to families who qualify for Pupil Premium. We understand that circumstances can change for families, and at any time. Please contact our Finance Department or your child's Head of Achievement for further information about how we may be able to help with:

- Subsidised laptop purchase via the BYOD scheme
- Subsidised or fully funded school trips
- Uniform vouchers to support the purchase of compulsory items of uniform
- An essential stationery pack, including scientific calculator
- Subsidised or fully funded enrichment activities
- Menstrual hygiene products
- Daily Breakfast Club available to all students in the Gallery from 8:15am
- Free School Meal (if you qualify for free school meals)

Uniform Standards & Expectations



White shirt tucked in

School blazer with logo

Plain black tailored trousers or shorts, not jogging bottoms

Plain black polishable shoes, not trainer style shoes

Black hijab in the Winter/Spring term and black or white hijab in the Summer term - no other head wear permitted

Highdown jumper or cardigan is optional

Plain black pleated skirt or black tailored trousers

Black, white or grey socks. No white socks over black tights

The school will not bypass uniform expectations as a result of receiving a note from a parent/carer explaining uniform discrepancies. Exceptions may be considered when notes are supported by a letter from a medical professional. The school has spare plimsolls and uniform to ensure no child misses learning for wearing incorrect uniform.

PE Uniform

PE KIT	
COMPULSORY from official suppliers	Red polo shirt with school logo Black shorts with school logo Highdown Red socks
OPTIONAL from official suppliers	Plain black tracksuit bottoms with or without school logo Sports hoodie with school logo Multisport top with school logo (boys only)
TO BE PURCHASED ELSEWHERE	Trainers – suitable for sport, not fashionwear
OTHER KIT WHEN REQUIRED	Swimming costume and towel Football boots Shin pads (football, rugby and hockey) Mouth guard (rugby and hockey)



Jewellery and Personal Appearance

Most jewellery is not permitted for safety reasons. The following provides clarity on our expectations:

- 1 small stud in either one or both earlobes
- Other piercings, such as a nose stud, are not permitted
- The covering of piercings with plasters is not permitted
- Rings and bracelets are not allowed to be worn
- Students are encouraged to wear a watch, but smart watches are not permitted
- Make-up may be worn but should be minimal and natural in colour
- Nail extensions or any non-neutral nail varnish are not permitted
- Students unable or refusing to remove any of the above items will be taken out of circulation until they comply with these expectations
- Extreme hairstyles are not permitted (this includes lines, patterns and neon colours)

Our supplier for uniform is SWI - www.swischoolwear.co.uk / 01928 752 610

Mobile Phones and Mobile Technology

The use of mobile phones (including smart watches and earphones) are not permitted at Highdown School. As soon as the bell rings for the start of the school day, the use of mobile devices is not allowed.

Students who bring phones to school must ensure they are turned off and placed safely in their school bag. Students must not place their phone in their blazer or trouser pockets.

If a mobile phone, earphones or smart watch are seen or used during the school day, the student will be required to hand them over immediately to the member of staff. The device will then be placed in a named envelope and can be collected from Student Reception at the end of the school day. Failure to hand over the device will be classed as an act of defiance and the student will be taken out of circulation and parents contacted.





Rewards

The true value of your child's aspiration, respect and excellence will be realised as they achieve successful next steps and future contentment and prosperity. But we know it is important to both value and recognise students for positive behaviour, progress and success throughout their school career.

House Points

Across the school, in lessons and outside of them, students will receive praise points, which are shared with parents and carers through the Class Charts app.

In addition to praise points, we celebrate student successes with postcards home, letters of praise, phone calls home, termly celebration assemblies, Friday 3 Award, Excellence Evening and hot chocolate with the Headteacher.



Consequences

Students are encouraged, supported and rewarded for displaying and developing our core values but equally if students make poor choices contrary to the Highdown Way, they will receive advice, guidance and an appropriate sanction to enable them to understand and reflect on their behaviours and choices.

Incorrect Behaviour = C1	Consequence = Verbal Warning	Staff Action
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1st warning for off task behaviour • Unkind language • No/incomplete homework • Phone or uniform infringement • Sixth Form concern 	<p>Student remedial action:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concentrate on/improve homework • Do not say unkind things • Attend Excellence Club • Hand over phone/jewellery 	<p>Staff member action and log on Class Charts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quietly address student in private • Hand jewellery or phone to office • Sixth Form team intervene
Incorrect Behaviour = C2	Consequence = 25 min detention	Staff Action
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2nd warning for off task behaviour • Lacking equipment • Misuse of school resources • Lateness (between 5-10 mins) • Poor behaviour at social time • Refusing to hand in mobile/jewellery 	<p>Student remedial action:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concentrate on/improve work • Pack school bag the night before • Do not swear • Be punctual/improve timekeeping • Adhere to social time rules • Hand over phone/jewellery 	<p>Staff member action and log on Class Charts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • See student in detention for restorative meeting
Incorrect Behaviour = C3	Consequence = 50 min detention	Staff Action
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3rd warning for off task behaviour (withdrawal) • Vandalism • Verbal abuse towards a peer • Truancy (over 10 mins) • Out of bounds at social time (incl. leaving site) • Bystander to/inciting a negative event • Sharing toilets • Bringing the school into disrepute 	<p>Student remedial action:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attend withdrawal lesson and focus on classwork • Respect school/student property • Come to school/attend lessons • Stick to designated social spaces • If you see a negative event move on/report • Only use toilets individually 	<p>Staff member action and log on Class Charts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • See student in detention for restorative meeting • Call home explaining why C3 awarded • Adjust seating plan • Bag search when students found sharing a toilet

Parents/carers will receive notifications via Class Charts should their child be required to attend a same day detention of 25 or 50 minutes.

School Meals

The Gallery is operated by Accent Catering service. Accent staff prepare an excellent variety of food every day, including vegetarian options, cooked using fresh ingredients in our own kitchen.

We discuss menu choices with parents and students and ensure that all meals are tasty and healthy. Students do not need to bring money to school - parents transfer money into their son/daughter's account using 'ParentMail' and all students can make purchases using a biometric fingerprint reader.

Students who bring their own food can eat their packed lunches in the Gallery or at the picnic tables around the school campus.

Further information about Accent, including sample menus, are available on our school website.



Free School Meals

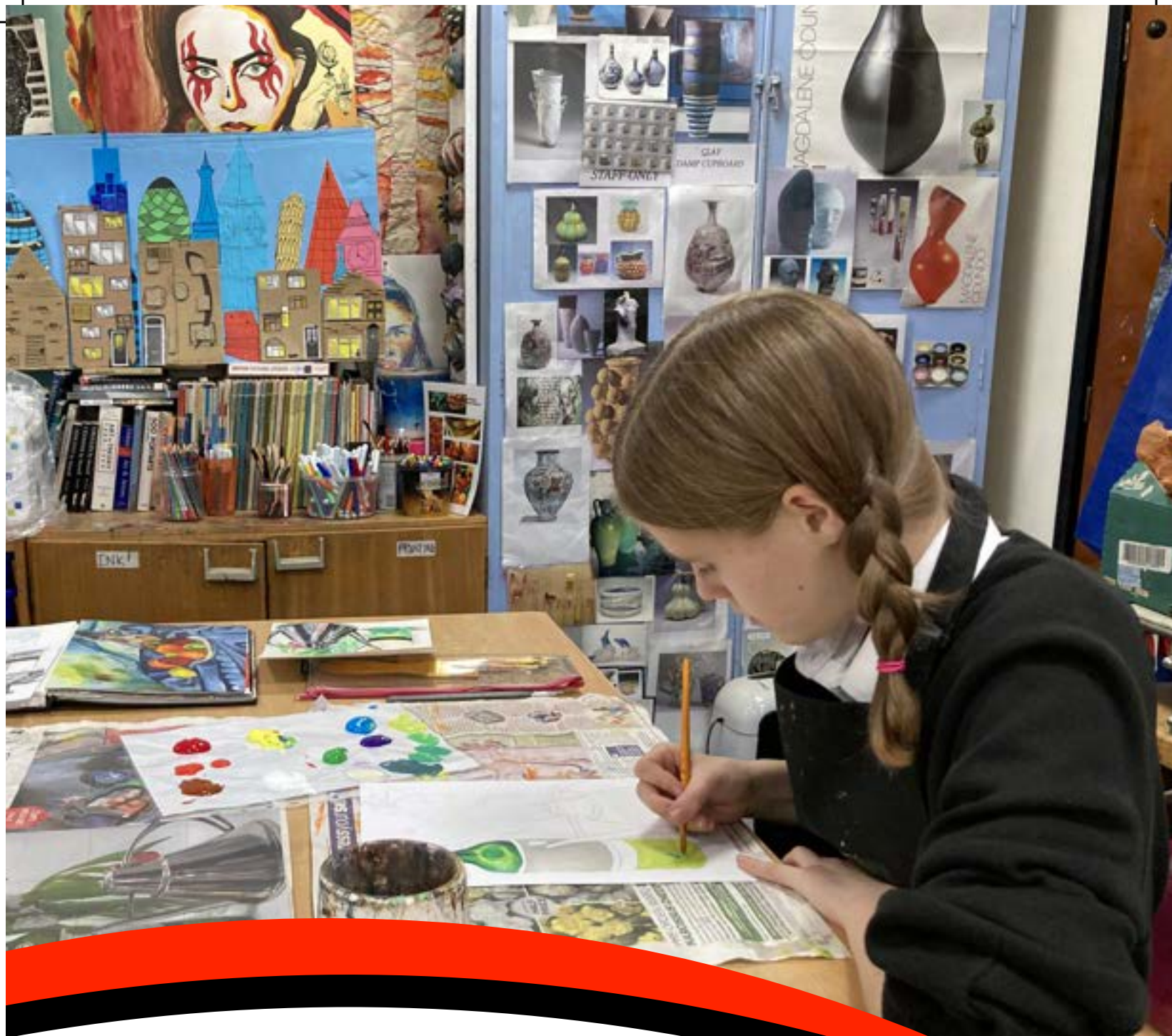
Some students may be eligible for free school meals. Checking your child is eligible is straightforward and can be done by completing the form on the school website: www.highdown.reading.sch.uk or by contacting the school office on 0118 901 5800 or by emailing: office@highdown.reading.sch.uk

Travelling to/from School

Highdown students are expected to demonstrate our values on the way to and from school, whether walking, cycling or using public transport.

Students cycling to the academy must wear a cycle helmet and obey the highway code at all times. As parents we request you ensure your child's bike is roadworthy and they have the necessary safety equipment, including a good quality lock. All bikes must be locked in our secure cages or cycle rack located outside PE. Scooters or electric scooters are not permitted on site.

Students who are driven to the academy must be dropped off safely, away from marked yellow zig-zags. It is illegal to stop on these, even for a short period. Students with mobility difficulties or visual impairments may be dropped off in the school car park. The roads around the academy are narrow and congested and we urge parents to arrange to pick their son/daughter up away from the immediate vicinity of the academy. Please be courteous when parking near our neighbours' homes.



Curriculum

Our rigorous and knowledge rich curriculum promises breadth of subjects and depth within them, equipping Highdown students with the best possible life chances. Each curriculum area is logically sequenced allowing space for mastery of core concepts and effective transitions into GCSE and Sixth Form. Students are aspirational in their learning, with expert teachers delivering content that is both engaging and stretching.

All curriculum maps can be found on the school website. Year 7 students will be routinely tested on the core knowledge from their knowledge organiser.

Assessment and Reporting

Regular, accurate recording of student assessments, progress and achievement is important. This not only supports and directs teacher planning, it also provides students and parents with up to date information about success, strengths and areas for focus and development.

You will receive formal reports regularly throughout the academic year and at least one formal parents' evening where you will meet your child's teachers and key pastoral staff. Should you need to discuss your child's progress outside these points you should contact your child's Head of Achievement in the first instance.

At Highdown we know that a strong foundation of knowledge supports excellent outcomes. This is reinforced through low stakes testing in every lesson and is also monitored through our formal assessment plan. Year 7 core knowledge tests are given at the end of each half term. Students can prepare for these using their knowledge organisers which they will receive on their first day in Year 7, but will also be available online over the summer holidays, should you wish to view them in advance.

Homework and Learning to Learn

Home learning is a vital part of students' academic and personal development. The purpose of homework is to:

- develop and embed effective learning and study habits
- consolidate learning of class work and prepare for future learning with retrieval quizzes

Students will be set up to 30 minutes per week per subject, although some of the home learning might take the form of longer term projects.



A High Performance Learner

- Extremely **resilient**, independent and highly motivated to learn
- Is extremely **confident** and asks **enquiring** questions to extend their learning
- **Always self-regulates** and meets all deadlines set for classwork and homework and regularly attempts challenge tasks
- Exceptionally **hard working**, which is shown in their outstanding level of effort and commitment
- Demonstrates a wide range of clear communication skills
- Regularly **practices** to improve skills and knowledge and shows resilience and determination in challenging tasks
- Demonstrates excellent **metacognition** with clear and effective responses to feedback and is able to learn effectively from their mistakes
- **Takes risks** in their learning and is **open minded** to try out new ideas
- Promotes the learning of others and shows exceptional **collaborative** skills
- **Quality of work in books is exceptional with exemplary pride in presentation**

Co-curricular Opportunities

Through a wide range of high-quality opportunities, we aim to nurture well-rounded individuals who are prepared to thrive and flourish in a dynamic and interconnected world. Our co-curricular programme complements academic excellence through fostering teamwork, creativity and resilience, and promotes positive contributions to our community.

Pillar	Examples of Activities	
Academic Excellence	Book Clubs Literary Festival Sparx Club Excellence Club History Club Medical Society Quiz Club	 
Creative and Performing Arts	Art/Photography Clubs Productions Theatre Trips Orchestra/Choirs/Bands Dance Company Music Recitals	
Sports and Physical Activity	Sports Clubs Team Sports Competitions Duke of Edinburgh Award (Bronze, Silver and Gold)	
Leadership and Personal Development	Student Leaders Buddies Rhos y Gwaliau Activity Week Sixth Form Peer Mentoring Reptile Club	
Community and Citizenship	World Challenge Residential Visits (France, Spain, China, Malaysia) Primary School Outreach	
Wellbeing and Mindfulness	Knit and Natter Club Shuffle Club Star Centre	
Careers and Future Pathways	Work Experience Careers and Apprenticeship Fairs Aim High Programme (Sixth Form) Careers Trips and Visits	



Music

In addition to the music curriculum, students can select from a range of instrumental and vocal tuition. Music lessons are either one-to-one or in small groups and are provided by independent peripatetic music teachers. Payment for lessons is made via the academy and rates vary. If you would like your son/daughter to have music tuition, please contact the school. Students in receipt of free school meals are eligible for discounted music lessons. Please get in touch with Mr Clawson, daclawson@highdown.reading.sch.uk, for more information. There are also opportunities for students to take part in a range of music clubs, for example choir, band from scratch, music technology, as well as the opportunity to take part in concerts and shows throughout the year.

Careers

At Highdown we are proud of the strong careers programme that we have established. We are committed to providing an inclusive careers programme which provides all students with the knowledge and employability skills they will need to be successful in the ever-evolving world of work. Students will receive personalised, well-informed advice and guidance which helps support decision making and planning for next steps.

Highdown's career programme includes the following:

- Regular use of Career Pilot application, including skills profile, pathway planners and job quizzes
- Access to careers information and College and University prospectus' in the Hive
- Careers Fair and Apprenticeship Awareness Evening
- Presentations and talks by outside speakers – either from local/national companies, colleges and universities, Highdown alumni
- Workshops delivered by external partners – mock interviews, CV writing, university financial awareness
- Visits to local colleges, universities and workplaces
- Meetings with Careers Adviser (from Year 10)

Key Stage 3 (Years 7-9)

During KS3, the key focus is to raise awareness of different career paths and the types of employment available, locally, nationally and globally. Students learn how to research up-to-date career information and how to access impartial face-to-face and digital careers information, advice and guidance services.

Year 7s will start exploring Career Pilot. They will also take part in the activity My School is a Workplace - looking at non-teaching jobs within the school.

Year 8s continue familiarising themselves with Career Pilot and take part in workshops, attend presentations and go on workplace visits, introducing them to a variety of career pathways.

During Year 9 students start to look at their GCSE options and how to choose between subjects. College, university and apprenticeship talks are made available at this stage.

Industry Links

Highdown has developed successful relationships with a number of providers to support students in a wide variety of activities. These vary from volunteers who provide support at Careers Fairs, offering work shadowing opportunities, getting involved in interview preparation work, and coming in to talk to students about careers in their industries. We are fortunate to have the opportunity to work with companies such as Signet Recruitment, AWE, Syngenta, Grant Thornton and Johnson Matthey to name a few. We have a great relationship with Activate Learning who ensure our students are supported in accessing courses that are not available as part of Highdown's post 16 provision. As well as working with local colleges we work closely with local universities such as University of Reading and Bucks New Uni, who arrange taster days on their site as well as workshops in school.



Communication

Working with the school, parents/carers have a vital role in helping maximise their child's success, achievements and personal development during their time at Highdown School and Sixth Form Centre. We provide regular information through our communication channels, as outlined below.



Class Charts

Online platform for information and homework

- Download the Class Charts Parent app from Apple Store or Google Play Store
- The school will provide new parents/carers with an 'access code' to log in and connect to their child in the first week of September



ParentMail

Our payment platform for meals, trips, event tickets and activities

- You will receive an email from ParentMail IRIS once your child is on roll at Highdown (this sometimes does not arrive on the first day, so we request that your child brings a packed lunch for the first week of school)
- Once the email arrives, please follow the instructions and you will be linked to the system and able to access the payment facility.

Communication Channels

- Parent/Carer's first point of contact should be their child's mentor or Head of Achievement for pastoral care and support matters, or the relevant Curriculum Leader for subject-based queries.
- Key contacts can be found on our school website - <https://www.highdown.reading.sch.uk/key-contacts>
- Parent/Carers should report their child's absence from school via Class Charts app.
- Parent/Carers can also contact us at office@highdown.reading.sch.uk.
- **Class Charts:** This app provides real-time information about your child's behaviour (recording House Points and notifying you of Consequence Points, and related same-day after-school detentions). Homework is set through Class Charts, enabling families to monitor home learning and completion of this work. Class Charts is also used to report attendance and for parents/carers to notify the school of their child's absence. The school uses the 'Announcements' feature of Class Charts to share information, for example our regular newsletter, information about trips and events, and reminders about home learning.
- **Email:** School email is used to communicate with parents/carers for a variety of reasons, for example by individual class teachers/mentor, information about trips, assessment reports, and letters. It is essential that the school has your current contact details, including email address, and that you inform us of any changes to your contact details as soon as possible.
- **Newsletters:** The school's weekly newsletter is shared through Class Charts, summarising recent events and achievements, as well as informing families of upcoming dates/events of interest.
- **Social Media:** We use a range of social media apps to promote events and celebrate achievements, including Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn.
- **School Cloud (Learning Review Evenings):** The school holds Learning Review Evenings each year where you can discuss your child's progress with their class teachers. These are held virtually through the School Cloud platform.



Contact Us

Highdown School and Sixth Form Centre
Surley Row, Emmer Green, Reading, RG4 8LR

Telephone: 0118 901 5800

Website: www.highdown.reading.sch.uk

To report a student absent: please use Class Charts app

Connect with Us



emmergreen



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Highdown School and Sixth Form Centre