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Hills news



A termly round-up from Hills Road Sixth Form College.

Spring 2026 hillsroad.ac.uk



Jo Trump, Daniel Zeichner and Hills' new Principal Ali Kirkman.



"I'm so excited to work with our community to continue Hills Road's outstanding legacy of sixth-form education."

ALI KIRKMAN

New College Principal at Hills

We are delighted to announce that Ali Kirkman has been appointed the College's new Principal from August. Ali is currently Vice Principal for Staff and Student Learning at the College and is also a former student.

An opportunity for current Principal, Jo Trump, to introduce Ali to the College's local MP, Daniel Zeichner, arose during his visit to the College in January. Daniel is a regular visitor to the College and is always keen to stay in touch with what's happening at Hills Road and in the sixth form education sector.

It was a valuable moment to introduce Daniel to Ali and to reflect on Jo's leadership as she prepares

to hand over the reins later this year. Both Jo and Ali shared their enthusiasm about continuing the College's strong partnerships across the city and for providing the best possible sixth-form education for future students in Cambridge and beyond.

Ali said, "It was a pleasure to meet Daniel as I prepare to take on the role of Principal later this year. I'm really proud of the work the College does for young people in Cambridgeshire and I'm looking forward to building on the strong foundations Jo has established, continuing Hills Road's commitment to high-quality education and strong community partnerships."

Outgoing Principal, Jo Trump said, "Daniel has been a great supporter of the Sixth Form College sector over the years. I know that he will continue to lend his voice and support to Ali as she takes the College forward into its new chapter. I am sure they will work together with city partners to establish how best to meet the needs and ambitions of Cambridge City for continued growth and to understand how Hills Road can help to meet that ambition. It's also a huge pleasure to know that Hills Road will be in such good hands under Ali's leadership and I'm sure it will go from strength to strength."

Ali features in our 50th anniversary stories. [Read more](#)

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Cambridge MP Daniel Zeichner visits the College



Daniel Zeichner with A level Politics students.

Year 12 Politics students were very lucky to receive a visit from local MP for Cambridge, Daniel Zeichner on Friday 9 January.

Daniel talked to the class about his role as an MP, in both opposition and in power, and the 14 months he spent as a minister in the Department for the Environment, Food, and Rural Affairs (DEFRA). There was then an opportunity for a Q&A, and students asked a range of questions covering reform of the House of Lords, the future of Your Party and the political left, the role of whips, inheritance taxes on farms and even how best to become a government minister!

Politics teacher, James Lake, said, "We are grateful for Daniel's visit, his insights into the world of Westminster, and for his candid and honest answers to all the questions asked of him. Thank you, Daniel, for making the time to come and see us. Please come back soon!"

Interfaith event brings students together for thoughtful discussion

Students gathered on 10 February for this year's Interfaith Question Time, a lunchtime event that encourages open discussion on faith, ethics and belief. A follow-on from World Religion Day, the panel was organised by James Parmenter and the College's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion working group. Representatives from Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Judaism and Islam responded to student questions on shared values, morality and the role of religion in contemporary society, exploring how faith traditions remain relevant today.

Speakers included Zen Buddhist Richard Potter, Suresh Patel from the Hindu community, Maths teacher Salah Ahras on Islam, and two former



staff members: Cathy Michel on Christianity and Mike Levy of the Cambridge Reform Synagogue on Judaism. The event was well attended,

“It was a pleasure to host such a diverse panel of speakers, and it was particularly good to see so many students engaging thoughtfully with the discussion.”

**JAMES PARMENTER,
HEAD OF HISTORY**

with students engaging thoughtfully and respectfully in the discussion, showing genuine curiosity and appreciation for different perspectives.



Izzy drove tractors, looked after calves and helped with milking on a dairy farm.

Hamburg work experience exchange trip

Now in its 35th year, our longstanding German Exchange to Hamburg offered fourteen students a rich cultural and professional experience. Accompanied by A level German teacher Jill Phelps and assistant Fenja Bühler, students were warmly welcomed into the homes of their German exchange partners and even spent a day attending school alongside them.

A highlight of the trip was the six-day work placement in and around the Hamburg-Bergedorf area. Students were placed in a range of settings, including primary schools, a bike repair workshop, a chemical company, and a GP's surgery, gaining hands-on experience and insight into German working life.

For Mimi Snell, who worked as a classroom assistant in a Year 2 class, the placement proved to be "one of the most challenging yet rewarding experiences" she has ever had. Gemma Deudney, who spent her week in a nursery, noted how much her understanding of German improved and particularly enjoyed the cultural side of the trip - from a walking tour of Hamburg to an evening at the iconic Elbphilharmonie opera house.

Izzy Young described her placement on a dairy farm as "amazing," and that the experience boosted her confidence in speaking German spontaneously and left her with "brilliant memories" to last a lifetime.

In brief

Enrichment activity trip: Earlier this term, Biology teacher Karen Stephens and Biology technicians Fenella Dansie and Rosie Brown accompanied a group of Year 12 students studying DNA barcoding for their Enrichment to the Wellcome Genome Campus as part of an exciting scientific investigation. The outcome of their investigation was to answer the question *Is fish always fish?*
[Read more](#)

Ski trip: During the half-term holiday, 46 students and six members of staff enjoyed this year's annual trip to Andorra. The group experienced excellent weather, fantastic snow and a brilliantly organised itinerary that ensured everyone made the most of their time on these slopes. The skiing conditions were ideal for participants of all abilities, making the trip unforgettable for everyone involved.

Upcoming Eco-week events: There is an exciting programme of events lined up for students during Eco-week at the start of next term. Kicking off with the annual HR4.5 fun run/walk on 15 April. This year, students chose to raise funds for the charity 'Just One Tree' in Kenya. There is also an excellent line-up of talks featuring Pippa Heylings MP, Sarah from Greenweigh, a minimal-waste shop in Sawston and Alan Rusbridger, former editor of *The Guardian*. The week will conclude on 24 April with an Eco-fair featuring a clothes swap, book swap and opportunities to learn more about sustainable living.

Student Council elections: This year's hustings to elect the new Student Council took place on 17 March and students voted on 23 March. The new Student Council members were announced on 25 March.
[Read more](#)



Matteo Nacher Saltara, piano, Shihua Zhao, violin, Koko Fish, cello.

Chamber Concert showcases exceptional student musicianship

The Chamber Concert on 26 February was a wonderful celebration of solo and ensemble music-making showcasing the depth and breadth of musical talent across the College.

Students delivered outstanding performances across a rich and varied programme, featuring works by composers including Mozart, Chopin, Bach and Shostakovich. From expressive solo performances to confident and well-balanced chamber ensembles, students demonstrated both impressive technical skill and heartfelt musical expression throughout the evening.

Highlights included accomplished piano and string performances, as well as engaging ensemble playing, with students performing challenging repertoire with maturity, sensitivity and strong musical communication. The

concert concluded with a lively and technically impressive performance of Sarasate's *Zigeunerweisen*, bringing the evening to an energetic close.

A huge thank you to all the performers, accompanists, staff and audience members who helped make the evening such a vibrant and memorable occasion, and for supporting live music at Hills Road.

[Read more](#)

“It’s always so uplifting to listen to students tackle such challenging repertoire with such verve, confidence and artistry. The standard of musicianship was incredibly high, and it was a privilege to watch and to listen!”

JO TRUMP, PRINCIPAL



Sophie Nuijn Jones, bassoon and Alex Greenham, bassoon.

Stunning performances at West Road Concert Hall



On 24 March, Hills Road students took to the stage at the West Road Concert Hall for a memorable evening of music, marking a welcome return to this prestigious venue. It was wonderful seeing students making the most of the unique opportunity to enjoy performing within the University of Cambridge.

Performances from the Symphony Orchestra, Chamber Choir and College Choir included Ravel's *Piano Concerto in G*, Shostakovich's *Suite for Variety Orchestra*, and powerful excerpts from Mozart's *Requiem*.

The evening also highlighted the breadth of musical life across the college, with the Jazz Orchestra and Folk Roots adding energy and contrast. Altogether, it was a vibrant and memorable showcase of the talent, commitment and versatility of our young musicians.



Eppendorf donates industry-standard equipment to Biology

Eppendorf, a leading international life science company, has generously donated equipment and consumables to the biology department. Students at the College, have been able to carry out DNA barcoding using newly donated industry-standard equipment thanks to the generosity of the leading life sciences firm.

Insights into what it's like working in a real-life lab were made possible thanks to the exceptionally generous donation of equipment and consumables from Eppendorf, whose UK headquarters are located in Stevenage, just under 30 miles from the College. As Eppendorf are a leading supplier to the life sciences industry, students are able to experience use of high-quality equipment found in real-life labs worldwide.

The donated equipment includes multi-channel micropipettes and a temperature-controlled microcentrifuge. Students will also be using a new PCR machine to create billions of copies of DNA within just a couple of hours as they amplify their DNA barcodes.

Head of Biology, Lizzy Bazley said, "This donation benefits our A level students as well as students who are taking Biology as an enrichment subject. This simply would not have been possible within existing resources."



A student using the Eppendorf equipment.

The equipment and consumables that have been donated will also be used by Biology A level students during their Year 13 studies of gel electrophoresis, DNA sequencing and profiling.

Biology at Hills Road is a highly popular A level and enrichment subject. In the 2025-26 academic year alone, over 800 students at

Hills Road will be able to benefit from the equipment in some way, followed by potentially thousands more in the years to come.



"We are so grateful to Eppendorf for enabling our students to have the chance to use industry-standard equipment."

LIZZY BAZLEY, HEAD OF BIOLOGY



Karen Stephens, Biology teacher demonstrates the equipment to students.



Students receiving their BPhO certificates.

Students' success in the British Physics Olympiad competition

Year 13 physicists have once again demonstrated exceptional talent in this year's British Physics Olympiad (BPhO), achieving an impressive set of results across the competition.

The BPhO is a prestigious national challenge designed to stretch and inspire young physicists. Students begin with the one-hour Round 1 Primer, a multiple-choice paper that tests core understanding. This is followed by Round 1, a demanding

"These results reflect the dedication, curiosity, and hard work of our students and we're incredibly proud of their success."

TIM LORD, TEACHER OF PHYSICS

two-hour written exam split into two sections. The highest-scoring students are then invited to tackle Round 2, a three-hour paper featuring a choice of extended, university-style problems.

Congratulations to Jasper Chan and Thehan De Silva, who both earned Gold Awards, placing them among the top performers nationally. An outstanding achievement also from Alex Greenham, who not only secured a Top Gold Award but was invited to compete in Round 2.

Students shine in the UK Space Design Competition



Students receiving their Space Design Competition certificates.

Twelve students took part in the UK Space Design Competition (UKSDC) online event November, showcasing creativity, teamwork and impressive STEM expertise in this fast-paced national challenge.

The UKSDC is a unique simulation competition in which students take on the roles of engineers, scientists and company directors

within a futuristic space-industry scenario. Working under time pressure, teams must design a fully functioning space settlement, balancing scientific accuracy with innovation, sustainability and real-world engineering constraints. The online format demands not only strong technical understanding but also excellent communication and collaboration.

"Students rose to the challenge, contributing ideas across structural engineering, life-support systems, robotics, economics and mission planning. Our students' final presentation demonstrated both ambition and professionalism, reflecting the many hours of problem-solving and teamwork that went into their design."

TIM LORD, TEACHER OF PHYSICS

Find out what our super-talented Performing Arts students have been getting up to this term, and what's coming up next term...

Drama and Theatre students prepare for their practical exams

Congratulations to the Y13 Drama students who have worked this term intensively on their final performance exams, with extracts from a variety of plays presented to a visiting examiner.

The students are a super talented and dynamic bunch taking on a huge range of theatrical styles and genres, including some gorgeous, heartfelt dark comedies like ground-breaking feminist play *Neoptide* by Sarah Daniels and Shelagh Stephenson's tense but hilarious *The Memory of Water*, as well as some moving and emotional pieces, for example, from Patrick Marber's *Closer* and Simon Stone's *Yerma*.

We also saw some great political theatre, *Accidental Death of an*



Liberty McCracken and Freya Bryant rehearsing for *The Odd Couple*.

Anarchist by Daniel Fo, performed in his trademark farcical style. It is always a treat to see the plays that students find vital and powerful and witness them come to life in such a dedicated and vibrant way.



Izzy Kent-Taylor rehearsing for *Immaculate*.



Hayden Matt and Penny Wood rehearsing for *Danny and the Deep Blue Sea*.



A level Dance student Lee Murphy performing *Motion*.

A showcase of dance

On 12 March, dancers took part in an exciting Showcase of their work. The programme included a rich variety of student choreography, ranging from beautiful lyrical solos, impressive jazz groups, to poignant and thoughtful contemporary work.

Y12 students had worked on a previous exam question, choosing from a Mondrian painting based on Broadway, an idiom or proverb, or the use of technology, which inspired a real range of dances, all performed with energy and intensity.

The Enrichment students chose a song that they liked and created some beautifully emotional work, and Y13 dancers performed some of their upcoming exam work. Their pieces were based on the Italian Renaissance, Textiles, and Assemblage Art, and they did not disappoint! Their work was full of choreographic integrity, innovative movement content, and insightful intentions brought to life through dynamic and charismatic performances.

Their solos reflected the work of different high-profile practitioners, including Bourne and Vardimon, contrasting in their styles and thematic content. Performing to a sold-out audience created an electric, exciting atmosphere, allowing the students to showcase their brilliant talent.



Dance Enrichment students. From left: Poppy, Evelyn, Sachie, Lilly.

“The recent Dance Showcase was a truly brilliant evening that once again demonstrated the remarkable talent and creativity of our students. The variety of performances, along with the polished stage production, ensured that every piece felt fresh and dynamic!”

ALI KIRKMAN,
VICE PRINCIPAL



Booking is now open for *Machinal!*

Monday 20 April, 4.30
 Tuesday 21 April, 7.30

Starring the fiercely talented Y13 company, don't miss Sophie Treadwell's ground-breaking expressionist masterpiece brought roaring into life at the Robinson Theatre! Age 12+

Book here



Students create film for nationwide campaign

A level Film Studies students are leading the way in sustainability through their work on a national film project for the Flight Free Schools campaign, which encourages schools to reduce air travel and explore more sustainable alternatives.

Four students – Oliver Bowman, Lena Popczyk, Kamila Matviienko, and Lara Williams – are producing a short film that highlights how schools can take meaningful steps toward lowering their carbon footprint.

“By reducing carbon emissions from flights, schools can make a positive difference and demonstrate that sustainability is something we all need to take seriously.”

LENA POPCZYK, YEAR 12

Since 2023, Hills Road committed to ending all trips involving flights.

Working alongside the English, Media and Film department and Chris Graham, the College’s Head of Sustainability, the students have taken charge of every stage of the process – from planning and filming to conducting interviews across the College. The project’s creative direction, storytelling, and technical production have all been student-led.

During the production, the team collaborated with Anna Hughes, Director of *Flight Free UK* and organiser of the Flight Free Schools campaign, who visited the College on 6 February. The campaign aims to inspire schools across the country to pledge to avoid air travel and spark deeper conversations about sustainable travel choices.

The finished film – due for release later this year – will spotlight both the environmental impact of aviation and the practical ways schools can create lasting change through responsible travel decisions.

Collaborating with OCR on a National Sustainability Qualification

Chris Graham, Head of Sustainability, has worked with exam board OCR to develop the new Level 3 Certificate in Sustainability, a qualification equivalent to half an A level. Introduced nationally this academic year, the vocational course is fully funded in the same way as A Levels.

Chris authored teaching materials for the examined component, including presentations, teacher guidance and a scheme of work to support schools delivering the course nationwide. These resources are hosted on OCR’s Teach Cambridge platform for approved centres. Alongside helping shape the qualification, Chris continues to support teachers through a national network, sharing guidance and best practice as the first cohort of students completes the course this year.

“The more young people who understand how environmental, social and political systems interact, the better equipped we are to respond to the challenges ahead.”

CHRIS GRAHAM,
HEAD OF SUSTAINABILITY



The annual Employer Fair, organised by the Hills Road Careers department, took place on 3 March, welcoming a broad range of employers to the College. Students met representatives from local organisations, including Addenbrooke’s NHS Trust, Cambridge City Council and Cambridge Consultants, as well as national and international companies such as Deloitte, ARM and AECOM. The event provided a practical opportunity to explore apprenticeships, work experience, part-time roles and year-in-industry pathways.

Hills students celebrate Oxbridge success

Hills Road is thrilled to share that 70 of its students have received offers to study at the University of Oxford and the University of Cambridge. Their chosen subjects span an impressive range – from Music, German, Classics and History of Art to Earth Sciences, Land Economy, Natural Sciences, Physics, Chemistry and Engineering.

This year’s number is similar to previous years, with 35 offers from the University of Oxford and 35 from the University of Cambridge. The College is immensely proud of all the students’ dedication and hard work.

This success also highlights the exceptional support provided by Hills Road’s Careers team, who guide students through every stage of the process – from interview preparation and mock interviews to crafting standout personal statements.

Head of Careers, Bekki Clark said, “We were thrilled to see so many students receive Oxford and Cambridge offers this year and we wish them all the very best in their future studies. For those who weren’t successful, we know that they will go on to do great things wherever they go.”

Careers week inspires Year 12s

Year 12 students had a fantastic opportunity to explore their futures during this year’s Careers week in January. The Careers team organised an impressive 38 online talks, all designed to help students discover potential university courses, career paths, and post-18 options.

Sessions covered a wide range of topics – from apprenticeships and the UCAS process to choosing the right

degree and preparing for university life. Students also enjoyed insights into specialist areas such as graphic design, sports rehabilitation and physiotherapy, ocean and earth sciences and careers in the Armed Forces.

Drawing a total of 4,166 attendances across all sessions, it was a brilliant demonstration of student enthusiasm and engagement. The week offered valuable guidance and inspiration,

helping them take their next steps with confidence.

Careers Advisor, Anita Irving said, “We were incredibly grateful to the many speakers who gave their time to speak during Careers Week. Students were fortunate to have such a wide choice of talks to attend, and we hope the experiences have broadened their horizons about the many opportunities available to them in the future.”

12 SPORTS ROUND-UP



Men's Rugby team following their win over Queen Elizabeth Sixth Form College.

This term's sport highlights



Netball team.



Women's volleyball team.

The Men's Rugby team made it through to the AoC Cup quarter finals, defeating Queen Elizabeth Sixth Form. Unfortunately, they lost to Hartpury College in the semi-finals 38-12.

The Hills Women's Basketball team kicked off their season with an exciting first win, edging out Long Road in a tense local derby. After a hard-fought match, the team secured a well-deserved 26-23 victory – a fantastic team effort all around!

The Men's Basketball have made

it through to the semi finals where they play Myerscough College in the Dynamik KO Cup.

The Netball first team also shone this term, dominating Sigma Sixth from Essex in a high-scoring clash to claim an impressive 56-20 win.

In Hockey, the Men's team continued their strong cup run with a win over Truro in the AoC Cup quarter-finals. They went on to face Peter Symonds in the semi-finals, but lost 0-5.

AoC Sport National Championships

Our Hills Road sports students have been hard at work this term, training and preparing to proudly represent the East region at the upcoming AoC Sport National Championships next term. Each April, Hills students travel to Nottingham to take part in this national event, where colleges from across the UK compete for

regional honours. Qualification for the Championships takes place through regional tournaments held during the autumn term, with only the top college teams and individual athletes going on to represent their regions.

This year, we're thrilled that 66 Hills Road students have earned

their place at Nottingham. They will be competing across eight sports: Badminton, Cricket, Cross Country, Mixed Hockey, Table Tennis, Tennis, Men's Volleyball, and Women's Volleyball. We wish all our athletes the very best of luck as they prepare to showcase their skill, teamwork, and dedication on the national stage!