

Parent & carer guide

**Shape
the
future**



Hills Road
Sixth Form College
Cambridge

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Introduction

At Hills Road, we are committed to helping every student thrive academically, personally and socially.

“Sixth form is an exciting time of growth, independence and opportunity, and our aim is to ensure that every student feels supported, challenged and inspired to achieve their full potential.

As Head of Year, I have the privilege of working closely with Progress and Support Tutors, teaching staff and support staff to ensure that every student has the guidance, encouragement, value and opportunities they need to flourish in a supportive, safe and inclusive environment.

Since joining in 2024, I can confidently say that the most rewarding part of my role within the College is seeing our students grow in confidence and independence, achieve their goals, and take their next steps beyond Hills Road with ambition and purpose.

We believe that the strongest outcomes are achieved when students, families and college staff work together, and we greatly value the partnerships we build with parents and carers throughout their young person's time at Hills Road. Open communication and a shared commitment to student wellbeing, attendance, and academic progress enable us to provide the best possible support when needed.

This guide outlines key aspects of College life and the support available to students. We hope you find it helpful and look forward to working with you to ensure your young person makes the most of their Hills Road experience.”



Sam Walker
Head of Year 12



Transition

Transitioning from GCSE to A level is not just a shift in academic rigor; it's a transformative period for your young person's self-discovery and identity.

This journey is a wholly individual experience, unique to each student and their family and there is no one-size-fits-all guide or universal strategy to navigate this transition.

For many young people, choosing to attend College is a deliberate and meaningful decision. It represents a secure yet significant step towards increased independence. During their time at Sixth Form, students encounter a greater sense of independence and are expected to make many more decisions for themselves, ranging from their A level subjects, progression plans, enrichment opportunities, to where and who they want to spend their time with.

This period of growth and self-discovery makes for a remarkable two years but it is inevitable that there will be challenges or frustrations along the way. It may feel in the first few weeks that the pace of sixth form is a rollercoaster, but we find that students do find their 'groove' in a short space of time.

Financial support info

Do not hesitate to contact your young person's Progress and Support Tutor to find out how things are going at college.



Attendance

Hills Road, in line with government guidance, expects excellent attendance from its students.

Our A level subjects come to life in lively face-to-face classes, making punctual attendance at each lesson absolutely essential. These classroom sessions are dynamic spaces for student discussions, skill development, and deepening understanding. They also give teachers the chance to quickly clear up any misunderstandings.

Studies consistently show that attainment and attendance are closely linked, with students who miss out on classroom teaching tending to achieve lower grades in their final A level exams. When a student is absent from a lesson, they miss out on important content, which can then make it harder for them to catch up and grasp upcoming lessons.

Our Teaching and Support staff are here to support students in attending, staying on track and making the most of their learning. We will keep you informed about your young person's attendance every week through an email sent on Friday evenings.

It is crucial to stress to them that attending classes and being punctual are vital for their academic success.

With our support system in place, we aim to minimise the impact of avoidable absences. Our students are guided by an attendance officer, their teachers and their tutor to help them maintain excellent attendance.



Absence

If your young person will miss or has missed lessons due to an unavoidable absence, they should apply for authorised absence.

Communication from parents/carers alone will not result in an absence being authorised, and requests must be submitted by the student.

Students should provide supporting evidence, such as a medical appointment letter, appointment card or other relevant documentation, and obtain permission from their teachers where appropriate.

We encourage students to arrange medical appointments and other commitments outside College hours wherever possible. Where illness or other circumstances affect attendance, students should keep their tutor and teachers informed so that appropriate support can be provided.

Authorised absence is the figure that is shared, if requested, with universities and future employers. Students must apply for authorised absence through the Student SharePoint page. Term-time absences for part-time work or holidays will be recorded as unauthorised.



Tutors

Every student at Hills Road is allocated a Progress and Support Tutor who is the first port of call for both students and their parents/carers.

Tutors offer support and guidance for both the personal and academic development of their tutees. Tutors not only provide academic advice but also act as a bridge to a wide array of support services, both within the College and externally, ensuring that students have access to the resources they need to thrive.

They are instrumental in delivering programmes such as the Future Ready Programme, the Extended Project Qualification or the Certificate in Sustainability, and Enrichment activities, enhancing students' educational experiences.

In their role, tutors monitor student progression and attendance, proactively identifying students who may be falling behind and will work closely with both you and your young person to create action plans for improvement.

They maintain open lines of communication with parents, caregivers, and external agencies, when necessary, to create a comprehensive support network around your young person.

You can contact your young person's tutor by email during term time from 8.30 am to 5 pm. Please allow 24 hours for them to respond.

All Hills Road students receive an ID card that identifies them as Hills Road students. To maintain a safe and secure site, students must enter the College site via the access gates using their ID cards. Students who have misplaced or forgotten their ID card must report to the Main Reception.



Timetabling

Your young person's timetable follows a structured framework, although the specific arrangement of lessons and study periods cannot be confirmed until timetables are published.

- During term-time, the College site is open and supervised from 8am to 5pm, Monday to Friday
- The College day runs from 9am to 4.10pm and is divided into six 65-minute teaching periods
- Students have a 20-minute break at 11.15am and a lunch break lasting one period
- On Mondays, Wednesdays and Thursdays, lunch breaks are staggered by year group. On Tuesdays and Fridays, both year groups share the same lunch period.
- While A level lessons and Future Ready continue throughout both Year 12 and Year 13, EPQ and Enrichment are timetabled in Year 12 only.
- Timetables are usually set for the full academic year and reviewed at the end of Year 12 in preparation for Year 13, which may result in timetable changes at that point.
- Timetables may occasionally be adjusted during the academic year. We therefore encourage students to check their timetable regularly for any changes to lesson times or room allocations.

Independent study time are sessions in which students can continue their learning in College (using the College's resources) or at home.



A levels

A level subjects form the core of every student's timetable, complemented by our Future Ready programme to support their interests and next steps.

At Hills Road, whilst each subject is taught in the classroom for four periods a week, this is not enough time to build the knowledge and skills necessary for high achievement. Therefore, students are expected to complete three to five hours of independent study per subject each week.

Independent learning may consist of tasks designed to prepare for learning a topic, to apply knowledge or skills, to consolidate a topic, or to research a topic. All independent learning directed by teachers will be set as a Teams assignment.

Discussing how this will work in practice is a useful way of supporting your young person. Homes vary in terms of space, family demands, and other distractions and young people have to contribute to family life like everyone else. It will help everyone, and particularly the student, to establish routines.

If your young person is struggling with their subject, a variety of support is available. Students have access to SharePoint, where each subject has support tools, guidance and resources to aid learning.

Subjects also run lunchtime workshops led by teachers and some subjects have gap year students available for smaller group or one-to-one support.

Please do not hesitate to contact your young person's subject teachers for further guidance on academic support.



Future Ready

Underpinning your young person's educational journey at Hills is the Future Ready Programme (FRP).

The FRP helps students to develop personally and socially and equips them with valuable life skills to support them after sixth form, whatever they decide to do.

The Year 12 programme covers areas such as Health and Wellbeing, Community, Study Skills, Life Skills, and Future Progression.

Learning occurs through a combination of student input, tutor guidance and external experts and speakers.

FRP info



Subject lessons in class

12 periods

Extended Curriculum

- Future Ready sessions
 - EPQ or Certificate in Sustainability
 - Enrichment
- 1 period each

Independent study time

10 periods

**Weekly
Year 12 study
programme**
Three A levels

Independent study time should be used for independent learning set by subjects (4 hours per subject) and EPQ (2 hours).

Extended Project Qualification

Delivered in Year 12, the Extended Project Qualification (EPQ) is a compulsory aspect of our study programme, worth the equivalent of half an A level qualification.

The EPQ offers the chance to develop real independence, resilience and maturity as an advanced-level learner, while pursuing a topic of the student's choosing. The EPQ offers an opportunity to try something new, learn new skills and gain extra UCAS points as well as impress employers.

The project provides evidence that the transition from college to university will be a smooth one for students who have successfully demonstrated their aptitude for independent learning.

You can support your young person by talking to them about their project ideas, helping them keep track of their progress, and staying up to date via emails from the Head of EPQ.

EPQ info

New for this academic year, we are also offering the opportunity for students to complete the Level 3 certificate in Sustainability, in place of the EPQ. Students have expressed interest in being part of the programme during enrolment after GCSE results.

Certificate in Sustainability info



Enrichment

All students in Year 12 undertake Enrichment as part of their study programme and there are lots of activities to choose from.

You can support your young person by looking through the list of enrichment opportunities available and helping them decide which to sign up for.

The choice of activities will be shared with Year 12 students in the first few weeks of term.

Enrichment aims to be fun and relaxing, to give your young person the chance to try a new experience or expand an existing interest, to explore new skills such as independence, creativity and resilience, and to help make new friends.

We ask Y12s to choose a number of Enrichment activities at the start of term because we can't always guarantee their first choice. They need to complete the request form promptly; otherwise, an activity will be chosen for them.

Skills and talents develop in different ways, and they are not always related to A level subjects.

It could be that your young person finds a new talent or skill through Enrichment that they decide to turn into their EPQ.



Course changes

At the start of the term, we want students to feel confident in their subject choices and give each of their subjects a fair opportunity.

We encourage all students to attend every enrolled subject during the first two weeks. This allows them to fully experience each course before deciding whether it suits them. Following this period, a short course change window opens, during which students may request a subject change, subject to meeting entry requirements and availability.

If your young person is considering a change, it is important to carefully explore the reasons. A level subjects are all challenging in their own way, and sometimes a subject may feel difficult simply because it is unfamiliar or requires a different approach.

That said, we understand that finding the right fit is key to a successful and enjoyable learning experience.

Students will receive clear instructions on how to request a course change, and we encourage you to talk with them about how they are finding their subjects during those early weeks.

If a change is needed, it is best to act promptly, as switching later means catching up on missed content independently. For this reason, no course changes are approved after the October half-term break.



Planning

Sixth form brings greater independence and flexibility, which can be exciting but also a little overwhelming at times.

Some students may find it challenging to manage their time effectively, especially when faced with more free periods and fewer structured lessons. That is completely normal, and we are here to help.

We encourage students to think of their free periods as valuable independent learning time, which can be used to stay on top of studies, explore interests, or simply get organised.

Establishing good routines, whether at home or in College, can make a big difference in helping students balance their academic work with everything else that sixth form life offers.

You might find it helpful to sit down together and look at your young person's timetable on ProPortal to plan the week ahead.

For students who need a bit more structure, our Supported Independent Learning Service (SILS) provides timetabled sessions, regular goal-setting, and personalised support.

Contact Study Skills

Hills Road offers a variety of study spaces, including our dedicated Study Centre and College Library, both designed to support different learning styles.

If your young person is finding it hard to stay organised or motivated, their Progress and Support Tutor is always available to help.

