High Ongar Primary School Newsletter

Friday 9th October 2026

Welcome from the Head of School

It has been another busy and enjoyable week at High Ongar, with children continuing to demonstrate enthusiasm, resilience and a love of learning in all areas of school life.

I would like to say a huge **thank you** to everyone who has donated to our Hello Yellow fundraising day. We have raised **£121.20** so far and your generosity helps support vital mental health services for children and young people. If you would still like to make a donation, please follow this link: https://fundraise.youngminds.org.uk/s/12147/13417

I would also like to extend my thanks to everyone who continues to support the work of the **Friends of High Ongar**. Thanks to your fundraising efforts, we have recently been able to purchase two sets of BeeBots, which are already enhancing learning opportunities across the school.





As the weather continues to vary and children are bringing additional layers into school, please ensure that **all items are clearly named**. This makes it much easier for us to return misplaced items to their rightful owners and helps reduce the amount of lost property.

Thank you, as always, for your ongoing support and partnership. I hope you all have a wonderful weekend with your families.

Best wishes,

Mrs S Kilbey
Head of School

Important Dates

12th Oct - Shoebox appeal
14th Oct - EYFS Intake Tour
16th Oct - Clubs finish
22nd Oct - Friends Playground Tuck
23rd Oct - Non Pupil Day
2nd Nov - Clubs restart
9th Nov - Yr6 Resilience Workshop
11th Nov - Parents Evening
12th Nov - EYFS Intake Tour
12th Nov - Parents Evening
27th Nov - Friends Playground Tuck
30th Nov - Non Pupil Day
4th Dec - Clubs finish
8th Dec - EYFS and KS1 Nativity 9.30am
9th Dec - Friends Christmas Shop
10th Dec - EYFS and KS1 Nativity 2.15pm
16th Dec - Christmas Jumper Day
16th Dec - Christmas Panto
17th Dec - Friends Christmas Disco
18th Dec - School finishes at 1pm

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- Friends Update
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School Updates and Celebrations

House Captains

We are both excited and proud to announce our House Captains for 2026 to 2027.

House Captain: Lily
Deputy House Captain: River-Rose

House Captain: Amelia
Deputy House Captain: Leili

House Captain: Isabella
Deputy House Captain: Henry

House Captain: Ethan
Deputy House Captain: Ava



Celebrating Achievements Beyond School

We love hearing about the fantastic things our children achieve outside of school and would like to celebrate these successes in our newsletters.

Whether your child has earned a certificate, earned Player of the Match, won a competition, achieved a swimming badge, performed in a show, completed a challenge or reached a personal milestone, we would love to hear about it.

Please send a photo together with a couple of sentences describing the achievement to the school admin address, and we will share as many as possible in future editions of our newsletters.

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School Updates and Celebrations

Headteacher Award Winners

Congratulations to all our recent Headteacher Award Winners!

Week Ending 2nd October

Ash - Oscar and Ivy
Beech - Grace and Dolly
Elm - Anthony and Annalise
Maple - George and Ella
Willow - Nevaeh and Ronnie

Week Ending 9th October

Ash - Connie and Casper
Beech - Willow and Blake
Elm - Roo and Matlida
Maple - Lottie and Casey
Willow - Willow and Lily



Attendance

Congratulations to our attendance champions over the past two weeks. Excellent attendance helps children make the most of every learning opportunity and supports them to achieve thier best.



Week Ending 2nd October:

Willow - 97.2%
Whole School - 95.1%



Week Ending 9th October:

Maple - 100%
Whole School - 96%

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Reminders

Attendance

8.35am Gates Open
8.40am Classrooms Open
8.45am School Starts
10.30am Morning Break
10.45am Morning Break ends
12pm Lunch starts
1pm Afternoon learning begins
3.10pm Gates open
3.15pm End of day



To make sure that all children are as safe as possible, we operate a system of first day contact. When your child is absent, please contact the School Office on 01277 363761. Please give:

- Your child's name
- The reason for absence
- When you expect your child to return to school

You must call the school every day your child is absent.

PE Days

Ash - Monday and Wednesday
Beech - Thursday and Friday
Elm - Tuesday and Friday
Maple - Tuesday and Thursday
Willow - Monday and Wednesday



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THE FRIENDS OF High Ongar Primary School

OCTOBER NEWSLETTER

We have lots happening over the next few weeks! Thank you, as always, for supporting Friends of High Ongar and helping us raise money for our school.

PUMPKIN COMPETITION

Thursday 22nd October

Children are invited to carve and decorate a pumpkin at home and bring it into school on the morning of Thursday 22nd October.

£1 ENTRY PER PUMPKIN

1st & 2nd prizes will be awarded in each class!

Please remember to take your pumpkin home again at the end of the school day.

HALLOWEEN TUCK SHOP

Thursday 22nd October
After School in the playground

Come and join us for some spooky treats!

WE NOW TAKE CARD PAYMENTS!

HAPPY SCHOOL BAG COLLECTION

Thursday 5th November

happy school bag

Planning a pre-Christmas clear-out? This is the perfect excuse to sort through those wardrobes and donate any good-quality items you no longer need. Happy School Bag pays the school based on the weight of the items we collect, meaning your unwanted clothes can help raise money for High Ongar while also being reused rather than thrown away.

WHAT CAN YOU DONATE?

- Adult & children's clothing
- Paired shoes
- Handbags & belts
- Hats & scarves
- Jewellery & accessories
- Perfumes & toiletries



Pick up your Happy School Bag from the school office (or you can use your own bin bags).

Please bring all donations into school on Thursday 5th November only.

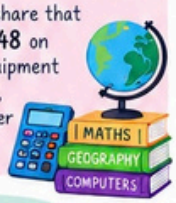
PLEASE DON'T INCLUDE: school uniform, underwear, toys, books, household linen or dirty/damaged/wet clothing.

£110 RAISED!

A huge THANK YOU to everyone who supported our September Tuck Shop!
Together we raised an amazing **£110!**
Every purchase really does make a difference, so thank you for your continued support.

£1,048 SPENT!

We are delighted to share that we have spent **£1,048** on learning support equipment which helps the maths, geography and computer curriculum.



WHAT ARE WE FUNDRAISING FOR?

We're currently raising funds towards:



NEW CHRISTMAS TREES



A WHOLE-SCHOOL WELLY RACK



UPGRADES TO OUR FOREST SCHOOL

AND THERE ARE PLENTY MORE PROJECTS WE'D LOVE TO SUPPORT... WATCH THIS SPACE!

Thank you for supporting Friends of High Ongar and helping us make a difference for all of our children.

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At The National College, our WakeUpWednesday guides empower and equip parents, carers and educators with the confidence and practical skills to be able to have informed and age-appropriate conversations with children about online safety, mental health and wellbeing, and climate change. For further guides, hints and tips, please visit nationalcollege.com.

What Parents & Educators Need to Know about

LOOKSMAXXING

WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

Looksmaxxing is an online trend focused on improving one's physical appearance, particularly among boys and young men. At the milder end, it can involve grooming, skincare, diet and exercise advice, sometimes called "softmaxxing". At its extremes, or "hardmaxxing", it can promote unproven or dangerous practices and contribute to body image concerns, low self-worth, and mental health difficulties.

TARGETING MALE INSECURITIES

Although usually aimed at men, looksmaxxing can also reach boys by promising to improve their appearance and dating success. Forums offer 'objective', and sometimes brutal, views on attractiveness, while influencers may make appearance seem all-important. Advice ranges from useful tips on hygiene, skincare, and fashion to more concerning guidance.

DUBIOUS ADVICE

Some advice moves into dubious territory. One example is "mewing", a tongue exercise claimed to create a more masculine jawline. The American Association of Orthodontists says evidence for its effectiveness is limited and warns that following such guidance could contribute to tooth alignment problems, bite issues, and speech difficulties.

EXTREME REMEDIES

Some DIY remedies are even more extreme and potentially dangerous. While fears of "bonesmashing" – which involves trying to alter the cheekbones using blunt objects for a more 'masculine' appearance – may sometimes be overstated in the media, other guidance can also cause harm. Untrained use of microneedling and derma rollers, taking substances or medication without appropriate medical guidance, and overusing skincare products can all have potentially harmful consequences.

BODY IMAGE ISSUES

This pursuit of physical perfection can become obsessive and contribute to serious body image issues. Exposure to looksmaxxing content can encourage teenagers to tie their appearance to their value and self-worth, as well as making boys and young men feel they need to change perfectly normal aspects of their appearance. This can be associated with disordered eating, overexercising, or other obsessive behaviours that interfere with everyday life.

MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS

As well as the physical consequences, body image concerns can be associated with mental health difficulties, such as depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, body dysmorphic disorder, and psychological distress. They can cause problems both at school and at home, with children and young people potentially avoiding social situations because they fear their appearance will be negatively judged by others.

A PATHWAY TO EXTREMES

Looksmaxxing has its roots in online 'incel' communities but has since become more mainstream on platforms such as TikTok. Algorithm-driven feeds may show users more extreme material as they interact with similar content. Some looksmaxxing spaces have also been linked with misogynistic, incel, and white supremacist ideologies.

Advice for Parents & Educators

WATCH FOR CHANGES

Keep an eye out for concerning behavioural changes in children and young people. This could include an obsession with diet and exercise, spending more time on social media apps, becoming secretive with their phone, or a shift in how they interact with friends and family. If a young person suddenly becomes distressed by their appearance or adopts rigid or extreme routines, try to understand what may be behind the change.

CHECK THE SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media algorithms are tailored to each user, meaning what appears on your feeds may be dramatically different from what children see on theirs. Try to get an idea of the content children and young people are consuming online, and use available parental controls where appropriate. TikTok, for example, provides tools that can help families manage or filter certain types of content.

LISTEN FOR THE LINGO

Like many internet communities, looksmaxxing groups and influencers use distinctive language. As well as "mewing", mentioned above, you might hear terms such as "Chad" (an attractive male), "foid" (a misogynistic term for a woman), and "mogging" (looking more attractive than someone else). Other examples involve adding "maxxing" to another word, such as "jestermaxxing" (using humour to attract women) and "starvemaxxing" (extreme dieting).

TALK TO YOUR CHILDREN

Open communication can help children and young people recognise misleading influencers and harmful online communities. Discuss unrealistic ideas about appearance and explain that some creators benefit from controversial or extreme content. Talk about the risks of unqualified health advice and how people's insecurities can be exploited online, while making it clear that it's okay to speak openly about any concerns.

Meet Our Expert

Alan Martin is a technology journalist who has written for publications including Wired, TechRadar, The Telegraph, The Evening Standard, The Guardian and The New Statesman.



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What Parents & Educators Need to Know about

CHARACTER.AI

Character.AI is an entertainment platform where users create and chat with AI-powered characters. These chatbots can act like existing favourite characters from movies or books, or like friends, mentors, or even romantic partners, responding in an emotional, personally engaging way. Although this can encourage creativity, it can also make a generated conversation feel like a genuine relationship, which is concerning if it takes the place of human relationships.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

INAPPROPRIATE CONTENT

AI replies are generated in real time rather than chosen from a fully checked script. Even with safety filters on, conversations can still move into sexual, violent, discriminatory, or self-harm material. These AI characters are often made by users, so a familiar name or child-friendly description does not guarantee that every response from the character will be suitable for a young person.

BLURRED BOUNDARIES

Characters on Character.AI can use the language of friendship, love, and empathy without ever feeling anything. Vulnerable young people may struggle to separate this simulation from genuine understanding. Romantic role-play or a character that demands attention, loyalty, or secrecy could also risk distorting young people's expectations around consent, disagreement, and the give-and-take involved in healthy human relationships.

UNRELIABLE ADVICE

Characters, like other chatbot platforms, are at risk of inventing facts or giving inappropriate advice while sounding completely confident. Characters may also echo a young person's assumptions instead of questioning them. This can become particularly risky when users rely on a character for guidance about health, mental wellbeing, relationships, money, or personal safety instead of checking with a credible source or trusted adult.

EMOTIONAL DEPENDENCY

Character.AI chatbots can appear endlessly attentive, supportive, and affectionate, which is one of the hallmarks of the generative AI models that such companions are built on. A young person may start turning to a character chatbot whenever they feel lonely or upset and believe that it understands them better than the humans in their life. This can become more concerning when chatting starts to replace sleep, schoolwork, hobbies and friendships.

PRIVACY CONCERNS

Character.AI chats may feel private, especially when a bot sounds personal and caring, but they take place on a company's online systems. Users could intentionally or unintentionally reveal their name, school, location, routines, images, or intimate concerns. Character.AI says some data may be retained to improve its services and AI models, so young people should never treat a chatbot like a confidential diary.

UNHEALTHY ENGAGEMENT

Be aware of warning signs such as secret accounts, bypassing age restrictions, hiding phone use from adults, chatting late at night, distress when access to the platform or character stops, withdrawal from other people, falling interest in school, or believing the character is conscious. Increased use may also signal that the young person is already lonely, anxious, or seeking help.

Advice for Parents & Educators

KEEP CONVERSATIONS OPEN

Ask what the young person enjoys about Character.AI and invite them to show you how the platform and their favourite characters work. Useful questions include, "Has it ever said something that felt wrong?" and "How can you tell it doesn't have feelings?" Avoid shaming them for using platforms like Character.AI or making them feel there is something wrong with them for doing so.

PAUSE, CHECK AND ASK

Teach young people to pause before accepting an answer from characters on Character.AI. Encourage them to check important claims against a trustworthy source and ask a safe adult when the issue matters. Never use a character as the sole source of medical, mental health, legal, financial, or safeguarding advice. Remind them not to share passwords, contact details, school information, live locations, or private images.

CHECK AGE, SETTINGS & LIMITS

Character.AI's minimum age is 16 in the UK, but open-ended companion chat is restricted to adults aged 18 or over. Users aged 16 to 17 receive a different experience built around guided 'Stories' and other creative or social features. Check their current settings, never help or encourage a young person to give a false age, and apply the same safety rules to other chatbot apps.

NOTICE AND RESPOND

Take action if chats involve sexual content, threats, coercion, abuse, self-harm or danger. Save relevant evidence, report the character and follow the setting's safeguarding process; educators should involve the designated safeguarding lead. If anyone is in immediate danger, contact emergency services. Childline is available on 0800 1111 and the NSPCC Helpline on 0808 800 5000.

Meet Our Expert

Darren Coxon is an educator with almost 30 years' experience across teaching, school leadership, and governance. He works internationally, supporting schools and colleges with AI leadership and governance, as well as teaching the key fundamentals of AI use and safety to educators at The National College.



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