



Paul Taylor, headmaster of Framlingham College, is beaming over the top of his frothy cappuccino.

We've already resisted the chocolate sponge cake and raspberry and white chocolate muffins on offer. Now we're sitting on comfy chairs, chatting about plans for celebrating the school's 150th anniversary.

I pinch myself. This is not some snappy café in the middle of town. This is a brand spanking new café in the middle of Framlingham College. I remark on just how wonderful a facility it is, a far cry from the somewhat limited tuck shop of my own school days.

"It is, isn't it?" says Paul. "I think we might be first to try out the coffee machine. It was only installed yesterday."

He has good reason to be pleased with this latest addition to the school.

As well as the café, which is for the entire school population to enjoy, it incorporates a superb sixth form centre spread over the first floor. Comfortably yet practically furnished, it provides sixth formers with their own space for informal and formal study, relaxation and a seminar room equipped for video conferencing, an aid to learning and, Paul hopes, a way for sixth formers to gain valuable careers advice by talking to alumni and various contacts working in business and professions around the world.

Ready to face the future

Framlingham College celebrates its 150th anniversary with the opening of a new sixth form centre



The café will become a hub, where students, parents and staff can meet during the day and into the evening. It will also be available to the public to hire for events.

Both the café and the sixth form centre are connected to the rest of the school by a light filled atrium, which is very much a thoroughfare used by most pupils every day. This is intentional, reflecting a desire to place the sixth form at the heart of school activity, rather than annexing it.

"I wanted to have it within the school because other pupils take their signals about behaviour and values from sixth formers at least as much as they do from staff," he explains.

At £2.5 million, the centre is a sizeable investment for Framlingham College, made possible by months of fund raising,



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 Taylor, headmaster of Framlingham College in the new sixth form centre. Right; catering manager John Betham serves coffee in the new cafe. Below left; views of the ultra-modern new eating facility. Top left; the historic school
Photographs by SU ANDERSON

appealing to parents and alumni as well as the wider community.

Significantly, it has been completed just as the school reaches its sesquicentenary. As a historian Paul believes very much in provenance, but is equally concerned that the school should be forward thinking and outward looking. What better way to mark this important milestone than with a new facility aimed at helping pupils secure their future success?

With this in mind the sixth form centre was designed with considerable input from the very sixth formers who will use it.

“After all they’re the ones who’ve got to make it work,” says Paul.

There’s an element of trust that pupils will use the centre responsibly, but there is always an adult presence, especially as five teaching staff have offices within the centre.

The aim has been to create a facility that bridges school and university, helping pupils explore and establish their independence.

“Sixteen year olds today are very different to 10 years ago and probably even five years ago,” says Paul. “Their whole perception of maturity, independence and their expectation is different - they see themselves as older and they feel ready for a more university style sixth form environment.

“In some ways they are more worldly, but they’re not always emotionally mature enough to be able to handle their self perceived independence. They still need a structured pastoral and academic environment and this building is about meeting them half-way.”

Sixth form is a very dynamic part of education, says Paul, and its importance can’t be overstated.

While education is about more than qualifications, good grades at A-level - and

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indeed, GCSEs are extremely important as a ‘passport’ that opens up opportunities and choices, he says.

“We’re preparing students for the world beyond school,” he says. That world, according to Paul, is wide open with many options, which might or might not include university.

While he expects the vast majority of Framlingham College students to go on to study for degrees, when it comes to careers advice, he questions the heavy emphasis currently placed on university and is concerned that many young people choose it as an end in itself rather than seeing it as just one of the alternatives that can prepare them for a career.

“I’m certainly not against university,” he says, “but I want them to think proactively and independently about why they’re choosing it, and not go there because ‘that’s just what you do . . .’”

He’s also aware the university is not for everyone and is personally opposed to league tables, believing in a culture that embraces a range of academic ability and acknowledges achievement at all levels.

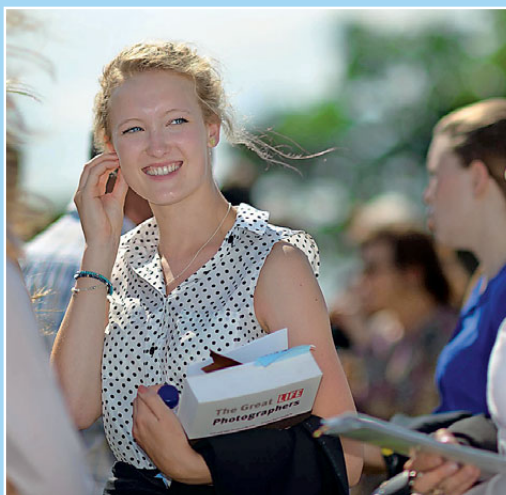
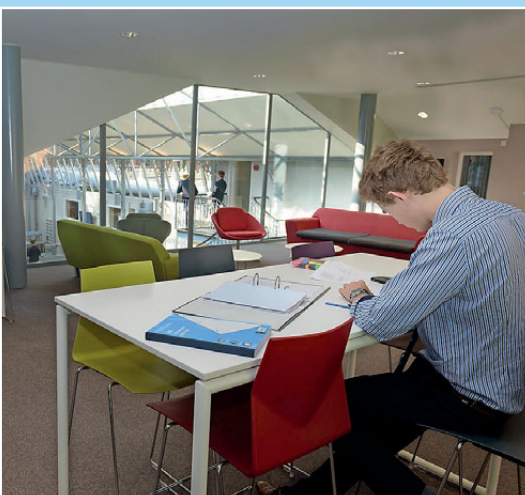
“For too long careers advice has been about university advice, but that’s changing. With fees and debt, people are questioning why they’re going there.” He cites top companies such as Marks and Spencer, which now offer good four-year apprenticeships as an optional career route - more direct and without debt - and talks of ‘decoupling’ university and careers advice. Indeed, the school has both a head of careers and a head of further education to help students find their most appropriate career paths.

“Students feel the influence of enterprise and an entrepreneurial culture,” he says. “The world they’re going into is a different place. I want students to feel excited by that challenge and confident of their ability to take it on.”



FRAMLINGHAM COLLEGE

BOARDING & DAY SCHOOL (13-18)



Sixth Form Open Morning: Saturday 27th September

Main School Open Morning: Saturday 4th October

Booking essential at:

framcollege.co.uk