

# Why key skills are just as important as academic results

Louise North, principal of Framlingham College, reflects on the value of public examinations and whether it's time for a refresh.

**E**very summer, having celebrated the achievements of our leavers, we reflect on the educational journey they have taken, and in doing so we identify aspects of our provision that we want to further develop.

We must ensure that our educational provision evolves to reflect the future adult world of our current pupils, and as they embark on their new academic year at Framlingham we are looking ahead to the future with optimism.

Framlingham College is a school that believes that its academic results are a byproduct of the education that a young person receives, not the end in itself. This doesn't mean they are not important, and it doesn't mean that we are not challenging and stretching each young person intellectually, setting high expectations and holding them to account, because we are.

I think it's time to expose the blinkered view, promoted by league tables, that top grades are the only measure of a good education. And this is because an education at Framlingham College is about far more than a set of stellar academic results.

We want these, but we are about developing good human beings, something that requires a set of key skills that will complement the academic results that they achieve.

According to the World Economic Forum, the skills that employers need the most from their workforce are:

- Creative and analytical thinking
- Technological literacy
- Curiosity and lifelong learning
- Resilience, flexibility and agility
- Systems thinking
- AI and big data
- Motivation and self-awareness
- Talent management
- Service orientation and customer service



Framlingham College prioritises an education provision that is connected and relevant to the wider world. Inset below left, principal Louise North

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Many of these are skills and traits we are already working to embed at Framlingham. Our pupils are encouraged to be creative, resilient, ambitious, to think outside the box, to pursue their dreams. This list simply reflects that how we learn, what we learn and why we learn it, is changing rapidly.

Teachers are no longer omniscient beings at the front of the class imparting knowledge. Our young people can access all the knowledge and information they need by touching a screen. And AI will only hasten this process.

As educators, our role is increasingly to teach how to acquire those skills the future world requires; how to channel attention on what is useful and relevant; how to find meaning, context and connection.

With this in mind, I begin to question the real value and worth of public examinations at 16. What exactly are we testing when a young person goes into a hot and airless school hall to write one of probably 20 or so public examination papers that they will face across the summer term exam weeks? Are we actually assessing the skills, knowledge and understanding



that our pupils need to develop?

Our pupils currently prepare for, on average, nine GCSE subjects. We do this because GCSEs are the accepted educational currency and have been since they were launched in 1988. However, while GCSEs have evolved to a certain extent, society has changed completely over those 36 years, and this includes the understanding that we, as educationalists, have of the teenage brain.

Are we really being fair by examining pupils on their knowledge and understanding of

9 or 10 subjects at a time of their life when we know for a fact that their brains are still developing, their decision making is erratic and irrational, their hormones are screaming at them to turn left, then right and then left again, and when the pressures and stresses upon them due to social media have exponentially risen?

I also question whether the current system allows us to measure what we value, and in turn do we value what we measure? At Framlingham we are reviewing our entire curriculum because we believe that no child

should be defined by their examination results alone.

We all aspire to achieving as highly as possible, but looking ahead to the future adult world, surely it is time to check in with ourselves as a nation as to how and when we judge academic potential.

Either way, Framlingham College will continue to be part of this conversation and we will always ensure that our educational provision remains connected and relevant to the world into which our young people will go.