



# THOMAS MILLS HIGH SCHOOL

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Dear Parents

13<sup>th</sup> April 2021

## **Headteacher's Update 2020/2021 – Letter 25 (of 25)**

I very much hope that this letter finds you well and that you were able to enjoy the Easter Break. The themes of hope and renewal that we hear around Easter were timely. I hope you were all able to have a rest and a chance to switch off from normal routines.

The return to school and the Government Guidance published over the holidays has, understandably, been over shadowed by the death of HRH Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, and this period of National Mourning. Prince Philip had a tremendous national and global presence for many decades. Our thoughts go particularly to Her Majesty the Queen and her family at this time.

## **Department for Education – Coronavirus Operational Guidance**

As expected, the Department re-published this document during the holidays. However, the changes do not have an immediate impact and so, to some extent, it is 'business as normal.' We do expect to plan for many more events and will look to re-publish the school calendar.

## ***Face Coverings***

The key announcement from the Government is that face coverings should continue to be worn in secondary schools as a precautionary measure. From the 17<sup>th</sup> May it is anticipated that face coverings will no longer be required to be worn in classrooms or other communal areas. The Government have committed to announcing a decision with one week's notice. It is expected that other safety measures will remain in place.

Quite rightly, there are some concerns about the length of double lessons and senior staff are exploring protocols that may enable students to have a break with an opportunity to have a rest from wearing the face covering. However, any 'break' (if not in the classroom) will require supervision arrangements. There would also be some lost learning time and we will also need to consider the views of teachers.

In the meantime, everyone's continued support with this measure is much appreciated.

## ***Home Testing***

The twice weekly LFD (lateral flow device) tests seem to be working very well. Staff or pupils with a positive LFD test result must:

- Self-isolate in line with the stay at home guidance;
- Arrange a lab-based PCR (polymerase chain reaction) test to confirm the result.

A PCR test will override the self-test LFD.



So, in the situation where a student's LFD result is positive, but the subsequent PCR test is negative, the student would return to school and continue following all the protective measures. Close contacts would also end their self-isolation.

Please do keep the school informed and we will be able to guide you at any stage with the next steps. We do have some PCR tests in school although the advice is to get a test at a testing site as these deliver the fastest results.

### ***Exams and assessment and attendance for Year 11 and 13 from June 2021***

The Government has published some further guidelines on attendance and provision for Year 11 and Year 13 'exam cohorts.' The new guidance recognises the need to balance the provision and assessment opportunities for students alongside the time needed for teachers to make judgements so that the grades are submitted to the exam boards by 18<sup>th</sup> June.

The cancellation of examinations continues to have consequences such as no traditional revision (or 'cramming') and therefore no 'study leave.'

We are required by the end of April to have a centre policy for determining teacher assessed grades in Summer 2021. Senior colleagues have made very good progress with this and I envisage this will be shared with you very shortly. Exam boards have also now published assessment materials which teachers could use.

The new Government Guidance recognises that for many pupils, work done after the May half-term will not contribute towards their grades. By providing more flexibility, this implies that our Year 11 and Year 13 students will be based at home from Monday 7<sup>th</sup> June. However, it is our strong advice that students should not undertake paid work or go away in case teachers need to liaise with students about any assessed work. For Year 11 it remains the case that the legislation that governs compulsory school age is the same. As usual, pupils cease to be of compulsory school age on the last Friday of June in the year in which they turn 16.

We will need to clarify the exact arrangements for June although the Government has highlighted independent study or remote provision as possibilities. Transition activities linking to Sixth Form or further education is likely. For Year 11 we will still look to provide some face to face provision supporting transition into the Sixth Form.

### ***School Trips***

The Government has now provided some guidance about existing and new bookings. In short, we can resume educational day visits, but residential educational visits are not advised at this stage.

Although the Government think that we can resume such trips from May 17<sup>th</sup> this could change depending on the data. At the same time, they advise against entering any new financial or contractual commitments. At this stage, I am not approving any new residential trips. We will need to review existing commitments and explore what our best options are. Some of our commitments will include international travel and at the moment this is not feasible. In line with previous work undertaken with the Outlook Expedition and the Ski-trip, we will explore our options and advise relevant parties accordingly. At the same time, the Government informs us that the Treasury is looking at indemnities.

## Summary

It is inevitably the case that further communication will follow. More detailed arrangements for Year 11 and Year 13 need to be shared and we also need to confirm the calendar of events for this term. I am hopeful that this term will include a return to more familiar features in the school setting and a move away from continuous adaptations!

As you know, our students have reacted magnificently to the challenges the last year has brought to us all. I am confident that they will continue to do so, and we are optimistic as a school that the best opportunities both inside and outside of the classroom will keep returning to our lives.

Such opportunities also include the Duke of Edinburgh's Award which has really thrived in this school in recent years. It is a great legacy to the life of HRH Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh.

It would seem fitting to finish this update letter with a quote or two related to Prince Philip himself (but not one of his one liners!)

Prince Philip met many young people across the country and Mohammed Leily was one such student thrilled to meet him at a presentation event for the Duke of Edinburgh's Award. Mohammed arrived in the UK from Syria as a refugee in 2013 and decided to sign up for the bronze award. Mohammed remembers that Prince Philip *"told us to make sure we are as active as we could possibly be, and to make sure we made use of our youth now while we have the energy."*

This fits with what Prince Philip said himself in 2010 about the D of E Award: *"One of the perpetual problems about human life is that young people of every generation have to discover for themselves what life is all about."*

It remains our privilege to work with a fabulous group of young people who I am sure will make the right discoveries in the years ahead. In the meantime, I wish you all a very successful term.

Yours sincerely



P J Hurst  
Headteacher