



# THOMAS MILLS HIGH SCHOOL

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Dear Parents

16<sup>th</sup> October 2020

## **Headteacher's Update 2020/2021 – Letter 6 (of 6)**

Following my last letter on the 1<sup>st</sup> October 2020, I write with an additional update on many issues, all connected with the pandemic. Recent Government announcements, including a tiered approach for different local areas, continues to keep Coronavirus at the top of the headlines and therefore in our thoughts and actions.

### **Further update on adaptation of bubbles.**

- The *temporary swap* in spaces for Year 10 and Year 11 has been welcomed but has, of course, simply transferred some of the original problems. It has been good for Year 10 to experience Science in a lab and also good to see more revision classes for Year 11.
- We explored the possibility of *new seats* for the Science Laboratories. We have flexibility in some budgets and so we could, on this occasion, afford to buy seats with backs. However, the reason for stools in laboratories is that during practical experiments when children are moving around, the seats need to be safely out of the way (i.e. under the tables). The Science Department therefore recommend stools and, more importantly, the opportunity to teach practically too and preferably to all year groups.
- We have now been able to explore *safer cleaning* protocols which involve pupils. In some other schools, the teacher sprays desks with anti-bacterial surface cleaner before the pupils enter the classroom. As pupils enter, they use a tissue to wipe it dry afterwards. This could be introduced at the start of registration and lessons.
- We have also introduced further *cleaning capacity* in terms of hours and the team has also been organised to be responsible for zones. In general, the focus is on surfaces and less on hoovering.
- We have also looked at the school site and with the range of buildings, outdoor spaces and doors, it offers many opportunities. It is possible to introduce a more effective *one-way system*. (Further details and signage to follow in due course.)

### **Change to rooming**

Given the observations above, and reasons outlined in previous correspondence, it is my current intention to move towards specialist rooms from Monday 9<sup>th</sup> November. With the additional strategies outlined, it is possible to create a safer environment as well as an improved educational experience.

This timing enables a further assessment of the decision immediately after half-term and an opportunity to explain to students any new protocols around cleaning and one-way systems for example.

If we do move to specialist rooms, the Head of Department will be able to liaise more closely with cleaners, given the new cleaning and zoning arrangements.

### **Coats and layers**

With the recent inclement weather, it was noticeable that not all students were arriving to school with a coat which is rain proof. I strongly suggest to students that they have a suitable coat. It is my current preference that breaks are taken outside. The reasons for this are the benefits of fresh air, as well as avoidance of congestion and crowds indoors. At the moment this action is *strongly recommended* but in line with all measures, is under review.



## **Communication**

Our website and these update letters continue to be our preferred method of communication. I have no need to communicate through any third party (I'm not important enough to need a spokesperson!) and we must all be sensitive to rumour, hearsay and false social media in this situation.

The front page of the school website contains a number of links including who to contact if reporting a pupil absence; telephone 01728-726677 or email [attendance@thomasmills.suffolk.sch.uk](mailto:attendance@thomasmills.suffolk.sch.uk)

Some parents have asked for information about named individuals and their 'covid status.' This is not appropriate and puts us all in a very awkward situation. The usual rules around medical confidence still apply. If we do have a confirmed case, we will immediately work with the authorities such as Public Health England and the Department for Education. We would follow their lead in terms of contact tracing. The experience from other schools is that a key focus is on seating plans and I also think in our school, there would be attention on transport (buses) too.

## **Self-isolation, local lockdowns and remote learning**

In the event of pupils or staff exhibiting symptoms or being in close contact with someone who has tested positive, or testing positive themselves, the expectation is to stay at home for the advised period.

We now have a remote learning procedure and more details can be found via the following link <https://www.thomasmills.suffolk.sch.uk/public/files/remote-learning-plan-201015110554.pdf>

## **Catch-up funding and homework**

We will be allocated some additional one-off funding, via the Government's Catch Up Premium, from November until the end of the year. We are currently appointing a number of Academic Co-ordinators who would work with some specific year groups. This will build on identified gaps from teachers but will be much broader than subject content and could include metacognition (learning how to learn) for example. In the meantime, if you have any specific concerns on learning and progress please contact the subject teacher or Head of Year. It is also worth saying, that homework remains one of the most effective methods of improving learning as well as moving students towards more independent learning.

## **Announcement on summer exam series**

The Department for Education has recently announced:

- Summer exams will be delayed by 3 weeks and will begin on 7<sup>th</sup> June and end by 2<sup>nd</sup> July "for almost all A and AS levels and GCSEs."
- Results days will be held on the 24<sup>th</sup> August for A and AS Levels and 27<sup>th</sup> August for GCSE (this is the same week).

As you can see, there is a lot to think about. As ever, a calm and measured response is my preferred way of dealing with this challenge. In looking at wider society it seems to me that anxiety levels are increasing in some quarters whilst there is a risk of complacency and ignorance in others. The important thing is that we all do the best that we can, together. We are clearly going to have to live with this situation for the foreseeable future and my key advice to students is to maximise the focus on their education. My underlying optimism tells me that education lasts a lifetime and considerably longer than this virus.

Given the evolving situation I may need to write to you again this month but if I have no need to, may I wish you all a pleasant half-term. Hopefully, a chance to enjoy a safe break albeit closer to home.

Yours sincerely



P J Hurst  
Headteacher