



THOMAS MILLS HIGH SCHOOL

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Dear Parents

19th March 2021

Headteacher's Update 2020/2021 – Letter 23 (of 23)

As always, I trust that this letter finds you safe and well. This letter provides you with an update with regards to the next stage of LFD testing and some other matters which I know will be of interest to you.

LFD Home Testing

This week, each student has been given 6 tests in two boxes of 3. Instructions for completing the test and reporting the results, can be found in the booklet they received. The use of these tests will start from Monday 22nd March.

Students are to test twice a week, 2 to 3 days apart, including the Easter Holidays. Ideally, students should keep one test to complete either Sunday evening 11th April or the morning of Monday 12th (the start of the Summer Term).

As well as notifying NHS track and trace, students or parents will also need to complete the form (link below) informing school of the test results. This link can also be found on the school website.

https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=bAZ96jw-P0uqQxizW8eYR3lfY-D_VglBgUVjXgHVMitURU1ZSUEzQzYOVIhSUK4wUDBLNUUzQO1XTy4u

Thank you in advance for your support with the LFD Tests.

Suffolk County Council – Trade Your Bus Pass for a Cycle Allowance

The County Council has sent us some information which encourages wider use of cycling to school. Essentially the scheme encourages students to trade in their school bus pass. Further information can be found at suffolkboard.com/cycle allowance.

However, I am mindful that our school is located in a very rural location and this mirrors our school community. The scheme does caution that 'if you have an unsafe route you and your parents will be advised not to apply for the cycle allowance.' Anyway, this offer may be relevant for a few families.

Charity Day – Friday 26th March

We will be holding a Charity Day next Friday. The Sixth Form House Officials have been busy creating some good ideas which enable us to enjoy this day although, understandably, it will have a different feel to past Charity Days.

The day will be a non-uniform day for all students. The Sixth Form have suggested a theme for all students and staff which is 'heroes.' Pupils are asked to make a donation of £2 for the opportunity to wear their own clothes or wear 'hero' costumes.

In addition, whilst we are encouraging dressing up as heroes, we want students to BE heroes by bringing in an item suitable to donate to local food banks e.g. pack of pasta, rice, tin of food.

To enable the House Assemblies to run, Period 1 will start a little later (probably about 9.40am), otherwise my expectation is that lessons will proceed as normal.



Summer Term Re-Opening Document (STOD)

Work has started on this document ready for the return of pupils and staff on Monday 12th April. In terms of control measures, the default setting is the current Government Guidance. However, we expect changes to emerge which reflect requirements in wider society.

To pre-empt this, we have considered carefully the use of face masks in lessons. The paragraph below is our current thinking but as you will see this incorporates continued Government direction on the issue.

“The Guidance for Re-Opening Schools in March recommended the use of face coverings in classrooms as a temporary measure. It was assumed that in this context ‘temporary’ meant towards the end of the Spring Term. We are currently working on the assumption that face coverings in classroom lessons are not a requirement for the Summer Term. Such a change would improve communication and learning within lessons. The safety considerations are also mitigated by the routine use of LFD testing and the high levels of consent (99.7%).

However, the final decision relies on a review by the Government and any updated guidance. It is unlikely that the Government will communicate this before the end of term.

Teachers, students, and parents should plan for both eventualities. Our own preference supports the removal of face coverings in classrooms for the reasons outlined above.”

I expect further changes to emerge which affect the subjects with a practical component. We anticipate that the STOD will need to be constantly updated but we will look to publish a draft before the end of term and a further update by the 31st May, in preparation for the final half-term of the year.

Year 11 and 13 Assessments

Mr Ward and Mr Cann have recently spoken to Year 11 and Year 13 respectively about the process of awarding qualification grades. There is some natural anxiety and it seems to me that it is partly around:

- What evidence is being used;
- What impact this process will have on the Easter Holidays.
- The timescales of publications from the Examination Boards.

Although reassuring messages can be given, the situation may not necessarily be helped by the Department for Education making some changes and I am given to understand that the Examination Boards may not issue the assessment tasks until after the Easter Holidays as they were worried that students would be using this time to cram.

In response to this situation:

- Teachers are sharing with classes the evidence that can still be gathered. Heads of Department are co-ordinating subject responses and sharing these with Mr Ward and Mr Cann. (It maybe that we can create a document which would be useful to parents.)
- The Easter Holiday should not be used for cramming (traditional revision is not needed as traditional examinations are not taking place). Assessments can be undertaken during term time.
- JCQ (Joint Council for Qualifications) say that grade descriptors and assessment materials will be published in late March. As stated above, we understand that optional assessment materials will be published to students in April.

Although students will get to know how well they performed in many assessments, they will not get to know their final grade until it is published through the Examination Boards. In the meantime, if you have any specific concerns the usual class teacher or Head of Department may be able to help, or if there are wider issues Mr Jeffery or Mr Ward for Year 11 and Mr Cann for the Sixth Form.

Summary

It has been a pleasure this week meeting various groups of the School Council. We have spoken about aspects of lockdown and remote learning as well as wider issues within society. As always, they are incredibly insightful discussions. They have appreciated the return to school and the general support.

We also discussed some of the wider issues within the news and even the recent vigil in London which raised the issue of violence against women. Although students are appreciative of the opportunities in school, it is clear that in certain settings, language is still used which is not appropriate. I have asked teachers to be vigilant in regards to this but at the same time, students need to be mindful of what they are saying even within friendship groups or on the school bus for example.

I hope the points about LFD Home Testing are clear but if there are any queries do not hesitate to contact the school through the Main Office. As stated last week, we have had a very high consent rate and at the time of writing, all the results have been negative.

Assuming that I have not jinxed anything, I look forward to being in touch next week before we break for the Easter Holiday.

Yours sincerely



P J Hurst
Headteacher