



# THOMAS MILLS HIGH SCHOOL

Headteacher : P J Hurst, BA, MA, MBA, NPQH

Saxtead Road, Framlingham,  
Suffolk, IP13 9HE  
Telephone : 01728 723493

Email: [inmail@thomasmills.suffolk.sch.uk](mailto:inmail@thomasmills.suffolk.sch.uk)  
Website: [www.thomasmills.suffolk.sch.uk](http://www.thomasmills.suffolk.sch.uk)

Dear Parents

18<sup>th</sup> December 2020

## **Headteacher's Update 2020/2021 – Letter 12 (of 12)**

I trust this letter finds you all well. I am pleased to say that we enjoyed a very positive end of term. It was good to reach this point! It has been a great team effort, and this was the theme in our end of term assemblies. As you will no doubt have heard, the students also enjoyed a staff music video.

It is also great that we were able to enjoy a wonderful Christmas Concert. If you have not seen this, there is a tab on the parents' section of the website. It is an hour well spent and my congratulations to everyone involved in putting this together.

However, my main reason for writing is there has been a Government announcement that will affect us in the New Year.

## **Important Changes to the Start of Term January 2021**

Yesterday the BBC reported that the Government announced that the return to secondary school in January will be staggered, with some pupils starting online, rather than in class. This was later confirmed by the Department for Education's daily bulletin in the evening. As a result:

**Year 11, Year 12 BTech/CTech students and Year 13 will return to school on Tuesday 5<sup>th</sup> January 2021 as planned;**

**Years 7,8,9,10 and 12 will remain at home, with remote learning provided, from Tuesday 5<sup>th</sup> January 2021 until Friday 8<sup>th</sup> January 2021.**

At the present time, it looks likely that all year groups will be expected to be in school from Monday 11<sup>th</sup> January 2021.

The reason the Government gives for making this change is that it will allow schools to set up a covid testing scheme. However, I think it is a sensible development for other reasons, as surely it will also provide a mitigation against the potential health impact of increased social mixing over the Christmas period.

As today is an additional non-pupil day, it provides teachers with a chance to consider the implications of this announcement.

## **Rapid Testing for Schools Returning After the Winter Break**

The Government's aspiration is that schools will be able to offer staff and students "an extra round of free coronavirus testing from the first week of January." With school shut down imminent and a handbook only just issued, this is an ambitious aim. I assume that between now and the 4<sup>th</sup> January we will receive the testing kits, materials, and training materials (I will now look out for that sleigh!). However, the handbook says that the "lateral flow devices do not require a laboratory to process the test." I envisage writing to you early in the new term with more details.

There are many implications for schools including setting up a testing site, redeploying appropriate staff and obtaining consent for testing. Given that I am about to wish the staff a happy holiday, I do not envisage that we



can fully assess this as a school until the 4<sup>th</sup> January. I have added the handbook to my Christmas reading. We will move things forward as soon as we can.

Once implemented, the new system could have many benefits. For example, 'serial testing' could be undertaken if a student or member of staff were identified as a close contact of a positive case. This would allow them to stay in education by taking a daily test in the morning for 7 school days.

The Department for Education mentions that armed forces personnel will support directly through planning with schools. We may need to increase our workforce and we are told that reasonable costs will be reimbursed.

### **Children of Critical Workers and Vulnerable Children**

The Government says that these groups, as they call them, can receive face to face education. I envisage that all our usual timetable (i.e. teachers and rooms) will be in place. Teachers will deliver remote learning at the usual scheduled times whilst also providing face to face education where required.

I apologize that I am only now informing you of these changes, but schools did not get any prior notice about them. As we know, things can change and if there are significant announcements that emerge over the holidays, I will, of course, be in contact. Otherwise, I do not envisage contacting you until the end of the holidays or the start of term.

Thank you so much for the good wishes that have been sent to the school community. It has been much appreciated and there are now too many for me to reply to personally!

It just remains for me to say that I do wish you a safe and enjoyable Christmas Break and look forward to working with you in the New Year.

Yours sincerely



P J Hurst  
Headteacher