



THOMAS MILLS HIGH SCHOOL

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Dear Parents

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Headteacher's Update 2020/2021 – Letter 16 (of 16)

As always, I trust this letter finds you well. I thought it would be useful to provide a brief update, especially as education dominates the headlines. We do, of course, correspond with specific groups more regularly.

National Free School Meal Voucher Scheme

The Government has announced that the national free school meal voucher scheme will go live this week. We will be able to place orders for supermarket vouchers on behalf of parents whose children are eligible for benefits-related free school meals. This covers the period between 18th January and 12th February. The vouchers are worth £15 per week per eligible child. We can order eCodes to be delivered to parents' email addresses and there are alternative arrangements where this is not an option. The Finance Office will be in touch with families.

If any family needs support with food or any other areas at the moment, please do get in touch and we will do our best to help or signpost to other organisations. Volunteers with the St. Vincent de Paul Society are able to give Co-Op vouchers to anyone in need for example.

Attendance and Engagement with Online Learning

Senior Staff have been working on protocols to ensure that all pupils actively benefit from the online provision at this time. Following on from my last letter about the possible use of games consoles, it has been raised that a keyboard is probably necessary. Increasingly our in-school equipment is needed for the key worker provision but it maybe that we are able to access keyboards if that could be of help.

Senior Staff are alert to the possibility that we may need to work with other agencies in the situation where a family did not engage. We also have the possibility that the pupil would be required to attend in school provision. Ultimately this is to ensure that no child is left behind.

Overall, levels of engagement are high, and the over whelming consensus is supportive of the use of the school timetable. As always, there should be a variety of teaching and learning but live lessons have been particularly well received. The challenge will be to sustain the quality and the engagement although the Government's current lockdown only takes us to half term.

Following the Secretary of State's announcement about encouraging complaints to OFSTED, there was quite a backlash against this, including from OFSTED themselves. This is, of course, a national emergency and working together and not apart was recognised by most participants in this debate. Several parents took the time to express their views as the quotes below show:

"we appreciate the hard work you've put in... I think many of us are tired of schools being used as political footballs by parts of the press and the government."



“thank you to all the staff for the efforts into making home learning work.... Well done everyone for doing such an amazing job. It can't be easy.”

“I shall be writing to Ofsted to share our views and to say how grateful we have been to you all during the most difficult of times.”

“the online learning..... it's meant we can continue to work without needing to constantly supervise... We have nothing but admiration for the teachers concerned, and their great patience and kind manner in which they speak to the children.”

Consultation on GCSE, AS and A Level Grades for Summer 2021

The Government have now launched a joint consultation with Ofqual on how GCSE, AS and A Level grades should be awarded in summer 2021. This will last until the 29th January and students (due to take exams), parents and teachers can submit their views. The Department for Education say that teachers will use their judgement to determine grades. The consultation will consider the range of evidence teachers use to award a grade which could include coursework, other forms of assessment and papers provided by exam boards. Further information on the consultation can be found here:

[Consultation on how GCSE, AS and A level grades should be awarded in summer 2021 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/gcse-as-and-a-level-grades-summer-2021)

In the short-term, it is important that these year groups engage fully with the learning as it is already clear that there is a stronger focus on the need for evidence to support the grades awarded.

Learning Support

Unfortunately, our Head of Learning Support/SENCo is absent from school and my thanks to several colleagues who have undertaken a number of additional roles. We are now looking at some interim roles which will particularly support the annual review processes.

In the meantime, we have been actively exploring how our Teaching Assistants can support pupils online through Teams and some successful trials have already taken place. For some staff this does require some resources and training. We envisage this provision helping us with the transition of pupils back into school and will help us manage the concerns about close working which classroom support often entails. Teaching Assistants had been on standby to assist pupils needing support in school. It now looks as if the new provision can support pupils whether in school or more likely at home.

This development also supports the new Government Guidance which states that “the requirement for schools to use their best endeavours to secure the special educational provision called for by the pupils’ special educational needs remains in place. Schools should work collaboratively with families, putting in place reasonable adjustments as necessary, so that pupils with SEND can successfully access remote education alongside their peers.”

In a letter to all schools, Allan Cadzow, Suffolk County Council Director for Children and Young People, suggested that there is communication with parents highlighting that “while providers will do all that they can to make provision, there will be challenges due to staff absences and illness and safety considerations.” Although as a school we are aware of the need to prioritise, I am hopeful that we can find suitable arrangements and provision which meets the ‘best endeavours’ framework.

Free Workshops for Parents

Norfolk and Suffolk NHS Foundation Trust (nsft.nhs.uk) have alerted us to some free online workshops that they are running for parents to support the emotional wellbeing of their children during the pandemic. The first in a series of online workshops; surviving lockdown mark 3, will explore how we make sense of what we are all experiencing. It will consider the most significant challenges posed by the pandemic for both parents and young people (including anxiety and low mood) while also thinking about the most helpful ways to manage these challenges.

You can book onto the workshop on Monday 25 January at 1pm or 6pm; or Tuesday 26 January at 6pm or 7.15pm by emailing admin.pst@nsft.nhs.uk

These workshops are designed to provide advice and guidance on how best to support your child's mental health. They will last one hour and will be recorded so anyone unable to attend can still access the content. Other workshops include supporting our young people with anxiety (Tuesday 9th February) and supporting our young people with low mood (Monday 22nd February).

The workshops are being run by Dr Beth Mosley's psychology in schools' team; made up of clinical psychologists and senior psychotherapists who have worked in specialist mental health services. The team also have a series of podcasts and blogs on the Norfolk and Suffolk NHS Foundation Trust YouTube channel.

Testing and Public Health Advice

We are pleased to report that our own testing using Lateral Flow Devices is very much up and running and last week the students in school were also tested. This provision is sustainable with the relatively small numbers of staff and students in school. However, Suffolk Public Health Authorities are not in favour of close contacts (of those who have tested positive) staying in school. For us, this situation has not arisen, but we would alert the Local Health Authority if we had a positive case.

Summary

Although this letter highlights some changes, most of us are now in a period of stability and routine. As we know, the situation could change at any point and so we all keep a close eye on national and local, news and data.

In the meantime, I thank everyone associated with the school community for their continued support. This has included a range of donations which has varied from (useful) technological equipment, remote volunteering and cakes and biscuits! My thanks to you all especially as some of the donations were made anonymously.

On that positive note, I will bring this letter to a close. Our community has been much stronger because we've worked together, and it really has been a privilege to be part of it. Until I have reason to write again, stay safe and I wish you all well.

Yours sincerely



P J Hurst
Headteacher