



# 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

25<sup>th</sup> September 2020

## Headteacher's Update 2020/2021 – Letter 4 (of 5)

As the Government prepares for a second spike of Coronavirus infections, we continue to review our procedures. We need to consider safety as well as effective educational provision.

It remains the case at the moment, that the best response is to prevent infection of yourself and others by:

**Hands** – washing or sanitising hands regularly

**Face** – using face coverings

**Space** – social distancing

Remember, if you have any Coronavirus symptoms you must **self-isolate** and get a **test**.

### Purpose of this letter

This letter is to share an important proposal with you:

**We are considering adapting 'bubbles.'** We will maintain social and pastoral bubbles (i.e. the grouping of students during free time and registration) but amending the current rooming segregation so that students can return to specialist rooms for all subjects

This letter will explain to you how we have reached this proposal, some new measures needed, as well as the next steps for us all.

### What the Government suggested in July

In response to Government Guidance in July for full re-opening of schools we planned for a number of measures including year group 'bubbles.'

The Government thinking behind these bubbles was that:

- Consistent groups reduce the risk of transmission by limiting the number of students and staff in contact with each other.
- Maintaining distinct groups that do not mix makes it quicker and easier in the event of a positive case to identify those who may need to self-isolate and keep that number as small as possible.

The Government Guidance acknowledged that:

- The use of small groups restricts the normal operation of schools and presents educational and logistical challenges. ("It is particularly difficult in secondary schools.")
- Schools **may need to change the emphasis on bubbles** within their system of controls and increase the size of these groups.



## Our experience since September

Since this guidance we have now been operational for a few weeks and can assess the impact of these bubbles not only in terms of control measures but also with regard to the quality of education:

- The arrangements have enabled specialist teaching but not within specialist rooms.
- The curriculum is limited by some subjects not being taught in specialist rooms – an obvious example is the demonstration of a science practical.
- Learning time has been lost as all teachers travel to different areas of the school. As they travel it can be hard to keep their distance from other students and staff (although the use of face coverings has helped to mitigate this).
- Teachers have to set up in different rooms often with different arrangements, including the use of technology. Valuable teaching time is wasted.
- Although there are more control measures in the corridors (face coverings), movement in corridors is considered low risk.
- Year 11 are based in the Science Laboratories but for many students this is not the most comfortable arrangement.

The Government Guidance makes it clear that, the approaches of separating groups and maintaining distance are not “all-or-nothing” options and will “still bring benefits even if implemented partially.”

## The development of our new proposals

To improve the quality of education but also to enhance the control measures believed to reduce the risk of transmission, we are consulting with the school community on the following proposals:

- To amend the rooming timetable so that students return to specialist rooms to be taught by specialist teachers.
- To maintain registration in the ‘social bubbles’ which also provides an area for wet lunchtimes.
- To maintain the same control measures within classrooms including reducing face to face contact as well as teachers keeping their distance from students.
- Students taking more responsibility by disinfecting desks and working surfaces they are about to use.

We have consulted with staff over this proposal and included the consideration of a two-week timetable and longer lessons. There was an overwhelming positive response to return to specialist rooms but there are some concerns over longer lessons. These include:

- The gap in weeks between some subject lessons and the loss of learning during this time;
- The effect on staff who work partially during the school day and the amendments needed to the staffing timetable;
- The concerns that some students would struggle to concentrate and the advantages of a more varied day;
- Consideration that as we are managing movement at other points in the day, why not between lessons.

I am also conscious of how well students and staff have responded to the return to school as well as following our new measures. They are aware of the risks in wider society, naturally anxious but demonstrating compliance as well as self-discipline at high levels. I am therefore suggesting the following proposal to the school community:

- **That we maintain the one-week timetable (which includes some double lessons and so reducing movement) and return to specialist rooms.**

**In order to implement this effectively we also propose that:**

- **All students clean desks using disinfectant materials at the start of registration and every lesson;**
- **Students regularly sanitise their hands and are actively encouraged to do this on arrival to school and at the end of every lesson;**
- **One-way system signposting is enhanced and this will ensure that there are no pinch points in corridors during the day;**
- **Staff only release students on the bell (we cannot have the next class arriving early and a current class leaving late as this will lead to congestion);**
- **Period 5 starts at 2pm and the class teacher will register the students for the afternoon roll call.**
- **Continue to wear a face covering when moving around the school.**

I have confidence that staff and students would adhere to the new measures which are designed to keep us safe as well as improve the quality of education.

This proposal would enable curriculum areas to be fully overseen by Heads of Department and in many cases by Heads of Year. It would also support Heads of Department overseeing cover arrangements for absent colleagues.

As already mentioned, we would continue to use one-way systems and the central corridor (between the Science rooms) would only be accessible to staff. With the exception of some classrooms (Science and Technology) students will go straight into their timetabled rooms.

In addition, the Year 11 pastoral and social bubble would change to the Mathematics classrooms (which will enable revision work to take place) and Year 10 would now use the Science Rooms (where three of the Science team are tutors).

In order to support effective teaching in this situation, Miss Lambert (who is also our Staff Development Officer) and Mr Heath (who is also our Professional Tutor) are already sharing good practice and directing staff development.

### **Next Steps**

If you would like to provide any feedback you are welcome to, through the school. Ideally before Tuesday 29<sup>th</sup> September. I envisage writing to the school community in my fifth update letter providing you with some brief feedback as well as any decisions. It would also be good to update you on other matters including our revised arrangements for Open Evening.

A decision will be made by assessing the balance of advantage, considering safety as well as the quality of our education.

In the meantime, I continue to be impressed by our school community who are co-operating well and focussed on education. It remains a privilege to work with our students and staff on a daily basis.

Yours sincerely



P J Hurst  
Headteacher