



THOMAS MILLS HIGH SCHOOL

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Dear Parents

5th March 2021

Headteacher's Update 2020/2021 – Letter 21 (of 21)

As always, I trust that this letter finds you safe and well. Further to last week's letter, I am pleased to say that the planning for full re-opening has moved forward at quite a pace. Key details are included in this letter.

This week we have welcomed back the majority of the staff and it has been useful re-establishing the protocols that affect them. For example, we are currently operating two Staff Rooms as staff have to maintain social distancing from each other. A few staff have been unable to return to school this week. Departments are working collaboratively but I am sure that you are aware that staff absence creates some additional pressures.

As expected, the demand for in school provision has grown and so we've welcomed more students back to school. Teachers have managed to teach and supervise these students whilst also delivering online work. As always everyone is rising to the challenges.

Our full plans for re-opening are outlined in a document called *March Opening Document (MOD)*. The MOD is a key feature of our risk management process. It is a dynamic document which means it is subject to change. However, the latest version can be found via the following link [march-opening-document-213510216.pdf \(thomasmills.suffolk.sch.uk\)](http://thomasmills.suffolk.sch.uk/march-opening-document-213510216.pdf)

Most of the control measures in the MOD are the same as last term. The key differences, such as face coverings or Lateral Flow Device (LFD) testing have been shared with you in my last letter. As always, parents' support in implementing these measures is much appreciated and ensures that the school is as safe as possible so we can focus on an effective education.

The overall mood is that everyone is looking forward to the return to school albeit with many extra control measures in place. In line with the weather, on occasions this week, I sense that the clouds are lifting. Blue skies are on the horizon.

Return of Year Groups to School from Monday 8th March

Year Groups will return to school as follows and will register in the same areas (or pastoral bubbles) as before lockdown:

Monday 8 th March	Year 11	Mills Charity Building (Maths Block)
Tuesday 9 th March	Year 10	Science Laboratories (10RGI in Room E7)
Wednesday 10 th March	Sixth Form	Sixth Form Area
Thursday 11 th March	Year 7	West Block (7JBA in Room E2)
	Year 8	Scrivener's Building (English Block)
Friday 12 th March	Year 9	East (E) Rooms (10SSp in W9/10)



Key Health Considerations

- We must follow the system of controls as outlined in Update Letter 20 – this ensures **prevention**, as well as an appropriate **response** to infection.
- The school has undertaken a number of adaptations, but everyone has a **personal responsibility** to keep themselves and others as safe as possible.
- **No one should come into school if: they have one or more coronavirus symptoms; a member of their household has coronavirus symptoms; they are required to quarantine; or if they have had a positive test.**
- We must all promote the **Hands, Face, Space** messages:
Hands – clean them more often using soap and water or hand sanitiser;
Face – wear face coverings when required;
Space – adhere to social distancing

Attendance

- Parents should let the Office know of any students who are self-isolating or shielding by emailing attendance@thomasmills.suffolk.sch.uk
- We are happy to discuss any anxieties or concerns with parents or students.
- **Excellent attendance and excellent behaviour is expected.**
- Students are encouraged to bring their own sanitiser, tissues, and wipes with them.
- School uniform is expected (any specific issues should be shared with the form tutor).

Pupil Support and Expectations

- This lockdown has once again re-emphasised the importance of face-to-face education. Everyone will be keen to make up for any lost ground not only with academic education but also good social development. There is no time for distractions.
- All students are expected to follow reasonable instructions. Any student who does not follow such instructions and potentially causes fear, anxiety and/or undermines confidence in others can expect the highest of sanctions.
- Behaviour for learning – there will be a real focus on positive working relationships, engagement, and motivation.
- Catch up support will continue and will be amended subject to guidance as well as the school's own assessments.
- The school's pastoral system continues to play a significant role and in the post-lockdown context will help with the rebuilding of friendships and social engagement; respond to issues linked to coronavirus; and support pupils with approaches to improve their physical and mental wellbeing.

Asymptomatic Testing and Containing an Outbreak

- Lateral Flow Devices (LFD) can support the return to face-to-face education by helping identify people who are infectious but do not have any coronavirus symptoms.
- The school will be moving towards a home testing model, but students will be offered a test on their first day back, followed by two more tests in school during the first two weeks. Registration will be combined with Period 1 during this time.
- Testing is voluntary but strongly encouraged.
- Students will self-administer the tests.
- A positive result will be handled sensitively and Mr Wheeler or a member of the Senior Management Team will make contact with the Health Authorities.
- In the vast majority of cases, parents will be in agreement that a pupil with symptoms should not attend school given the potential risk to others. If necessary, we can refuse a pupil into the school if, in our reasonable judgement, it is necessary to protect our pupils and staff from possible infection with coronavirus.

Transport, Arrival and Departure

- Students must wear a face covering when travelling on dedicated transport to secondary school.
- Upon arrival, students should go straight to their form area (Miss Preston will advise Year 10 on specific arrangements).
- Upon arrival and during lesson changeovers, staff and students should follow the one-way systems.
- Period 6 will finish at 3.45pm for all students. Students should leave the site by 4.00PM. Students can leave by the nearest exit.

Sixth Form, Library and Book Borrowing

- The Library continues to be used for Sixth Form study and a general base.
- The Common Room will be closed initially (and will be used for testing as well as an alternative teaching space in the event of an outbreak). This will be reviewed for the Summer Term.
- Library books will still be available but through a different system outlined in the MOD.

Break, Lunch, and the Canteen

- Students should be outside at break and lunch except in bad weather (Mr Cann will email teachers during Period 4 if this is the case – however I have asked Mr Cann to ensure blue skies for the foreseeable future!).
- Students should only go to their designated areas on the field as well as specific queues in the canteen.
- Students can eat in the Canteen or outside on the field. They must not eat in form rooms.
- In inclement weather, students can use form rooms. Year 10 would use the Main Hall. Year 10 also have access to the FAYAP Centre at lunchtime (whatever the weather!)
- The menu from our caterers continues to be 'grab and go.'

Curriculum and Subject Specific Considerations

- Education is not optional, and our curriculum remains broad and ambitious.
- **It will be very important that positive working relationships are established between staff and pupils so that a thirst for learning is quickly re-created.**
- Pupils must bring their own equipment such as pen, pencils, calculators, glue sticks and highlighters – and should not share with anyone.
- Seating plans will be created and must be followed. Teachers will upload these as advised. (This helps with NHS Contact Tracing.)
- PE, Drama, Music, Art, Science, Technology and Learning Support have specific considerations, and these are outlined in the MOD from page 25.
- All arrangements are under review ahead of the Summer Term. For example, it is possible that the changing rooms may be re-opened enabling students the opportunity to change for PE lessons.
- **In the meantime, students should only wear PE kit on the days when they have PE.**
- **The PE Department** have asked me to mention that PE kit should include tracksuit trousers or sports leggings (blue or black) as these can be worn in classroom lessons.
- The PE Department have also requested that students bring trainers, boots, and shin pads for all lessons, to ensure they are prepared for all activities.
- **Homework** should be set as normal. Microsoft Teams may be used for some homework and some work can be submitted online.
- Computer keyboards and some other pieces of equipment must be wiped before and after each pupil.

Other Considerations for Parents

- Parents should contact the school through telephone or email.
- If parents are contacted because of an unwell child, it is important that they are collected quickly. Please ensure alternative contacts are available if required.

Summary

I appreciate that there's a lot to take in. Most of the details included within this letter will be familiar to you and any key changes have been explained and will be re-iterated over the next few weeks.

Although I feel the media has, on occasions, catastrophised the situation within education, I have found the school community remarkably resilient. Any anxieties are understandable, and an appropriate conversation has dealt with any concerns. If you have any further questions do not hesitate to be in touch.

It is my current judgement, with the support of the Academy Trust, that it is safe and appropriate to open the school from the 8th March. This will be continually assessed in the days and weeks ahead and I will advise you accordingly. We will have contingency plans in the event of a groups of students needing to self-isolate or if staff absence had a wider impact. At the same time, we are also giving thought to the Summer Term and our plans will feature in another new publication – this time, the *STOD – Summer Term Opening Document!* We all very much hope that there will be even fewer restrictions as school provision mirrors the wider re-opening of society.

A year ago, it was clear that society was heading towards a period of great challenge and uncertainty. The effects will last with us for some-time and many families are still mourning.

On occasions this week, I have driven to and from work with a very heavy mist for company, yet the sunshine has been putting in a welcome appearance. The choice of music on the radio has also followed my mood – more upbeat but still thoughtful. '*Mr Blue Sky*' by ELO really captured the moment!

In a previous interview lead member of ELO, Jeff Lynne, explained the background to the song. In the late 1970s, he was locked away in a Swiss chalet and it was dark and misty for two weeks. Suddenly the sun shone, and the "beautiful Alps" appeared and provided the inspiration for 'Mr Blue Sky.' A key message is that we have had the bad times but when 'Mr Blue Sky' appears, you can tell the good times are here.

On that note, I see that this weekend's weather forecast appears to have some dry and sunny spells. I hope that the weekend is kind to you and look forward to 'regrouping' next week.

With best wishes

Yours sincerely



P J Hurst
Headteacher