



THOMAS MILLS HIGH SCHOOL

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Dear Parents

8th January 2021

Headteacher's Update 2020/2021 – Letter 15 (of 15)

I thought you would appreciate a brief update following the end of our first week back which has seen the return of a 'lockdown'. I am pleased to say that many things have moved forward through a more structured approach. On Wednesday, the Secretary of State for Education made a statement to Parliament. He reaffirmed that schools have not suddenly become unsafe but limiting the number of students who attend them is essential to curb the escalating cases of coronavirus.

Provision for Critical Workers Children and Vulnerable Pupils

Forty-nine students are in school today. Miss Armes and Mr Wheeler have now organised the timetable for the weeks ahead and we have been able to meet the demand. We, therefore, cannot take other students in an unplanned way and it has been suggested that we may have to consider a waiting list. Any changes to future provision will need to consider school staffing, transport routes as well as catering arrangements. The Local Authority will look to condense the bus routes. Supervision of these pupils remains a priority for the school and we hope to have built in some resilience with the staffing. Many staff will be able to work from home in the weeks ahead. Other staff will be in school working on a rota (this in itself is a control measure).

Remote Education

I am pleased to report that teachers say there has been much greater engagement with the learning. Compared to the first online response last March there is more interaction whether through live lessons or the chat facilities. Making use of our timetable to structure our learning, enables the teacher to focus on the class as they would do usually. I'm sure our use of these platforms and discovery of other functions will continue to develop in the weeks ahead.

Attendance and the completion of work will be monitored. Where concerns arise, a graduated response will be followed. It could be that there are connectivity issues and so some help could be offered here. The Government has committed to increasing data allowances on mobile devices to help 'disadvantaged' children. Please contact us if you do not have fixed broadband at home and cannot afford data for devices and we will follow up the links that the Government have given us.

I do understand though that the problem of access and sharing laptops at home might be solved for some if Teams is accessed via a games console.

External Examinations

The Department for Education confirmed that students (Year 11, Year 12 BTEC and Year 13) will not be required to sit external examinations this summer. Together with Ofqual, they will consult next week on how fairly to award all pupils with a grade to ensure they can progress to the next stage of their lives. Although this creates some uncertainty, it is still 'business as usual' for these year groups. Not only is there more subject learning and consolidation needed but also opportunities for students to provide evidence of their learning. I know



that Heads of Year have been in touch and Year 11 have been sent a Mathematics and English paper. We are proposing a date for a rescheduled Year 11 Parents Evening.

On-line Parents Evenings and Other Changes to the Calendar

The feedback from the Year 13 Parents' Evening has been mostly positive: many feel it's the way forward; there was more student engagement and "good" given the circumstances that we're in. There were some connectivity issues and it has been suggested that we start earlier at 5pm. The next Parents Evening online will be with **Year 12** on **Thursday 21st January**.

The following changes to the School Calendar are proposed:

Year 8 – Options Evening scheduled for the **25th February** has been cancelled. Pupils will have presentations during tutor time, and these will be available online for parents. Further information about the GCSE Options will be available shortly.

The Parents Evening scheduled for **4th March** will be postponed to the **25th March** and will be online.

Year 9 – The Parents Evening scheduled for the **18th March** will be online. Guidance will be issued.

Year 10 – The Parents Evening scheduled for the **28th January** will be online. Guidance will be issued.

Year 11 – A re-scheduled Parents Evening can take place on Thursday **4th March**. This will be online, and guidance will be issued.

Sadly, the Easter Concert which was due to take place at Snape Maltings on the 25th March has been cancelled.

Coronavirus Testing

Currently, without the help of the Army, we have managed to have our Covid-19 testing facility up and running. During Wednesday and Thursday over a hundred staff in school have been tested. From now on, staff will be tested weekly. Mr Wheeler and Mr Mugliston have been looking at the logistics of testing the students in school. Correspondence has been drafted and will be issued shortly. I would like to place on record my gratitude to the staff involved. Their professionalism and attention to detail has been second to none and provides the school with another control measure for these times. (It would be wrong of me to create a precedent of sharing the results but let's say there has not been anything for me to worry about.)

Thank you to all those who offered support by volunteering to help with the mass testing programme. As we will not be mass testing pupils on the scale expected we no longer require any immediate assistance. We will keep a record of your interest as the situation could easily change!

Summary

My continued thanks to everyone in the school community for their contribution to all of our efforts this week, whether in school or remotely. It has been truly remarkable. Today is our traditional Thomas Mills Day. The life, values and legacy of Thomas Mills continues to provide much inspiration to us.

As always, I hope that this letter finds you safe and well. I particularly hope that our staff and students find time to rest and relax. I am certainly looking forward to switching off (from the news at least).

Yours sincerely



P J Hurst
Headteacher