



St. Thomas More High School

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3rd February 2021

Dear Parents and Carers,

Following the most recent announcement from the Prime Minister, I wanted to take this opportunity to write to update you on a number of issues relating to School. We now know that schools will be closed until 8th March at the earliest, and remote learning will continue until at least that date. May I take this opportunity to thank you for your continued support and all that you are doing to help your children adapt and cope with the demands of online learning. As times remain challenging, and the impact of the new strains of coronavirus, the effect of long covid on our community and government policy remain difficult to predict, I thought it would be helpful to make clear some firm decisions where possible, and to offer some additional guidance relating to teaching and learning. Please remember that it only takes one government announcement to require our plans to change and be reviewed and therefore, there could be further changes from what is outlined here.

February Half-Term 15th-19th February

St Thomas More will close for all students for the half term break. Staff will not set work for students during this week; nor should students expect work to be assessed during this week. The provision for the children of key workers will resume on Monday 22nd February.

Enrichment

Staff are continuing to source enrichment activities for students which extend learning beyond the 'classroom'. I encourage you to read our weekly newsletter Contact [contact.pdf \(st-thomasmore.southend.sch.uk\)](#) each week so that you and your son/daughter are aware of the opportunities available now. We anticipate national guidance on the Duke of Edinburgh expeditions, and how to deal with Bronze, Silver and Gold Awards.

Plans for Year 11 & 13

Year 11 and 13 have had a very difficult experience. As well as dealing with lockdowns and remote learning, they have had to endure a great deal of worry about how their grades will be assessed and then moderated nationally. The engagement of the vast majority of students with remote learning has been excellent and we would encourage them to continue to work hard as this work and the assessments that will follow later in the year on their return to school, will be a key factor in the decisions made and the courses offered if you have applied to our Sixth Form. If you need additional support please do not hesitate to contact your Pupil Progress Mentor in the first instance or welfare@st-thomasmore.southend.sch.uk

Year 8 Key Stage 4 Options

Year 8 Options Information Evening is now moved to Thursday May 6th and we will write to parents of Year 8 with details of this process after the Easter holiday.

Remote Learning

Teachers and support staff have been working extremely hard to continue to develop the Microsoft platform which has now been rolled out across the School to provide a blended learning approach to all students. Heads of Department and Pupil Progress Mentors are monitoring the engagement of students in their learning, with teachers completing class registers each day according to their timetable. Please contact your child's Pupil Progress Mentor if you have any concerns regarding the work. We would hope

students are proactive in their studies, and would contact their teacher if they are struggling or have fallen behind with their work. [remote-learning-policy.pdf \(st-thomasmore.southend.sch.uk\)](#)

Online Devices

I know, for some families, it has been extremely difficult to be able to provide appropriate online access for their sons and daughters during this period of lock down. The School has received some laptops from the Government for our disadvantaged students, but demand has exceeded supply. We have, wherever possible, sought other suppliers and are trying to meet the daily requests of parents who are really struggling to have enough laptops, PCs and other devices to allow their children to access the online curriculum. Please remember that work can also be accessed via smart phones and tablets. Whilst such smaller devices would not be useful tools for extended writing, they can be a further way to access lessons or see the work that has been set. If you are really struggling, we will continue to try to source further devices and make them available to those most in need. Please email Mr Maxfield on pmaxfield@st-thomasmore.southend.sch.uk if you would like to be placed on a waiting list.

Parents Evenings, and Reports

Whilst the nation works together to get infection rates under control, we have postponed face to face Parents' evenings and events and will review this after the Easter break in the week commencing 12th April 2021. We are exploring with and learning from our Diocesan colleagues, the use of an online platform for Parents' evenings. However, Progress Reports will be sent home largely in line with our published calendar dates for all year groups and ask you to please bear with us if this takes slightly longer than usual. We have updated [whole-school-calendar.pdf \(st-thomasmore.southend.sch.uk\)](#)

Testing for Covid19

As part of our regular review of risks, we know that we are limited in the number of large spaces we have that could be given over to onsite testing and repeat testing of students and staff using Lateral Flow Devices. Therefore, when the school reopens to more students, students will be asked to use the community testing facilities close to home, rather than being tested in school. In addition, as I have said in previous communication, we would ask that parents of children who currently attend school (mainly the children of key workers) take their children to the community testing sites on a regular basis, to protect other students and staff in school. [Getting tested for COVID-19 – Coronavirus information and guidance – Southend-on-Sea Borough Council](#)

Families in Need

As a school community we are very conscious that several of our families are really struggling during this lockdown. Some, we are aware of but there may be others that might need help from the wider St Thomas More family. If you are aware of any particular need, please contact Mr Maxfield or myself via my PA, Ms Parr and we will do what we can to help you during this difficult time.

Please continue to pray for all those affected by Covid 19, especially those who are unwell or anxious. During our weekly assemblies and staff meetings, we continue to pray for all of you and your families at this time and I would ask you, in turn, to pray for all those working at the School to support your sons and daughters to achieve the very best they can.

Yours sincerely



Mrs G Ackred
Headteacher