



St. Thomas More High School

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6th January 2021

Dear Parents and Carers,

You will be aware that in the evening of Monday 4 January, the Prime Minister announced a national lockdown in order to reduce the spread of COVID-19, which has now come into effect. Full details of the lockdown restrictions can be found at www.gov.uk/guidance/national-lockdown-stay-at-home. This central Government decision does not suggest that schools are no longer safe places for young people. Instead, limiting attendance is about reducing the number of contacts that all of us have with people in other households, therefore driving down transmission of the virus.

The new restrictions mean that our school, **only remains open for the children of critical key workers and vulnerable young people to attend on site. All other students will receive remote education until February half term and must remain at home, in line with national guidance.**

We have spent the past two days settling back into a new rhythm of daily school life with teachers working on the delivering of remote education which will follow the daily timetable for all students until February half term. I understand as a working parent the challenges of balancing work and life at home but appreciate too, that drastically reducing the number of people in school is essential if we are to successfully protect the NHS and reduce the transmission of the virus. I attach some guidance which may help structure home learning and expectations.

Children of critical key workers and vulnerable young people – including those with education, health and care plans or a social worker

Schools are remaining open to children who have an education, health and care (EHC) plan and/or an allocated social worker and children of workers who are critical to the COVID19 response, who are unable to safely stay at home. We need to ensure that the number of young people accessing the offer of provision in our school is kept to the lowest number possible. Therefore, even if you are a critical worker, if your child(ren) can remain at home rather than attend school, on some or all days, then they should. **Please only use the offer of provision when it is crucial for you to undertake your critical role.**

The list of critical workers can be found [here](#). Please continue to support us in considering this carefully for your circumstances and only use this offer of support if you have no alternatives for childcare for your child(ren). Clearly the more children and young people that attend, the wider the risk of spreading the virus grows and we will keep the numbers attending school under review. Please contact school using the email office@st-thomasmore.southend.sch.uk to keep us informed if and when your situation changes.

Please do continue to make use of the community testing to keep our staff and in school community safe prior to sending students into school and do not send your child into school if they are unwell. [Southend-on-Sea Borough Council \(st-thomasmore.southend.sch.uk\)](http://www.southend-on-sea.gov.uk)

Summer exams

The education secretary confirmed in his statement to MPs this afternoon, that GCSEs and A-levels are not going ahead - after this week's decision that it was no longer feasible with so much time lost in the Covid pandemic and the latest lockdown. They will be working with Ofqual to consult rapidly and put in place alternative arrangements that will allow students to progress fairly. We anticipate but are not yet in receipt of any guidance and will provide an update in due course about how centre assessed grades will be calculated. In the absence of this information, I would like to advise you that staff **will not be commenting on predicted grades** but that we will do our professional best to ensure that students receive the right grades and qualifications.

Public exams and vocational assessments scheduled to take place are planned to go ahead at St Thomas More. If you were working hard in anticipation of sitting a public exam in January or February you will have received an email regarding arrangements from myself and Mrs Norton our examination officer. Please email her directly if you have not or have any queries or concerns at knorton@st-thomasmore.southend.sch.uk or complete the [St Thomas More High School Student COVID Absence Report \(office.com\)](#) if you are unable to attend these examinations because you are unwell.

Although **we will not be holding mock examinations for Year 11 and 13 students in school** this half term, assessments and tests may be set as part of the work for this half term and we are likely to need some standardised formal assessments when you return. No single piece of assessment will determine your overall grade: you have months of learning ahead and we measure progress over time as well as overall attainment. So please do keep up the effort to engage with your learning and reading. This will put you in the best position, whatever arrangements are made for your qualifications. It's important that we focus on the knowledge and skills needed to equip students to progress to their next stage, whatever form that might take – whether to our Sixth Form, a college, an apprenticeship, university or employment.

We know that this is a difficult time for students, their parents and carers, teachers and staff. Our message to students is this: please continue to engage as fully as you can in your education. All learning will be remote and online for all students whether in school or at home, at least until February 12th 2021. Teachers are learning and working to deliver a variety of activities via Teams, which may include some 'live' teaching and the priority for the next two weeks will be for our GCSE and A Level students as per Government guidelines.

The way ahead is not straightforward. We know that we are all seeking clarity as soon as possible and will provide further updates as soon as we can. We hope that you understand that decisions we make under these circumstances are difficult and stressful and we are always unlikely to satisfy all students and families, but we continue just to do our best.

I thank you for your continued support of us.

Yours sincerely



Mrs G Ackred
Headteacher