



St. Thomas More High School

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31st December 2020

Dear Parents and Carers,

You will be aware of the announcements from Gavin Williamson and Boris Johnson yesterday afternoon, regarding plans for the return to school of primary and secondary pupils next week.

Despite being given no prior knowledge of this communication, no access to the detail it contained and the overall lack of clarity of the messages given, we are relieved that schools have been asked to revert to online learning for the majority of students for the next two weeks.

Despite the measures that we have implemented to keep everyone safe, we have become increasingly concerned about the rapidly increasing rate of infection in our surrounding area and our ability to keep everyone safe in our school setting considering we welcome 1100+ young people and staff members to school each day. Accommodating up to 30 young people/adults in a room does not allow for the social distancing restrictions that are currently required out of school and despite continuous messages from the government that children and young people are not at risk, there appears to be significant contrary evidence in our local schools of both children and adults becoming unwell.

The challenges of providing education during the pandemic have been very apparent. Although during last term, we have always been able to provide access to learning for all students, disruption in the continuity of learning has been very evident. We recognise the anxieties parents have related to pupils returning to school and spreading the virus, in particular the new variant that is being widely spoken of. We also understand the pressures that people are under to return to work on January 4th. Additionally, we know that there are vulnerable families out there who need our support both, academically and at home.

We have considered all these factors and with the support of the Local Authority, the Chair of Governors and the Multi-Academy Trust (ACT Chair Frank McEvoy), our plans for starting back in January are as follows.

Public Examinations - January 6th and 8th

We will be open for Year 12 and 13 students who are due to sit public examinations for BTEC as per their exam timetable. These students should arrive at school no earlier than 8.30am in uniform and leave after their exam has finished, with all their belongings

Partial Opening 5th – 8th January – Critical Key Workers & Vulnerable students only

All students will be working remotely, remaining at home following their normal timetable.

Our fantastic teachers and support staff will endeavour to provide the best remote learning for students and set work online according to their timetable and will be available to respond to student queries and questions via Teams and email. In responding to this pandemic, our responsibility is to minimise the risk of infection and transmission and therefore we will be supporting staff in balancing their own home circumstances with delivery of remote learning by reducing to a minimum, the number of staff

in school over the next two weeks. Therefore 'live' online lessons delivered by teachers are unlikely between 5th and 15th January.

During the week 5th – 8th January we will not be fully closed as we must stay **open for children of critical key workers and vulnerable children**. We appreciate that some of you will not be able to continue the very important work that you do to protect our community if we are closed and if the government says we must open for these groups, then open we must. **However, if you belong to one of these categories please may I ask you to consider your decision very carefully. If you have the capacity to care for your child/ren at home please, please keep them away from school.** If you belong to one of [these groups](#) and have no other option but to send your child/children to school please complete our survey [here](#), even if you have done so previously.

Once we know the number of students that we need to accommodate, we will prepare a plan for next week. Please be aware that students at school will be supervised by an adult other than their class teacher and will be accessing the same activities online as their peers who are at home.

Staggered opening 11th – 15th January

From Monday 11th to 15th January, in addition to the critical key worker and vulnerable children, **Year 11 and 13 will begin their mock examinations** as per the timetable attached. Remote learning will continue for all other year groups this week.

Full reopening 18th January onwards

From Monday 18th January, we will make on-site provision for as many year groups as is practically possible, having reviewed and considered the national, regional and local public health information available to us. Parents will be advised as soon as this decision has been made.

The information in this letter is, of course, being shared with our staff, so we can begin to plan provision as best as is possible. We will be encouraging all our staff to be tested, at one of the many facilities provided by Public Health, in good time before returning to the classroom. It is unlikely that the extensive provision of on-site 'mass testing', as envisaged by the Department for Education, will have been established in the early weeks of January. We would encourage all students, with their families, to do the same: to ensure you have all been tested in the week before returning to school, even if you have no symptoms and even if you have obtained a negative test result before. Please do not get a test if you have had a positive test in the last 12 weeks as it may give an incorrect positive result.

I apologise for having to contact you on New Years Eve and please be assured that I will do all that is possible to minimise the disruption to your child's education and, most importantly, to keep everybody in our school community as safe as possible over the coming weeks.

Wishing you all a happy and healthy new year.

Yours sincerely



Mrs G Ackred
Headteacher