

4th December, 2020



Dear Parent/Carer

Coronavirus Update 36

Welcome to this week's *Update*; I hope we find you in good health and spirits this week. Spirits here have been buoyed by the fact that (so far!) we have had no positive test results within our school community this week. Long may that continue!

Face masks

Please can I remind all parents that students should bring a face-mask to school every day? At present a number of students are 'forgetting' and are being directed to the School Office for a spare. There's been a sharp rise in the number of masks the Office is having to hand out over the last week or so, and the cost of providing these has to come out of general school funds. Please ensure your son or daughter brings a mask into school, and that they understand the importance of wearing it around the site.

Virtual Parents' Evening

We tried our first 'virtual' Parents' Evening last night, and initial feedback has been positive. One Year 11 parent kindly took the time and trouble to e-mail me and comment: "*We found it to be excellent and more streamlined and organised than on site parents' evenings*"; "*5 minutes was just about right and technology all went to plan!*". Our next such Parents' Evening is for Year 7 on Monday.

As ever, we're keen to hear feedback from both evenings – if you took part, how did you find it? Please e-mail me at scbrierley@stmargaretsacademy.com if you have any observations. I'll try and reply to each one, but can't promise to do so.

Christmas Jumper Day, 2020

Next Friday (11th December) is Christmas Jumper Day! In return for a small donation to charity, students are welcome to wear a Christmas Jumper instead of their school jumper and/or blazer (though a school shirt, school tie, school shoes *etc* must still be worn). We've taken part in this initiative for a few years now and it's always great to see our students (and staff!) sporting various Christmas Jumpers in all their glory. We'll let you know how it goes next week!

Last day of term

Our published term dates state that this term finishes on Friday 18th December, and that that day is a half-day for students. We had planned to hold our traditional Carol Service in the Cathedral that day, but sadly this won't be possible this year.

However I'm delighted to be able to let you know that we will still be able have a Carol Service, with appropriate social distancing! Rev Ian Greenwood has kindly allowed us to use St Anne's Church, and so we will arrange for each half-year-group in Years 7, 8 and 9 to have a 30-minute service that day. (There will therefore be six Carol Services altogether, with St Anne's being cleaned between each one). Students will come into school half-an-hour before their Carol Service starts in order to spend some time in their form groups, and they will be dismissed from St Anne's immediately after their Service finishes – so it will be a fairly truncated day. Our new Missional Chaplains will be leading the service – more details about this next week.

Year 10 and Year 11 students, meanwhile, will have a whole year-group Carol Service in the Sports Hall. Again, the Service will last 30 minutes and will be preceded by 30 minutes in their form-groups. After their hour in school, students will be dismissed.

Detailed timings will be circulated in next week's *Update*. Regrettably we will not be able to welcome students' families to our Carol Services this year.

Mr Lawton will be writing to post-16 families separately about Sixth Form arrangements (which include a Carol Service and Charity Santa Dash on Thursday 17th December).

Exams, 2020

I am sure many parents, especially those of students in Years 11 and 13, will have heard yesterday's Government announcement about this summer's external exams. You may also have heard one of our Year 13 students gracing the airwaves – he spoke very eloquently about the challenges of studying through a period of self-isolation on Radio 4's flagship *Today* programme just after the 8 o'clock news on Thursday. St Margaret's has been in the media quite a bit this half-term!

If nothing else, I think the announcement demonstrates the Government's commitment to ensuring that exams do go ahead if it is at all possible for them to do so – a second year of school-assessed grades seems very unlikely. The provision of a second set of exams in late July (for those who missed all the papers in the first round, perhaps due to self-isolation) does seem to be a very sensible way of ensuring such students are not disadvantaged.

However the announcement did leave a number of questions unanswered, with more details about individual subjects' requirements promised next month, and an 'Expert Group' to determine the best way of ensuring fairness between schools where there has been a great deal of self-isolation and schools where there has been comparatively little. If you or your son or daughter are feeling anxious about the situation, please do not hesitate to get in touch; we may not have the answers, but sometimes just talking the issues through helps.

I am currently consulting with subject leader colleagues within school about the entry requirements for post-16 courses. We'll publish them all in time for the Sixth Form Open Evening on Thursday 4th February, 2021 (save the date!).

Finally...

Best wishes to all St Margaret's families as the season of Advent continues. Rarely has this season of getting ready for Christmas assumed such significance.

We'll be in touch again as usual next Friday.

Yours faithfully



Stephen Brierley
Principal.