

8th January, 2021



Dear Parent/Carer

Coronavirus Update 40

A hearty welcome to our latest update for parents, at the end of an extraordinary week.

I wonder what your reactions were when you heard about our third national lockdown. The news, when it came, was not entirely unexpected; and the decision was certainly necessary, of course, given the spiralling rates of infection both nationally and locally. But I think that my overall reaction was one of deep sadness, as I was mindful of the significant impact our partial closure could have on so many of our young people as they are separated once again from their friends, and from the new routine that has been part of their lives since September. If your son or daughter is finding any of this difficult to come to terms with, *please let us know*: we can help.

Comparisons with last March are, of course, inevitable, but this time we are in a very different place to respond as a school. Back in March, we set work for each lesson; this time, we aim to provide live lessons all day. Hopefully this will help keep some sort of sense of routine, as this time we have been able to stay with our decision to maintain the timings of the school day. Those onsite and those at home are now able to access the same educational offer, so everyone will be able to continue to learn whatever their circumstances.

The first week has not been without its hiccups, but I'm delighted to say that about 75% of lessons are now being delivered 'live' in accordance with the school timetable. A number of parents have been in touch to let me know that this has worked well (thank you!), and I'd certainly want to pay tribute to all our teachers who have got to grips with the new technology (and the challenges of teaching through a very different medium) after, in quite a few cases, decades of teaching in a more traditional way. I'm equally grateful to our support staff who have risen just as admirably to the challenges this week!

Online education

So, a quick reminder: **school may be closed to most students, but teaching and learning is continuing**. Students should log on to Teams every morning, and in their 'Calendar' they will have a button to click to access each lesson. Where lessons are not taking place live (*eg* where the teacher is unavailable due to illness), 'assignments' will have been set for students to complete.

However, not all our students are accessing lessons online yet. **We are keen to support students in that position**, so:

- if there are technological issues, please let us know.
 - In some cases, we may be able to help provide some hardware (please e-mail Mrs Penketh, apenketh@stmargaretsacademy.com, for more details).
 - If your son or daughter is accessing live lessons through their mobile 'phone, we may be able to get you an increased data allowance on your mobile contract through another Government initiative. You can find out more about this [here](#). (Please note that this scheme is available to many children, not just the 'disadvantaged'). Please contact me (scbrierley@stmargaretsacademy.com) if you're interested in this.
 - Students "who may have difficulty engaging with remote education at home (for example due to a lack of devices or quiet space to study)" are likely qualify as 'vulnerable' students, and so may be able to come into school.
- if your son or daughter is simply just reluctant to engage, again please get in touch; there are a number of individually-tailored strategies we can put in place to help.

Online education on 'short days'

Whilst sticking to our current timetable is the right decision at this point, it does mean that for one day a week (their short day) students will have no live lessons to access. Given the intensity of the other four days in the week (the weekly number of lessons was spread over five days pre-Covid; it's spread over four days now), it may well be appropriate for students to have one quieter day each week. But there are still some activities for their attention:

- starting from Monday 11th January, we will be relaunching our virtual Assemblies. Students should take the time to watch the video message – retaining our focus on the 'bigger picture' in life is vital for all of us at this time.
- also starting from this Monday, our Learning for Life programme will be back; there will be a video and a power-point for students to study, and (in due course) some work to promote good self-regulation too;
- although we are not providing live PE lessons, regular exercise is very important during lockdown! Our PE team is setting work for each class, every week – such as home bodyweight circuits and other creative ideas to help students exercise at home. And if it's appropriate, we'd encourage older students, with parental permission, to go for a walk, a run or a bike ride;
- homework is still being set – so there's the chance to get ahead with that; and
- for those who would like to get even further ahead in their learning, or maybe learn something different (a new language, or a history topic that is – or is not! – on our curriculum), we'd warmly commend Oak Academy (<https://www.thenational.academy/>) who have an excellent range of online lessons. Here's a challenge for some of our younger boys: if any student in Year 7 or Year 8 can gain full marks in an Oak Academy Year 11 Higher Tier Maths end-of-lesson quiz – please let me know (scbrierley@stmargaretsacademy.com)!

Onsite education

Around 70 students are now arriving onsite every day – more than double the peak number who came onsite during the first 'lockdown'. Every year-group is represented, including the Sixth Form. Your son or daughter is eligible to attend school if either parent is a 'key worker', or if the young person themselves is 'vulnerable'; the definitions for both groups are quite wide, and can be found [here](#). If your son or daughter qualifies and you would like them to come into school:

- **please let us know first** by e-mailing scbrierley@stmargaretsacademy.com and copying jdally@stmargaretsacademy.com into the e-mail;
- the same timings of the day apply as were in place last term;
- **full school uniform must be worn** (PE kit on short days);
- from Monday 11th January, **masks must be worn throughout lessons** as well as in communal areas (eg corridors), unless your son/daughter is exempt from wearing one (see [here](#));
- students must come into school through the large yard as usual, and sign in when they enter the building (the signing-in sheets are in the main reception area);
- students will be allocated to an ICT room (Year 7 to Room 20 or the Learning Resource Centre; all other years to Room 37 or Room 47), where they will access their live lessons in the same way they would if they were at home;
- **students must bring their own headphones into school** as lending school ones increases the risk of Coronavirus infection;

- hot meals will be available as usual in the canteen (including on ‘short’ days – although parents who would rather their son did not mix with students in other year-groups may still provide a packed lunch); and
- the same comments about the work for students on short days apply as above, although we are exploring whether it will be possible to arrange for some onsite physical activity as part of our onsite provision.

External exams 2021

You may have seen the Government’s announcement on Wednesday that this summer’s GCSE and ‘A’-level exams will not take place (presumably BTECs won’t either), and that Centre-Assessed Grades will once again be awarded.

First things first: I recognise this news could well be very unsettling for all our Year 11 and Year 13 students. (My older son is in Year 13, my younger in Year 11, so I understand first-hand how they feel). If your son or daughter needs any extra support at this time, *please get in touch* (with Mrs Wyke (vwyke@stmargaretsacademy.com) for Year 11 students, and Mr Lawton (rlawton@stmargaretsacademy.com) for Year 13 students) – it’s what we’re here for.

To be honest, you probably now have as many questions about how this year’s grades will actually be awarded as I do. Wednesday’s announcement was short on detail, and we’re expecting further guidance in due course. At this point in time we don’t know about timescales, or what evidence we’ll be advised to use; we don’t know whether we can set any of our own tests to inform teachers’ decisions, or how teachers’ grades will be moderated to ensure fairness within and between schools. Naturally, when we have any further information, we’ll share it with you.

For now, two key messages.

- **To students – you need to keep learning.** There may still be some sort of assessment ahead which might impact on your grades. But even if there isn’t, anyone who takes their foot off the pedal now will struggle in September. The courses you want to do next year (‘A’-levels and BTECs for many current Year 11s, degrees and apprenticeships for many current Year 13s) will still assume you are familiar with the content of your current courses. Not working now may well lead to big problems next year.
- **To parents – please make sure your son or daughter keeps engaging with their learning.** Just working hard isn’t enough: GCSE and ‘A’-level grades are not effort grades! True, working hard is *part* of what’s needed, but working effectively is just as important. Is the work that they’re covering really sticking in their long-term memory? Can they recall what they learnt three weeks ago, say? If they can, your son or daughter will be well-placed to be awarded high grades – which go to those who have *learnt* the most, not necessarily those who have worked the hardest.

Free School Meals

As in previous lockdowns, because access to meals in school is more difficult when schools are partially closed, supermarket vouchers will be available for families entitled to Free School Meals. This time, vouchers for Liverpool schoolchildren are being distributed through Liverpool City Council (I’ve yet to be advised about arrangements for students from outside Liverpool).

We need to know at which supermarket each family would like to spend their vouchers – Asda, Morrison’s, Sainsbury’s or Tesco, so **please could families entitled to Free School meals e-mail officestaff@stmargaretsacademy.com with their preference?** Thank you.

Testing

We are in the process of setting up our onsite testing facility and hope to have further details about this next week. In the meantime, I would encourage all St Margaret's families to continue accessing testing sites – especially for those attending school. Details of how to do this can be found [here](#).

Term dates 2021/2022

I'm aware we've yet to publish these on our website, partly because we're currently unclear whether the school year will be 190 days long or 189 days long. (School years are normally 190 days long, but there's going to be an extra Bank Holiday in the May half-term for the Queen's Platinum Jubilee, and it's not certain whether students and staff will benefit from this).

Governors have approved the following dates, however:

Term	First day of term	Half-term is the week beginning...	Last day of term	Notes
Autumn Term 2021	Thursday 2nd September 2021 (half-day for students)	Monday 25th October 2021	Wednesday 22nd December 2021 (half-day for students)	School <u>may</u> also be closed on Monday 6th December 2021
Spring Term 2022	Wednesday 5th January 2022	Monday 21st February 2022	Friday 8th April 2022	
Summer Term 2022	Monday 25th April 2022	Monday 30th May 2022	Thursday 14th July 2022	Monday 2nd May 2022 is a Bank Holiday

News of a former student

A past student from St Margaret's has turned her skills to helping the environment by manufacturing reusable silicone straws. She estimates that she has saved 650,000 single use straws from ending up in landfill since launching The Silicone Straw Company.

Charlotte Walsh first had the idea of creating a reusable alternative to the single use plastic straws when she saw the waste left behind by visitors on sunny summer days. This encouraged her to think about how she could use her 10+ years of manufacturing and engineering experience to make being green easier for families. The engineer has developed the manufacturing process specifically to allow the straws to be made cost effectively in the UK.

And the timing couldn't be more important. The UK government has released a 25-year strategy which aims to reduce the amount of avoidable plastic waste by 2042. It's designed to drastically cut the amount of plastic pollution that inevitably ends up in the sea. As part of that, since October 2020 the UK has banned single-use plastic straws to further reduce marine pollution.

You can contact Charlotte at hello@thesiliconestrawcompany.co.uk or through [this website](#). A pack of six reusable straws and a cleaning brush is available online for £9.99.

We'll be back with the next (hopefully shorter!) edition of our *Coronavirus Update* at the end of next week. Until then, please stay safe, and do enjoy the weekend – despite the new circumstances.

Yours faithfully

Stephen Brierley
Principal.

