

5th February, 2021



Dear Parent/Carer

Coronavirus Update 46

Welcome once again to our weekly update. As ever, we trust this letter finds you and your family in good health and spirits, but if for whatever reason you are not, please be assured of our thoughts and prayers.

Whilst the number of Coronavirus infections in the St Margaret's community has been relatively low this half-term, we're aware that a number of our students' grandparents and other relatives have not been well – do please pray for them during what can seem like a very dark time.

Free School Meals

For families that are entitled to Free School Meals, I'm able to advise that paper vouchers for the half-term holiday (£15 per child for the week) will be distributed through the City Council, and not by e-mail through Edenred. We'll be posting these out before half-term; if you haven't received them by Monday 22nd February, please let us know.

Parents' Evenings for the rest of the year

Most years, we're able to publish a calendar of Parents' Evenings and other key dates before the start of the academic year – and then stick to it, without variation. This year, we've had to chop and change dates a number of times. I appreciate that this isn't ideal, and that sometimes parents will have been inconvenienced by this – but I trust you will understand the circumstances under which we're operating at the moment!

We will be holding five more Parents' Evenings this academic year.

- For parents in **Year 9**, there will be a full, virtual Parents' Evening on Thursday 25th February. Further details will be circulated next week. We'll also circulate details about the Year 9 Options process, which will start with a webinar on Tuesday 23rd February.
- For **Year 11** families, we're looking to hold a full, almost certainly virtual Parents' Evening in either the week beginning Monday 8th March, or the week beginning Monday 15th March. We'll be in touch about that either next week or shortly after half-term. Also, please ensure our Sixth Form Open Evening is on your calendar – it will be happening on Thursday 18th March. The second round of Mocks, scheduled to take place either side of half-term, is unlikely to take place in its usual format; at the moment, we're looking at holding them on a voluntary basis, but we'll say more about this next week.
- **Sixth Formers, and Sixth Form parents** – we'd like to combine the Year 12 and Year 13 Parents' Evenings into one event, and have a single Parents' Evening during the first week back after the Easter holidays (the week beginning Monday 12th April).
- **Year 8 and Year 10** Parents' Evenings will follow in the summer term.

Year 11 Estimated Grades

We've been approached by a number of Year 11 students and parents to ask whether we can give estimated GCSE grades at this point – not least because some other schools' Sixth Forms ask for them as part of their application process.

There are a number of reasons why it is very difficult to give estimated grades right now. For example, we won't know until later this month on what basis grades will be awarded this year. Further Government guidance is expected, but it seems premature to estimate anything until the guidance comes out, and we're told what evidence we can draw on when determining a Centre-Assessed Grade for the Exam Board. Moreover, without having students onsite and in classes, it's hard to make a judgement about where an individual is and what progress they've made since Christmas.

We will be providing some sort of guidance about likely outcomes, though, in the form of a three-grade range (eg "*Josh is likely to achieve a 4, 5 or 6 in Maths in the summer*"). We'll give these to you in writing around the time of the upcoming Year 11 Parents' Evening, so you'll have an opportunity to discuss the grades with your son's teachers when they're published.

I don't know how many other schools' Sixth Forms are asking what students' predicted grades are (though the number is at least two) – but I recognise the difficulties students may face if they want to apply to such a Sixth Form. To alleviate this problem, earlier this week I wrote to my colleague secondary Headteachers across the City advising them, and explaining why, we won't be providing estimated grades this year. If any Year 11 students encounter any difficulties in applying to other institutions because of this issue, please don't hesitate to let me know.

As ever, if you have any questions about our approach to this issue, please do get in touch.

Live lessons

As I'm sure you're aware, most lessons are continuing to take place on a 'live' basis through Teams. Unfortunately we can't always guarantee lessons will take place this way – sometimes a member of staff may be unable to deliver their lesson at the appointed time, and it's not as easy to 'cover' their lesson as it would be. Under these circumstances, work will be set for students through the 'Assignments' area of Teams. Please do bear with us when this happens.

Some students have reportedly told their parents that attendance at live lessons is optional! We're expecting all students to attend their live lessons unless there are particular reasons why they can't (which should be discussed with the Head of Year in the first instance). Registers are being kept so we can support those whose attendance is low.

Finally, I'm delighted to see how maturely most students are using the 'chat' function in their lessons, but please ensure your son (or daughter) is aware that all comments in the chat area are monitored.

Online gaming

Dr Silverstone writes:

*"Here is the second piece of advice and guidance to share from [Thinkuknow](#). Last week we looked at social media; this week the topic is **online gaming**.*

"We know that many of our young people are gaming online more than ever before, if only because we are so restricted in terms of leaving the house and socialising in person, and we know that many of our St Margaret's families have concerns about the impact of increased gaming time.

"Online games are social activities, and most have features that allow young people to chat with others whilst they play. For information about the positives of gaming, the risks of 'in-game chat' and measures you can take to help protect them, watch this short video: [In-game chat: a guide for parents and carers](#).

“The PEGI (Pan European Game Information) rating system can be a useful tool to help you decide what online games are appropriate for your child. For more information on the PEGI system and other factors to consider before deciding what’s suitable, read [Gaming: what's appropriate for your child](#).

“Gaming is popular with both children and adults and can help to cure that lockdown boredom! If your child is gaming, you may have some questions about how to keep them safer. If so, check out - [gaming: what parents need to know](#). For a guide on the apps, sites and games your child might enjoy, visit: [Net Aware](#).”

Safer Internet Day: Tuesday 9th February

Mrs Roberts writes:

“This year in the UK, Safer Internet Day explores reliability online. The internet has an amazing range of information and opportunities online, but how do we separate fact from fiction?”

“In our Learning for Life lessons next week, students will explore:

- *how they decide what to trust online; and*
- *how influence, persuasion and manipulation can impact young people’s decisions, opinions and what they share online.*

“The lessons will also look at the emotional impact that navigating a misleading online world can have on young people, and why it is important to create a supportive, critical and questioning culture online that encourages debate and discussion.

“More information can be found [here](#) and [here](#).”

Admissions Policy 2022: consultation

We would like to consult on making some minor changes to our Admissions Policy for 2022. Technically this is being done as an ‘in-year variation’, and will need to be approved by the Regional Schools Commissioner.

The proposed new policy will shortly be available on our website; if you have any comments, please send them to admin@stmargaretsacademy.com by 9am on Tuesday 23rd March.

Letter from two City Councillors

Two of the City’s Councillors – Cllr Wendy Simon (Acting Mayor) and Cllr Barbara Murray (Cabinet Member for Education) have written an open letter to the parents and carers of children in Liverpool schools. I’ve reproduced the text at the end of this letter.

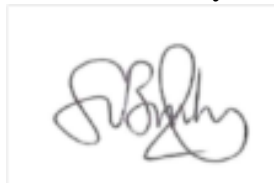
Well-Being Day, Friday 5th February

I hope that your son/daughter has benefitted from today’s Well-Being Day. Please note that our choice of today for a Well-Being Day was in no way influenced by the fact that for the first time for 16 years, a Test Match is today being shown live on terrestrial television – the whole idea of the day is to spend *less* time on screens, not *more*! However I’m sure those of us who consider ourselves to be cricket fans will enjoy the coverage this weekend.

Cricket aside, I’m very much looking forward to hearing what St Margaret’s students have got up to today. Please e-mail any short reports/journals to me at scbrierley@stmargaretsacademy.com – I may even be able to feature one or two such reports next week!

Next Friday's *Update* will, of course, be the last one before half-term. (Please note that school will not be open to key workers' children, or to vulnerable children, that week). Until then, please stay safe, and do get in touch if there's anything we can do to support you at this time.

Yours faithfully



Stephen Brierley
Principal.

Dear Parents and Carers,

We are one month into this third lockdown and we want to acknowledge all that you are doing for your children. Throughout this time exceptional demands have been placed upon your shoulders.

We have been identifying different groups of workers who have shown incredible service and commitment during the pandemic – they deserve our thanks. But nothing replaces your role as a parent or carer. You provide your children with love, support and care. These are the most important things that help children develop and grow through challenging circumstances. Thank you and well done!

This is particularly difficult for those of you who have to juggle child care, remote learning and work pressures. That is why we will continue to call for government to provide better financial support for our workers and those who have suffered job losses during this time.

Keeping yourselves and children safe is so important. That is why we keep reiterating the advice to stay at home if you possibly can and follow the rules of hands – face – space. We also encourage you to get tested and take up the offer of the vaccine when it is your turn.

It is also important that you reach out if you need support. There is always someone available and ready to listen and help. There are some useful resources here:

<https://www.cultureliverpool.co.uk/parenting-through-covid-19/>.

Once again, thank you so much, and please keep you and your loved ones safe.

Councillor Wendy Simon – Acting Mayor of Liverpool
Councillor Barbara Murray – Cabinet member for education