

13th November, 2020



Dear Parent/Carer

Coronavirus update 33

At the end of a testing week, it's good to be reminded that according to the Bible, "*all things work together for good to those that love God*"¹ – even if it doesn't seem like it at the time. After a week when a number of St Margaret's students and staff have had to self-isolate, when quite a few have had positive test results (there have been seven since I last wrote), and when (to top it all) we've had issues with our water supply too, we may not feel that we can smile at the storm... but as people of faith, we can, and we have been!

As ever, there are a number of matters to draw to your attention.

Lateral Flow testing

In the last 24 hours the Army have 'taken over' our Sports Hall and our Lateral Flow test centre has begun testing staff. Our centre is not open to members of the public; only St Margaret's staff and students will be tested here.

It would naturally help all of us if you were willing for your son or daughter to be tested. We sent a letter home with details about the test yesterday (there's a further copy below), and I'm grateful for the large number of students who have returned their consent forms today. We've also set up an e-mail address where you can confirm your consent – testconsent@stmargaretsacademy.com.

It's worth clarifying that **we will not test your child if we do not have parental consent**. I understand that older students can give consent themselves, but we will not test a student based solely on student consent; to be tested in school, we must have parental consent too.

The test results come through to the school's e-mail address and mobile number, generally within the hour. As has been the practice in other schools which have taken part in this project, we won't notify parents if the test comes back negative; we will only contact you if it comes back positive, or void (*ie* it will need to be done again).

Free School Meals

I am sure many parents were as pleased as I was to hear that the Government will continue to provide Free School Meals during the Christmas and February half-term breaks. From Monday 16th November, we are also able, on request, to provide a food parcel for those who are self-isolating due to contact with a positive case in school and who are entitled to Free School Meals – for more details, please contact Mark D'Arcy at mdarcy@stmargaretsacademy.com. Likewise, please contact Mr D'Arcy if your daughter or son has been self-isolating at our request earlier in the term, as we may be able to provide some supermarket vouchers in recognition of the fact that we weren't able to provide a food parcel at the time.

New website

Have you seen our new website? We felt it needed refreshing, so Mrs Roberts and her team have been working hard to update it. I know she'd appreciate any feedback if you have a chance to visit!

¹ Romans 8:28

If you have any issues loading the new site you may need to clear your browsing history of old versions. Please contact itsupport@stmargaretsacademy.com if you have any questions.

Knowledge homework in Key Stage 3

Mrs Roberts writes:

“With effect from Monday 16th November 2020 homework in most subjects in Years 7 to 9 will focus explicitly on reinforcing subject knowledge. This will support students as they tackle more complex problem-solving tasks in the classroom, and is also partly to address some gaps in students’ knowledge that have emerged as we have progressed through this term.

“Please watch the videos on the homework page of our new-look website, introducing this to students and parents/carers. Students will be given an opportunity to watch these in Learning for Life next week and subject teachers may refer to them when they tell students they are setting homework.

“Your son will be given a homework exercise book, which will be used for all subjects, and will complete the work using the method described in the video on Retrieval Practice.

“There is an expectation that students submit evidence of homework by uploading an image in Teams. There are four support videos for Teams on the Remote Learning page of the website, as well as a guide to assignments and setting up Teams.

“It is not appropriate for all subjects to set homework in this way, so there are some exceptions:

- *Mathematics: IXL will be used for Year 7 and 8 – your son will have been allocated a personal account for this; MyMaths will be used for Year 9 – teachers will have distributed login credentials for this.*
- *English: teachers will set assignments for English in Teams. They may also require students to read books, plays, poems and texts. Details of these will be posted and students will be told how to access them.*
- *Art: homework for Art will be set in Teams and may not be knowledge based but may involve practical work.*

“Any work set from Monday 16th November should follow this structure. Please don’t hesitate to get in touch if you have any questions”.

Term Dates, 2021/2022

Our term dates for the next school year have not yet been approved by the Governors, but I can advise you that they are provisionally in the diary as follows:

Autumn term

- Students return on the afternoon of Thursday 2nd September.
- Half-term will be the week beginning Monday 25th October.
- The term will hopefully finish with a Carol Service in the Cathedral on Wednesday 22nd December – this again will be a half-day for students.

Spring term

- The first day back in school after Christmas will be Wednesday 5th January.
- Half-term will be the week beginning Monday 21st February.
- The last day of term will be Friday 8th April. (Easter Sunday is 17th April in 2022).

Summer term

- The first day back in school after Easter will be Monday 25th April.
- School will be closed on Monday 2nd May for the Spring Bank Holiday.
- Half-term will be the week beginning Monday 20th May.
- The last day of term will be Thursday 14th July.

Revise Till Five

Back by popular demand...!

Pre-Covid, our Revise Till Five programme ('Rt5') provided an opportunity for Year 11 students to revise in school for 90 minutes after lessons finished – with the aim of not only helping them revise, but also getting them into good study habits for their upcoming GCSEs.

The programme is restarting on Monday (16th November). If you son has been offered a place he should now have access to the dedicated Rt5 areas of Teams. (If he doesn't, please let us know by e-mailing emanwaring@stmargaretsacademy.com as soon as possible). Those pupils on the programme will need to log into the Teams-based meeting at 4pm on Monday to begin the first session.

Parents' Evenings

Parents' Evenings cannot take place in their traditional format at the moment. However we have been exploring software that will facilitate 'virtual' Parents' Evenings, and initial reports from other Heads around the City suggest that it could be worth piloting this approach. One disadvantage, I gather, is that the software automatically terminates the conversation at the specified time, even if the discussions are mid-flow – maybe that aspect is something we will need to get used to!

We'll let you have more details on this when we've determined the best way forward. In the meantime, the dates for each year-group currently look like this:

	Exams	Reports		Parents' Evening	Other events
		Short	Full		
Year 7	June 2021	November 2020 April 2021	June 2021	Monday 07.12.20	
Year 8	June 2021	November 2020 February 2021	June 2021	Tuesday 02.02.21	Options Evenings: Wednesday 06.01.21
Year 9	December 2020	November 2020 January 2021	May 2021	Wednesday 20.01.21	
Year 10	June 2021	January 2021 April 2021	June 2021	Wednesday 28.04.21	
Year 11	November 2020 March 2021 June/July 2021	November 2020 March 2021		Thursday 26.11.20; Tuesday 13.04.21	Sixth Form Open Evening: Thursday 04.02.21
Year 12	June 2021	November 2020 February 2021 April 2021	June 2021	Monday 05.07.21	
Year 13	January 2021 June/July 2021	November 2020 February 2021 April 2021		Thursday 25.02.21	

And finally...

Despite the difficulties of this week, we have been encouraged by news of progress on the vaccine front – maybe we will be able to return to a more 'normal' way of doing things at some point this year. But for now, we hold onto that verse in Romans: "*All things work together for good...*"

Yours faithfully

Stephen Brierley
Principal.

