

19th March, 2021



Dear Parent/Carer

Coronavirus Update 53

Have you had your jab yet? I was fortunately enough to be ‘called up’ last week, and accordingly I had my first dose of the Oxford Astra Zeneca vaccine on Sunday morning. Although I felt pretty tired on Monday, the effects (for me) were mild and short-lived – and in any case were a small price to pay for significant protection against a nasty disease. I mention this simply by way of encouragement: if you’ve been ‘called up’, please ensure you get your vaccine. It will help keep us all safe, and speed the day when we can get back to normal.

Coronavirus testing

I’m delighted to report that we carried out another 680 tests on Tuesday this week, and once again there were no positive results. Thank you to everyone who consented for their son or daughter to be tested – and ‘big thanks’ too to Mr D’Arcy, to Mr Taylor and to too many other colleagues to name for their assistance in getting the whole operation up and running so successfully.

The testing campaign now moves into Phase Two, when students are tested at home. The following arrangements will apply:

- we will be giving students home-testing kits on their ‘short day’ (different arrangements apply for post-16 students); and
- kits will be given to every student who wants one.
- If you do not wish to take part in testing at home (although we would continue to encourage everyone to do so), please make sure your son or daughter is aware of this so they don’t pick up a testing kit which could be used elsewhere.
- If your son or daughter tests positive, please let us know as soon as possible. We do **not** need to know about negative test results. However, all test results (negative, positive or void) need to be communicated electronically to the NHS; there are instructions about how to do this with the kits.

Year 8 timetable changes

Thank you to everyone who responded to our recent consultation about changes in the times for the Year 8 day. Overall, 96 parents responded through the form, with 65 being in favour of the change, and 31 against. A number of parents included comments in their feedback, for which we are very grateful; although we are not able to reply to the points raised, I can assure you that every comment has been read and taken into account.

Staff feedback has also been positive, **so the changes will be implemented from next week**, the week beginning Monday 22nd March. An additional change will be made for Dr Silverstone’s 3:30pm to 4:25pm class on Fridays – that will also now move to earlier in the day, and timetables for the students affected are being distributed as I type.

For clarity, Year 8’s short day (Tuesday) is unaffected by this change.

Sixth Form Open Evening

Further 'big thanks' to Mrs Roberts, Mr Slater and Mr Lawton – and to the team of assistants helping them – for all their hard work in ensuring the smooth-running of last night's Sixth Form Open Evening. The videos that were shown are now available on our website, as are videos about every single course that we offer. If you would like any further information, please don't hesitate to get in touch: we should be delighted to assist.

Dr Silverstone's section

Dr Silverstone, our Director of Pastoral Care, turns his thoughts this week towards the issue of extremism. He writes:

"We are currently in talks with an Arts and Drama organisation who have received funding from the Home Office to present to schools a performance which explores themes of radicalisation and extremism. We are hopeful that they will be able to (remotely) present to many of our children during Learning for Life sessions after Easter.

In the meantime, you may want to look at two informative websites:

- <https://educateagainsthate.com/parents/> gives answers to lots of common questions about extremism, radicalisation and how young people can be vulnerable; and
- <https://www.ltai.info/> (*let's talk about it*) is an initiative designed to provide practical help and guidance to the public in order to stop people becoming terrorists or supporting terrorism.

I stress that we have no concerns about any of our pupils in terms of being at risk currently in this regard, but we are always advised by the government and our partners in the local authority to spread these important messages to raise awareness."

Year 8 options

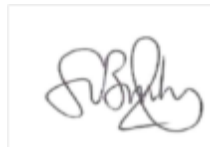
Although Year 8 students will have fewer choices in their Year 9 curriculum than previous Year 8 groups have had, there is still some choice available (notably, whether students study French or Spanish). We will be writing out with more details about this just after Easter.

Finally...

It's scarcely believable that this weekend marks a full year since the first Coronavirus lockdown. I know that for many of our families, it has been a tough year – and as ever, if you or your son/daughter needs our support at this time, please do get in touch (admin@stmargaretsacademy.com). But as we emerge into a spring that's rich with the hope of a freer summer, I'm optimistic that the post-pandemic world will be a better place in numerous little ways. (One small example: a Year 11 parent I was speaking to earlier today was much happier with virtual Parents' Evenings and didn't want to go back to the physical version. If that's what a majority of staff and parents think – full consultation to follow shortly! – we'll keep it that way).

There is no better note to end any letter than a note of hope! I wish you a restful weekend, filled (as it will be) with the hope of spring in the air, and Easter to come.

Yours faithfully



Stephen Brierley
Principal.