

Dear Parent/Carer,

12 February 2021

I hope you and your family continue to remain safe and in good health. I constantly keep you in my prayers during these challenging times.

This half term the whole community has had to adapt to new roles and ways of working. Our teachers have had to adapt once again to the world of remote lessons and virtual communication with families. We are proud to say that we have seen engagement increase each week because of the strong support offered by teachers, coaches, student support, SLT and Progress Leaders. Students have adapted to new routines at home and shown resilience by completing their lessons each day. Finally, as parents you have taken on the role of home educator and we cannot thank you enough for your support. We know this has not been easy in the midst of a pandemic and may have placed strain on your wellbeing, but please know that the school is here for you and I would urge you to get in touch should you require any support. This letter has been written to communicate important updates from the world of St Mark's this half term.

School calendar:

- Half term runs from **Monday 15th February to Friday 19 February 2021.**
- 2021/22 term dates can be found on our website
- As you will have seen in the news, we have seen vaccines being distributed across the nation and the latest Government guidance still states that that the earliest date schools could open is **8th March 2021.**
- During the first two weeks back after half term students should continue to engage with 4-6 hours of remote education at home each day.

Parents' and Carers' Evenings

Parents' evenings are an important part of academy life and we will be hosting these events online this year, connecting parents and teachers by video call. We will be using School Cloud, which allows parent to choose appointment times accessible by mobile, laptop or a desktop computer.

We have revised the dates for each year group and so they are now as follows (specific information about the booking of appointments will be shared with parents ahead of each date):

- Y11- 28th January 2021
- Y13- 11th February 2021
- Y8- 04 March 2021
- Y10- 25 March 2021
- Y7- 01 April 2021
- Y12- 22 April 2021
- Y9- 13 May 2021

Interim Principal Hannah Fahey

We will be sure to hold an additional Teams Information Evening dedicated to examinations and calculating grades this summer for parents with children in Years 11 and 13 following the consultation summary being finalised. This will happen at the beginning of March and I will write to you all to confirm dates.

Academic Achievement Reports

- Reports have been sent home for children in every year group. Please contact school@stmarks.anthemtrust.uk if you have not received a report.

What if my child is sitting exams in Year 11 and 13?

- Exams will not go ahead in the same way however it is hugely important that students in Year 11, 12 and 13 engage with home learning because we will need to use all available evidence to accurately assess them.
- The examination consultation has now closed and more details will be published in due course. It seems clear that Year 11 and 13 students will still have to sit assessments in some form so it is vital that they are working at home for at least 5 hours a day on their 6 periods of work.
- Thank you to parents/carers with children in Year 11 and 13 who attended Parents' and Carers' Evening this term. You received vital information about exams and progress, teachers valued this time with you all.
- Parents who have children in Year 11 and require further guidance or support with developing their child's revision and work ethic should contact jkhan@stmarks.anthemtrust.uk (Vice Principal in charge of Curriculum Impact) Similarly, parents who have children in Year 13 and require further guidance or support with developing their child's revision and work ethic should contact sbhadare@stmarks.anthemtrust.uk (Director of Science and Sixth Form)

Live Lessons and Virtual Opportunities

Thank you for all your feedback and questions regarding our approach to remote education. We have been working hard to provide all families with devices so they can access our carefully planned lessons. We currently deliver the majority of our lessons as pre-recorded interactive videoed lessons to allow all students to access lessons at a time that is convenient to families sharing devices and quiet spaces to work. All the reading and research we did suggested that this was the right approach as we worked on securing laptops for students who needed them.

However, now that we have improved connectivity and ICT provision, we are using the software to trial live lessons for our Sixth Formers and are beginning small-group interventions with lower years, along with some whole-class trials.

If your child is involved with any of the above we will contact you personally and will be updating all of our families at the appropriate times if there are any changes to our provision that will affect them. Thank you for enquiring, we really appreciate the engagement. If you have any other questions, please do not hesitate to ask.

Sixth Form Update

As mentioned above, we have been running live lesson trials with the Sixth Form and are now ready to include all students and subjects after half-term. The students will follow their normal academic timetables that they would have used when in school and their individual teachers will be in touch if there are any changes to this.

We have been really proud of all the students who have been involved up until this point, the attendance has almost been 100% and the feedback from both staff and students has been great to see.

We have now also completed all UCAS applications and are delighted to announce that 20% of our students applied to Russell Group universities with three applying to Oxbridge.

We have also been giving the students a wide-range of virtual opportunities including: work experience, Markevision, charity, live Q and A's with professionals and many more. Please encourage them to continue applying to these and preparing themselves for the next step in their journey.

When will Year 9 Options take place?

In Year 9 our students take part in the Option Process at St Mark's Academy. At St Mark's recognise the importance of the decisions that your child needs to make in their transition from Year 9 into Year 10 and Year 11. In this important and challenging phase of students' education, it is crucial that we give your child and you as parent(s)/carer(s) clear and informed guidance as to the choices available and how these are matched to their individual needs, interests and abilities.

This will be the first time they have been given the chance to select the GCSE and BTEC subjects they wish to study from Year 10 onwards, so it is important that they consider the following things:

- What is available?
- What do they enjoy?
- What are they good at?
- What might you need for future study and careers?

We are passionate about making sure our curriculum is broad in that it allows us to realise the God given potential in every child, but also offer a strong academic core through our EBacc offer. This means that students can continue to extend their knowledge and skills in a central core of subjects while beginning to make choices in other areas, based on their own abilities, talents and preferences. This curriculum will ensure as many opportunities as possible remain open to your child for further study at St Mark's Sixth Form, in higher education and their future career. We are extremely proud of the offer we are providing students with which is supported by high quality teaching delivered by staff with exceptional subject knowledge.

The Year 10 and Year 11 curriculum combines a core of compulsory subjects (English Language, English Literature, Mathematics, Science, RE and Core PE) with choices taken from a variety of other subjects e.g. Modern Foreign Languages, Humanities, Drama, Art, Music, PE, Psychology, Technology, Business and ICT. It is important that your child maintains a broad and balanced curriculum so they do not limit their choices in Year 12 and 13 when they apply for A Levels and BTECs at St mark's Sixth Form.

Next steps:

- A summary of each course can be found in our options booklet which will be shared with you virtually w/b 1st March
- We will send parents a Microsoft Form to complete to show us what your child's initial choices are along with a guided pathway informed by your child's attainment and progress data.
- We will hold an assembly with Year 9 when they return to launch the process and run taster session in early April.
- We will hold a Virtual Options Evening Mid-April to communicate the process with you and answer any questions.
- We will share exact dates when we receive confirmation about the reopening of schools.

Free School Meal

If your child is entitled to free school meals, you will be sent an e-voucher to use at your local supermarket. The voucher will be sent via email. If you have any issues accessing your voucher, please contact Ms Drewett on ddrewett@stmarks.anthemtrust.uk

Interim Principal Hannah Fahey



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Support for Parents' Mental Health:

If you feel that you would like some further advice regarding how you can support your child's mental health through this period. Or information on signs to look out for that could signify a deterioration in mental well-being, the following websites can provide you with some useful information and strategies:

<https://www.nhs.uk/using-the-nhs/nhs-services/mental-health-services/cypmhs-information-for-children-and-young-people/>

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/articles/zndp6v4>

For the opportunity to talk to other parents or talk one to one with a qualified parenting coach about your own mental health please use the following link to Action for Children. This organisation also have programmes that your child can undertake to assist with their emotional well-being:

<https://parents.actionforchildren.org.uk/? ga=2.85144926.671339472.1612180097-1295232822.1612180097>

Please can I thank all parents again for your support in driving remote learning this half term. The Academy will remain a place where your child continues to learn and thrive this academic year and you have my word that we will continue to transform the lives of every young person who studies with us. When we return in March the school will be a safe and purposeful place for your child once again.

Yours faithfully,



Hannah Fahey (**Acting Principal**)