



# Sir Graham Balfour School

Member of Sir Graham Balfour Multi-Academy Trust

Dear Parents and Carers

## Weekly Update letter - Friday 24<sup>th</sup> April 2020

I hope that this week's newsletter finds you and your loved ones safe and healthy. I hope that you managed to find time and space to relax over the Easter break and that you are finding ways to come to terms with this very different new world we are finding ourselves in. These are truly bewildering times for all of us and I suspect that some of you, like me, are finding some aspects of lockdown and the progress of this dreadful virus very hard to reconcile.

Please do be reassured that we recognise these pressures and that as much as we are trying to support you, by providing work, feedback and contact with staff at school, it is also really important to make sure you are having quality family time together. Please do not get stressed over school work; take time to just be together, to do something fun, to laugh at silly things, to have a hug (if your teenage children still welcome that 😊) and do some cooking, or reading, or exercise together. You are all doing a brilliant job as parents and carers, juggling your jobs and commitments to your families as well as overseeing your children's work. We all at Balfour salute you! If you do have any concerns though, keep in touch with your child's House Tutor, who will be pleased to offer support or guidance.

I have been absolutely thrilled to see so many examples of the outstanding work so many of your children did for the Easter Scholars' work. Between them, they completed more than 500 pieces of work, with several students completing between 15 and 20 pieces each! I have already been assigning many Headteacher's Awards and look forward to giving out even more.

As is now the pattern, the following, in no particular order, is a collection of advice, guidance and information for you to read, and which I hope will be of use to you:

1. You will undoubtedly be picking up all sorts of messages about when and how lockdown will be eased, and may have seen in the papers last weekend a suggestion that schools might be amongst the first institutions to come out of lockdown. I am keeping a very close eye on Government advice and guidance and will let you know as soon as I hear anything concrete to report. For now, lockdown is in place for another two weeks. Without speculating too much about what the future holds, I think it is clear to all of us, that even when lockdown eases, greater society and our school will not return to 'normal' straight away. It has been stated this week that until a vaccine is produced, some form of social distancing will be necessary for everyone. Please be reassured that even at this stage, I am looking into what this might mean for us here at school, and what measures we would need to put into place to guarantee safety to students and staff. As this becomes clearer, I will let you know what this means for us.
2. We have been contacted by the local Health practitioners expressing concerns that there has been a sudden (if understandable) downturn in the number of children and adults seeking medical advice. They have asked us to stress the importance to you that it is still safe to seek medical advice, and they have released the enclosed newsletter for you to read; even if the heading may be a little menacing, please do read and keep this information safe.

### 3. GCSE and A Level exams

We have now received a directive from the Department for Education and Ofqual of how schools will be recommending grades for each student in each subject. The rules are very clear on this, and you can be assured that we will follow them to the letter, and that we will do everything in our power to ensure students' attainment is not damaged due to the current situation. Students will have the 'normal' GCSE and A Level results days in August, at which time they will see the grades they have been awarded.

Please do be mindful, that teachers will **not** be able to discuss any grade suggested with either student or parent at any time, so please do not ask us. This is because the Examination boards will have the final say on every grade awarded, and not the school.

From the point of view of work being set for Year 11 and 13 students, we will cease with our arrangements for setting and assessing work from the 7<sup>th</sup> May. After that point, we will be setting transition work for those students coming back into the sixth form, for the subjects they will be studying; for those students going to Stafford College, we will be suggesting preparatory work for them to do which will help keep them on track. Students waiting to go to University will be given suggested reading lists to help them maintain good study habits.

4. Please remember, if you are not sure of how to get in **contact** with us, please email: [office@sirgrahambalfour.staffs.sch.uk](mailto:office@sirgrahambalfour.staffs.sch.uk) and staff overseeing this area will ensure your message gets to the right person.
5. We have been informed some learners and parents have received a letter from ESFA asking for personal learner bank details in relation to the 16 to 19 Bursary Fund. Please be aware that the ESFA *never* ask for personal bank account details. This is a fraudulent letter – please do not respond. If in any doubt, take advice before giving this kind of information away.
6. You may have heard that the Government announced that certain families would be able to access tablets or computers and internet, where they have none. Not unexpectedly, I heard just last night that there is a delay in setting up the process by which schools can apply for these resources. We have identified those of you who would qualify for this kit, according to the criteria identified by the Government, and we will be in touch once we know more about how this scheme will operate.
7. A reminder about **Stafford's House of Bread** should you have need of it:

#### **Who is it for?**

The House of Bread Food Bank is to supplement those who have food but for some reason need that extra support.

#### **How does it work?**

The House of Bread Food Bank is not only a referral food bank, it is accessible to anyone in need.

If you wish to contact the House of Bread, please email: [info@hobstafford.co.uk](mailto:info@hobstafford.co.uk)

Or Tel: 01785 243492. Alternatively, please email Mrs Hedges, our Student Support Manager: [rhedges@sirgrahambalfour.staffs.sch.uk](mailto:rhedges@sirgrahambalfour.staffs.sch.uk) and she will be happy to arrange a delivery for you.

8. If you are looking for ideas to keep your children active at home, the following link may be of use to you: You Tube Get Active Videos: <https://www.acceleratelearningservices.co.uk/you-tube-videos/>
9. The following link will take you to advice put out by the Government, aimed at parents, and which offers advice and guidance on **how to support young people's mental health and wellbeing**:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-on-supporting-children-and-young-peoples-mental-health-and-wellbeing/guidance-for-parents-and-carers-on-supporting-children-and-young-peoples-mental-health-and-wellbeing-during-the-coronavirus-covid-19-outbreak>

10. Entrust skills and employability (those involved in helping with careers advice) have been working on producing a new and updated version of its website to incorporate further links and information during the Covid-19 lockdown. The link is shown below

Direct link: <https://www.entrust-ed.co.uk/media/1894/skills-employability-support-during-covid19.pdf>

11. The online activity pack from CEOP has a wealth of age appropriate activities to address keeping young people at both primary and secondary school age safe whilst accessing the internet and social media platforms.

[https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/parents/Support-tools/home-activity-worksheets/?utm\\_source=Thinkuknow&utm\\_campaign=03f521e658-TUK\\_ONLINE\\_SAFETY\\_AT\\_HOME\\_21\\_04\\_20&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_term=0\\_0b54505554-03f521e658-55023069](https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/parents/Support-tools/home-activity-worksheets/?utm_source=Thinkuknow&utm_campaign=03f521e658-TUK_ONLINE_SAFETY_AT_HOME_21_04_20&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_0b54505554-03f521e658-55023069)

12. The attached newsletter from the NSPCC provides parents and carers with a number of activities, advice and support to help you talk about coronavirus and share some activities to manage stress, anxiety, low mood and anger.

13. Goodbye...

We would like to express our thanks and best wishes to Mrs Bates-Turner who leaves us today. She has been standing in for Miss Allright, who returns to us from next week. We wish Mrs Bates-Turner all the very best for the future and who knows, maybe she will be back again at some point in the future.

As is the new pattern, I have today emailed every student to keep them up to date and to congratulate them on their hard work. I have also, yet again, reiterated to them, very strongly, the importance of staying at home, self-distancing, and not mixing with groups. I know that you will be continuing to support this as well.

Yet again, I would again like to offer our thanks for the many emails you have sent in over the past two weeks for the work our staff are doing. I have made certain that all staff have been made aware of your comments.

I will be in touch with you again next week, until then, please stay safe and well.

All best wishes to you, your family and friends



**Lesley Beck**

**Very proud Headteacher of Sir Graham Balfour School**