



Dear Parents and Carers

Weekly Update letter - Friday 1st May 2020

I hope that this week's newsletter continues to find you and your loved ones safe and healthy. I hope that you are finding ways to stay as upbeat as you can be during this time, and that you are finding some unanticipated positives in being locked down. For me, spending time in my little greenhouse has been especially rewarding. I am not entirely sure what we will do with all the broad beans I have planted, but I dare say we'll figure it out!

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. I have now 'archived' previous useful links and advice at the end of this newsletter, so you will always be able to locate them:

1. There has been a lot more talk and questions raised this week about schools (and other work and leisure places), being re-opened. I have received a few messages from you this week asking me about this. At this moment, I know only what I am picking up from the statements made by Government ministers. I am taking very little notice of the speculation which keeps appearing in newspapers, particularly those just desperate for an eye-catching headline.

Gavin Williamson, the Secretary of State for Education, has said repeatedly that there are no concrete plans for when schools will re-open. What he has stated on Wednesday of this week, is that when schools do begin to re-open, pupils would return in a "phased manner". I take this to mean that there will be no demand nor expectation that all students will come back to school from day one, at the same time. In order to maintain the necessary social distancing rules, which are likely to be in place for us all, it is highly likely that different year groups could return separately, and may be in school on different days, with some days still being spent working at home. He has said that the date for opening would depend on scientific advice – but schools would get "as much notice as possible". As I wrote to you last week, I really hope this is the case, but we are already looking into what this would mean for us here at Balfour. We have, for example, started to model classrooms, the dining hall etc and how they would need to be arranged to maintain social distancing. There is a lot to plan, but please be assured we are on to it.

I do want to reassure you, however, that I take the safety of our students, their families, and my staff extremely seriously. I will listen very carefully to the advice and guidance that will be provided by the Government, but will only re-open in such a way that I can be absolutely sure that everyone coming into the building is as safe as possible.

I will keep you informed as soon as I hear anything more.

2. Could I repeat, please, the message I have received from local Health practitioners, urging you to get in contact with your doctors, or the hospital, if you are concerned in any way about your own, or your children's health. They are extremely concerned that illnesses are being ignored, or going untreated, which could lead to serious complications. Please do seek medical help for yourself and your families if you need it.

3. Year 11 and 13 students

Staff are now busily putting together A level preparation work (we call it Transition work) for those students coming back to us in September. They will start to be emailed this work after next week. We are also producing guidance on how best to support the students going to College and will be in touch with them too after formal teaching ceases at the end of next week for our Year 11 and 13.

With regard to the estimated grades for GCSE and A Level, could I please remind you that we are strictly forbidden to discuss these grades 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. We will not know the grades awarded to students until August, when the students themselves will find out.

4. We have been in touch with our Key Worker parents who are currently sending their children into school, but just a reminder that school will be fully closed to students and staff on Friday 8th May, the amended May Day holiday.

To all parents, given that it is a Bank Holiday, we will not be setting for Friday 8th May, but if you wish for your children to be occupied, please do direct them to the Scholars work on Office 365 (they will know where to find it).

5. With regard to the Government's announcement that laptops and internet connection would be made available to some families, we have now been told that they will not be delivered until the middle of June. We will continue, therefore, to send out printed work packs to those children who have limited IT capacity at home, as we have been doing.
6. I was sent the enclosed link by a headteacher friend who works in Cumbria. It is a collection of really good advice and guidance to parents and other adults on how to cope and make sense of the current situation, from an adult perspective. I hope you will find it of some use. <https://www.every-life-matters.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/ELM006-COVID-19-public-info-a5-booklet-AW-online-1.pdf>

As usual, 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.

I will be in touch with you again next week, until then, please stay safe and well. Remember you are doing an amazing job with your children and families. We are all very proud of you and what you are doing. We miss school and all of our students and really look forward to meeting up again. We will be able to fill in lots of gaps fairly quickly when we do eventually re-open, so please do not stress about school work or worry about how your child is doing.

All best wishes to you, your family and friends



Lesley Beck
Very proud Headteacher of Sir Graham Balfour School

Reminders from previous weeks:

1. Please remember, if you are not sure of how to get in contact with us, please email: office@sirgrahambalfour.staffs.sch.uk and staff overseeing this area will ensure your message gets to the right person.
2. 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.
3. 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

Or Tel: 01785 243492. Alternatively, please email Mrs Hedges, our Student Support Manager: rhedges1@sirgrahambalfour.staffs.sch.uk and she will be happy to arrange a delivery for you.

4. 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>

5. 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>

6. 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