



6th June 2020

Dear Parents/Carers

As ever, I hope this letter finds you and your loved ones well. Life for all of us remains very odd still, despite the relaxation of some of the lockdown measures to which we have become accustomed. In big ways and small, this pandemic is touching all of us, and it is increasingly clear that until there is a vaccine or effective treatments for Covid-19, we must all find ways to live with the changes forced upon us.

Here in school, the past two weeks have been taken up with reading, researching, discussing and planning for what the partial re-opening of school will mean for us, for you and our students. As you will be very aware now, students in Year 7, 8 and 9 will not be returning to school until September, and there will be limited 'face to face' opportunities for Year 10 and 12.

Could I thank those of you who took the time to respond to my survey over the past two weeks. Your responses were extremely helpful and your questions and concerns illuminating. It would be impossible to address each one separately, but as you can imagine, you share a lot of similar concerns. They range from questions about school transport, to cleaning protocols, what social distancing will look like and what lessons and learning will look like. Some of you have concerns about your children's anxiety at returning and some of you cannot wait to send them back!

I mentioned in my last letter that I have drawn up a detailed school Risk Assessment specific to school re-opening. Tomorrow is the final day for consultation with our staff and Governors. From that Risk Assessment, I have drawn up a hopefully accessible action plan of what the Risk Assessment will actually mean for staff, parents and students; I will share this with you early next week, in time for the partial re-opening which will commence for some students, on the 16th June. I will also add some FAQs which I have gathered from the survey. Please do read through this very carefully when it is despatched early next week.

Before I get into the nitty-gritty of re-opening, there are just a few things I want to share with you. From the survey, I was extremely heartened to receive a very clear view from you that you trusted us to make the right decisions for your children and our community. That means a great deal to me and it is something I do not take lightly nor for granted. We are doing, and will continue to do all in our power to make the return to school, both in the short term and longer term, as safe as it possibly can be for all concerned.

But I must be clear with you that I cannot give you hard and fast guarantees over some of the things you are worried about. What I can say is that we are planning concrete steps to ensure students are kept separate in classrooms; we are ordering in gallons of hand sanitiser for regular usage; we now have a small stock of the PPE we will need for first aid incidents; teachers are continuing to plan and deliver really effective learning to children at home; plans for enhanced cleaning and maintenance are being finalised; pastoral sessions to reintegrate and reassure students are being planned; signage is being put around the building to help control movement.

Of the things we can directly control, we are putting great effort into achieving. But I must be clear that there is also a good amount of responsibility which will sit on your and your children's shoulders. We can advise, but cannot control how they make their way into school, who they mix with and how close they get; we can advise on social distancing at break and lunchtime, and staff will be on duty, but we cannot police every movement made by every student – they will need to heed the advice we will be giving them regularly. We will do all we can to educate students about hygiene but we will not always be by their sides checking that they are getting it right. In short, I can

give you no guarantee that despite all our best efforts, there will not be an outbreak of Covid-19 in our school – nor can any other school, office, factory, shop or indeed any building containing people.

We are also finalising an amendment to our Behaviour policy which will be necessary for when more children return to school. This will show our approach should any student visibly, purposefully or maliciously disregard the advice they will be given over hygiene, social distancing or appropriate behaviour in the times of this pandemic. This is aimed at keeping everyone safe and will be consistently applied. I will send this out to you and to our students next week.

That all being said, let's move to our plans for partial re-opening.

In the first instance, Year 12's will be invited back to school for the week commencing 15th June only; Year 10 students will be invited back, strictly House by House for one day only initially, week commencing 22nd June.

Early next week, Year 12's and their parents will receive a letter from Mr Hancock, telling them what to expect for the week commencing 15th June. The week will include some catch-up time with Mr Hancock and other Sixth Form mentors, and then they will spend a 2.5 hour session in each of their subjects, spread between the Tuesday and Thursday of that week. If for any reason a student cannot come in, then the content of those days will be relayed to them as is now the case. Very much depending on how this week goes, we will make further plans to see some or all Year 12's over the remaining weeks before summer.

Year 10's will be invited back, House by House, starting with those in Chetwynd House only, on Tuesday 23rd June, Sandon students on Wednesday 24th June and so on. Again, detailed information will be sent to students and parents next week on what to expect, so just a quick overview now. We want to see our Year 10's, talk to them, give them an opportunity to catch up with each other (socially distanced, of course) and to find out in detail how they have been getting on with the work they have been doing from a distance. From the information we will gather on these days, we will then plan for subsequent weeks, similar to what I have outlined for Year 12.

I am very much aware from the survey that many of you are very content with the work your children are doing remotely; some of you cannot or will not send your children back to school due to family circumstances; a very small minority of Year 10 students are struggling to work remotely, despite the support they are receiving. This all being the case, our plan is, following this initial week, to invite back in **only** the students for whom we have grave concerns, who are at serious risk of falling behind across a range of subjects. You may be assured that we will continue to deliver our curriculum remotely, enhanced with more and more video and audio help. The Government is clear that this is the way it must be until the end of term. To quote the latest guidance from the DfE: ***Our assessment, based on the latest scientific and medical advice, is that we need to continue to control the numbers attending school to reduce the risk of increasing transmission.***

With regard to school transport, I have been told that they can currently make no promises that they will be able to pick up every child who normally catches a school bus, but, as is the case with lots of things, this is a fluid situation and may change at short notice.

For Year 10 and 12 students only:

If your child normally catches the school bus, and would need to do so in order to come to school on one of the invited days, please email vmckeen@sirgrahambalfour.staffs.sch.uk with the following details, as soon as possible:

Student name; (year 10 or 12 only), and the bus service number they take.

We will then liaise with School Transport to see if they can offer the service.

Please do look out for the documents and letters we will be sending you next week. But please recall what I have now said several times: please be assured that when it comes to trying to ensure the safety of my students and staff, I will not hesitate to make decisions that I feel are in the best interests of our school community, even if they run contrary to the guidance set out by the Government. Each school is unique, and I feel that, having given due respect to any guidance we then **determine what is right for us and our school community.**

A few other things before I sign off:

- Please see the enclosed letter forwarded to you from the Local Authority.
- If you have a child with Special Educational Needs or a disability, please see the enclosed link sent to us by the Local Authority SEND Team, offering help and advice.
<https://www.staffordshireconnects.info/kb5/staffordshire/directory/results.action?localofferchannel=6-1-8-1>
- Many thanks to those of you who responded to the consultations over the proposed new build of a block of classrooms near to the Sports Hall and the one regarding the shortening of lunch time. I am pleased to report that of the responses received, there was clear support for both plans. All of the necessary planning applications are being processed for the new block and I will keep you informed of progress. The concerns that a couple of you had regarding lunch queues will be addressed as part of the changes to schooling which will come into effect from September.

As usual, I have kept some of the notices below for your information.

Until next week, I wish you all a restful and happy weekend.

With very best wishes to you all



Lesley Beck
Headteacher

Reminders from previous weeks:

1. Covid-19 Testing

You may already be aware of this, but just in case you are not, please see the following notice from the Government:

Testing now available to anyone with symptoms of coronavirus

The government has announced that anyone with symptoms of coronavirus is now eligible to book a test, ahead of the rollout of the test and trace service. Anyone experiencing a new, continuous cough; high temperature; or a loss of, or change, in their normal sense of smell or taste (anosmia) can book a test.

A coronavirus test can be booked here:

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19>

Government guidance for parents

The Government has also put together this guidance document on how parents of secondary age children can assist with their child's remote learning:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/help-secondary-school-children-continue-their-education-during-coronavirus-covid-19>

For those of you with primary aged children, you may also be interested in looking at the following guidance:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/help-primary-school-children-continue-their-education-during-coronavirus-covid-19>

2. 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.

3. Healthy minds and bodies.

- Below are a range of resources, websites and apps that you can access and that provide links to further mental health and well-being materials.
- <https://www.annafreud.org/schools-and-colleges/resources>
- <https://www.headspace.com>
- <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-51873799>
- <https://lifeontime.co.uk/how-much-sleep-teenagers-need-in-lockdown>
- <https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/for-children-and-young-people>
- <https://www.nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters/coronavirus-covid-19-staying-at-home-tips>
- <https://youngminds.org.uk/find-help/for-parents/supporting-your-child-during-the-coronavirus-pandemic>

4. Safeguarding

Keeping our students and their families safe is our most important job. Please contact us, in the first instance via office@sirgrahambalfour.staffs.sch.uk or directly to any of the email addresses of staff with whom you are in contact.

5. There is a lot of support available to help keep your child safe online. Below are some useful links to help parents and carers:

- Think You Know: <https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk> (advice from the National Crime Agency to stay safe online)
- Internet Matters: <https://www.internetmatters.org> (support for parents and carers to keep their children safe online)
- Parent Info: <https://parentinfo.org> (support for parents and carers to keep their children safe online)
- LGfL: <https://www.lgfl.net/online-safety> (support for parents and carers to keep their children safe online)
- Net Aware: <https://www.net-aware.org.uk> (support for parents and carers from the NSPCC)

6. 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.

7. 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>

8. 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.