



Dear Parents and Carers

3<sup>rd</sup> July 2020

Today sees the end of the twelfth week of school lockdown; in some regards it feels like time has passed incredibly quickly since we sent most students home on the 20<sup>th</sup> March. In other ways it feels like forever since we had a full school with all the accompanying noise, excitement and energy that young people bring with them.

I hope that you are all fit and healthy. I hope too that for all of you there is some semblance of normality starting to reappear. Despite the difficulties we have all faced over recent months, by nature I am an optimist and I am truly hopeful that the worst is now behind us. For those of you who have been closely affected by the pandemic, my heart goes out to you.

At long last, the Government just yesterday published the long-awaited guidance on school re-opening for September. Here is the link for those of you who wish to read it in full:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/actions-for-schools-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak/guidance-for-full-opening-schools>

Yesterday's news programmes covered this guidance in some detail. There is much to digest and still much for us to plan, but here are the main points I wish to share with you for now:

- Our school is due to re-open fully from Wednesday 2<sup>nd</sup> September to all year groups.
- Students will need to be in full school uniform from this date.
- If students can walk to school, they should. If students catch public buses, they must wear face coverings until they arrive at school. If students come to school by school bus, they should try to sit with students from the same year group and may choose to wear face coverings if they wish. They must always abide by the instructions of the bus drivers.
- There is currently no requirement for students to wear face coverings once in school. Guidance states, and we agree, that face coverings interfere with communication and that they can give a false sense of security. In order to try and prevent transmission of Covid-19, handwashing, respiratory hygiene and maintaining distance where possible, are more effective than the wearing of a face covering alone.
- The Government is very clear that attendance will be compulsory from September, and that the 'normal' rules for attendance will be back in force from the start of term.
- However, it is also vital that if your child or anyone in your family is exhibiting signs of Covid-19 (new continuous cough, high temperature, and change to sense of taste or smell) you must not send your child to school and instead seek tests for the whole family; self-isolation is then vital whilst awaiting the results.
- Should we experience a Covid-19 outbreak in school, we have clear guidance on what we should do. If we must close the school to certain year groups or even to the whole population at any point in the future, we are working closely with our teachers to ensure they can again quickly adapt to remote teaching. Where students have to self-isolate, we will be able to send work home in the ways we are currently doing.
- For students of the new Year 11 and 13, there is clear intention that GCSE and A level exams will take place next summer. We have been invited to participate in a consultation over what arrangements might be in place for students, and I will let you know once the final decisions have been made.
- In the first few weeks of term we will be carrying out Assessment Weeks for all students, to help us pinpoint any gaps in knowledge or understanding. This will then allow us to plan for catch-up work.

Especially for students of the new Year 11, there will be planned additional after-school sessions taking place from early in the term to help them catch up and re-build any lost confidence.

- In order to maintain order and safety, we will be relying heavily on students' compliance in following our usual behavioural expectations, but now, in addition, the rules on social distancing, hand washing, and respiratory hygiene. We will be sending out easy to follow guidance to students over the next two weeks, but I do urge you to help us by making sure your child recognises the importance of following rules which are there to keep everyone safe. We totally understand that students can make inadvertent mistakes. We also know that some will come back to us apprehensive. I hope that all our students will come back ready to settle and learn. Be assured that if necessary, we will deal promptly with any students *purposefully* seeking to endanger the safety of others or threatening to do so.
- The Government acknowledges that social distancing is virtually impossible in a school setting, and as such advises us to operate in Year group 'pods', the purpose of which is to stop students from different year groups mingling. This will present serious challenges for us, but ones we will work hard to overcome. What we have already established, however, are the following:
  - Students will largely stay in the same classroom for all lessons to reduce their movement in the building. For Year 7, 8 and 9 students, this will mean they will be in mixed ability groups according to the Modern Foreign Language they study. They will remain in this grouping for all other subjects until further notice.
  - Year 10 and 11 will inevitably have to move within their year group to take account of their options subjects, but they too will be based in a single area of the school and will not be moving outside of their year groups during the day.
  - Our wonderful vertical tutoring system will be temporarily suspended and students will remain with their same-age class-mates for House Time. They will, however, continue to belong to their Houses, and as soon as we are able, we will move back to mixed age House groups.
  - We will be looking at how we can keep year groups apart at break and lunchtime. The Dining Room will be open and will be selling food from the start of term. We will encourage students to spend as much time as possible outdoors and therefore students bringing packed lunches will be asked to eat outdoors in order to free up the dining room for students buying food.
  - In order to avoid crowded changing rooms during the new term, students will be asked to come to school in their PE kit on the days they have PE – we will send out more information on this shortly.

I will be working on the Risk Assessments and Action Plan for September now that I have received the above guidance and will let you have this as soon as it is ready.

There will undoubtedly be much more information I will be sending out to you over the next two weeks. If you have any general questions in the meantime, please let me know – I will collate them and provide answers in my next update. If you have any questions relating specifically to your own child, please contact their House Tutor or House Head.

Mr Hancock and I will shortly be writing to parents of **current Year 13 students**.

This following section is specifically aimed at **parents of current Year 11 students**:

As I have said in the past, one of the major impacts of this pandemic has fallen on the shoulders of our senior students facing public exams. Many of them (and you) feel cheated that they did not get the chance to sit the exams for which they had been preparing so diligently. They were equally denied many of the traditional rites of passage: a proper leavers' day, book signings, photos with teachers, goodbye parties with their House Groups, the joy and relief of the final exam session etc etc. This is highly regrettable and we all feel the same sense of disappointment at what they have missed through no fault of their own. We still hope and plan for the Prom to go ahead sometime in the Autumn term, but if continuing restrictions do not allow for this to be at the Moathouse, then we will plan a different kind of celebration at school, when students come back to collect their official exam certificates in late November. Be assured we will invite you all in as well. Watch this space.

We do look forward very much to seeing our Year 11s when they come to collect their exam results on the 20<sup>th</sup> August. In order to ensure all students do not arrive at once, thus putting social distancing at risk, please note the times we would like them to come in on that date:

<b>8.30 to 9.00</b>	Students whose surnames begin with <b>A-C</b> (32 students)
<b>9.00 to 9.30</b>	Students whose surnames begin with <b>D-G</b> (28 students)
<b>9.30 to 10.00</b>	Students whose surnames begin with <b>H-L</b> (37 students)
<b>10.00 to 10.30</b>	Students whose surnames begin with <b>M-R</b> (34 students)
<b>10.30 to 11.00</b>	Students whose surnames begin with <b>S-Z</b> (34 students)

At their allocated time, students should make their way to the front of the school, from where they will be directed to collect their results and, if they ordered one, their leavers' hoodie.

In their results envelope, some students will be given a date/time to come back to school to talk with a member of Leadership Group, Mr Hancock, Miss Watson or our careers advisor, Nikki Lambert. For those students who have applied to our Sixth Form, and who are successful in gaining the necessary grades, they will be contacted by Mr Hancock to confirm their subject choices.

Any results which have not been collected by the end of the day will be posted home the following day.

If, upon receiving their GCSE grades students are unhappy with a result maybe because they feel that it is not a fair reflection of how they would have done, it is important that they contact Mrs Metcalfe or Mr Mason in the first instance via [smetcalfe@sirgrahambalfour.staffs.sch.uk](mailto:smetcalfe@sirgrahambalfour.staffs.sch.uk) or [mmason@sirgrahambalfour.staffs.sch.uk](mailto:mmason@sirgrahambalfour.staffs.sch.uk). They will then contact your son or daughter and discuss their concerns. Depending upon the nature of the concern, the following could take place:

- Students may opt to sit GCSE exams in some or all their subjects in the Autumn term. Students would most likely do this at College, but we could make arrangements for them to sit the exam at our school; please note the cost for this, and any additional tuition required, would be the responsibility of each family and not the school (as is normally the case).
- The school could appeal to the exam board on the grounds that the exam board used the wrong data when calculating grades and/or incorrectly communicated the grades calculated.
- The school can also check there were no errors made when submitting the grade to the exam board, however, there was a rigorous checking process prior to the grades being submitted, so the chances of this are slim.
- At this point if students are unhappy with the above resolutions, please contact me.

Inevitably, this was a long update – well done if you are still reading at this point! I will write to you all again next Friday with the new information I have at that point. As usual, I will leave for your information some of the key points and links which may still be useful to you.

Take good care of yourselves and your loved ones, have a lovely weekend and all best wishes for the week to come.  
Yours sincerely



**Lesley Beck**  
**Proud Headteacher of Sir Graham Balfour School**

## Reminders from previous weeks:

### 1. Covid-19 Testing

*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>

2. 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.
3. A reminder that school will be fully closed from 12.30 on 17<sup>th</sup> July, including to the children of Key Workers. This will allow us to carry out painting, maintenance, deep cleaning and to reorganise classrooms so that they are ready for much greater numbers of students returning in September.
4. Here are a couple of new DfE links which may be of interest to you:  
The first offers advice and guidance for parents on home learning:  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-online-education-resources>  
And the second offers an update on how parents can keep their children safe online:  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-keeping-children-safe-online>
5. I have been asked to share the following links with you by the Local Authority team

### Grants for White Goods

The following links have been provided to us for if and when families are in need of white goods but cannot afford them:

<https://grants-search.turn2us.org.uk/>

<https://www.buttuk.org/>

<https://www.familyfund.org.uk/> - if there is a child with a disability within the household

6. 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>
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: [rhedges1@sirgrahambalfour.staffs.sch.uk](mailto:rhedges1@sirgrahambalfour.staffs.sch.uk) and she will be happy to arrange a delivery for you.