



Sir Graham Balfour School

Member of Sir Graham Balfour Multi-Academy Trust

Our Ref: LDB / VM

10th September 2021

Dear Parents and Carers

As is always the case, I hope this letter finds you and your loved ones hale and hearty. This first letter of the academic year is a long one, bringing you up to date with news and developments. Read it in stages if you wish, or stick it on the 'fridge for future reference!

The new term has started wonderfully well. Whilst we all remain acutely aware that the pandemic is still with us, there is also a palpable sense of relief that many of the restrictions we have had to face for so long are not, at present, in place. It has been lovely to see the smiling faces of our students and staff going about their business. After 18 months of static, classroom-based activity, our practical Technology rooms are back in action, children are cooking and making; they are back in Art rooms and creating; they are participating in the normal suite of sports; they are in specialist Science labs and carrying out experiments. Our enrichment programme is back up and running and we are already planning a wide variety of trips and visits. It is simply fantastic to see our school getting back to its purpose.

The Year 7's and 8's who missed out on our normal transition activities over the past two years have now been given the opportunity to learn about the whole school. The latter have discovered classrooms they never knew existed. Year 9's are happy knowing they are far from being the youngest in school and are already thinking about the GCSE options process; the Year 10's, 11's, 12's and 13's are quickly getting their heads down, focused on the challenges and opportunities waiting for them upon completion of their GCSE and A Level courses. Happy and purposeful times.

I have divided the rest of this letter into distinct sections so that you may refer to them easily should you need to, in the future.

New Achievement and Positive Behaviour Policy

Over the past year, as you know, we have remodelled our behaviour policy in consultation with our students. We focus primarily on rewards for always doing the right thing, for working hard and abiding by our School Values; we have an extended list of certificates and far more opportunities for the recognition and reward of achievement in all areas, including out of school. We have moved from a system of House Points and BCs to Merits and Demerits, and our students are very quickly getting to grips with this. In this first week, there have been in excess of 5000 merits awarded. We have streamlined our detention system, as you will see later on; I am very confident that the vast majority of students will never need to know how this works. If you have any questions about our new approaches in this area, please speak to your child's Form Tutor, to Mrs Metcalfe (Deputy Headteacher) or Miss Marshall (Assistant Headteacher)

Covid-19, lateral flow tests and vaccination

- Thanks to the consent you gave us, the vast majority of students received their two lateral flow tests at the start of term. We identified 4 positive cases, most confirmed by PCR tests, and we look forward to welcoming those students back in soon. Please could I urge you to ensure your child now continues the twice-weekly task of testing at home. In so doing, we will hopefully stop ongoing transmission, and therefore reduce any more disruption to your children's education.

- Following on from this, please do keep your child at home if they are showing any Covid symptoms; carry out a lateral flow test and if necessary, book a PCR test. If that comes back clear, and your child is well enough to attend school, then please send them back to us straightaway.
- I expect the Government to announce their stance on Covid vaccination for 12-15-year olds shortly. We have been asked to prepare logistics for vaccination taking place, and whilst this is not a guarantee that they will go ahead, I feel it is highly likely that they will. No child under 16 can or will be vaccinated without your consent – we will send out paperwork to obtain this when/if the time comes. I fully support the intent and purpose behind vaccination and urge you to support this if and when the opportunity arises.
- I want to remind you that at any point I feel it is necessary, I will reinstate some or all of the systems we had in place last year, up to and including mandatory wearing of face coverings, year/class bubbles in and out of the building, and even remote learning. I am in regular contact the Local Health Team, I scrutinise Stafford's Covid numbers, and follow closely local and national developments. I have asked all students to make sure they always have a face covering with them, should we need to return to them at short notice. As has always been the case, I will do everything I can to support our students and staff, and will not balk at doing what is in their best interests, even if this is at variance with the local and national picture. In following this pattern over the past two years, we experienced far less disruption and far fewer positive cases and self-isolation than seen in other schools.

Uniform, equipment and kit

I want to thank you for the provision of uniforms, kit and equipment with which you have sent your offspring to school. They look amazing, and do themselves, their families and their community very proud. Thanks too for doing all you can to ensure they are in school on time. Punctuality is absolutely vital and the vast majority of our students are in school, on time, every day.

Parents of Year 11 and 13 students

I am reasonably confident that public exams will take place next summer and our teachers and students are preparing for this. Arrangements are being made at national level if exams cannot take place, and of course I will keep you informed of developments over the coming year in this regard.

The rest of this letter is taken up with key messages from my senior staff, as you will see below. If you have any questions about those aspects, please contact the staff member mentioned.

Attendance and late to school – Mrs Metcalfe, Deputy Headteacher

Excellent attendance and punctuality are not only imperative for your child to be successful at school but valuable life skills also. We find that when patterns of absence appear, for example not attending on a Tuesday, there is often a reason. Therefore, we request where you identify patterns of absence, please ask your child whether there is an issue and contact your child's Form Tutor as soon as possible. Form Tutors will also look for patterns of absence and contact you accordingly. Throughout the pandemic we have, rightly, not sent letters home identifying attendance issues to parents/carers. However, we feel this is the right time to re-introduce this. We will be sending letters home regarding any issues with attendance relating to the last academic year, excluding any issues related to the pandemic.

Good punctuality to school is essential to ensure that your child is focused on the day ahead. Last academic year we found that when we contacted parents, often you were unaware that your child was late for school. Therefore, we have developed a sliding scale of both contact to parents and consequences:

- Late 1 – text message sent home informing parent of child being late
- Late 2 – a telephone call from Form Tutor, a lunchtime detention and 5 Demerits
- Late 3 – text message sent home, 1 hour after school detention and 10 Demerits
- Late 4 – Late Letter sent home, a week of lunchtime detentions and 15 Demerits
- Late 5 – text message sent home, 2-hour detention after school and 20 Demerits

- Late 6 – in school meeting with Form Tutor, 2-hour after school detention and 25 Demerits
- Late 7 – text message sent home, 2-hour detention and a week of lunch detentions and 30 Demerits
- Late 8 – Second Late Letter sent home, Isolation Room and 35 Demerits, in-school meeting with Form Tutor and Education Welfare Officer

Fortunately, the vast, vast majority of our students are in school on time. If there is a genuine reason explaining why your child is late for school, for example a medical appointment, traffic issues, please ensure you provide a note or contact the school. Finally, we are recording the minutes that children are late for lessons and we will take the equivalent social time from your child as a suitable consequence. This is to ensure they are not dawdling on their way to lessons.

School Meals and ParentPay – Mrs Kerr, Business Manager

The school canteen operates a cashless catering system and requires parents to top up their child's school meals account using ParentPay. If your child finds there are not enough funds on their account they should go to the Finance Office. Finance will contact the parent or carer and ask for an immediate top up which will appear on the child's account within 10 minutes.

The free school meal allowance is £2.30 per day. The school cannot provide additional funds for them to spend over and above the £2.30 if free school meal students choose to spend part of, or their full allowance, at break time. If FSM students wish to make purchases over their allowance, parents are required to top up the ParentPay balance in the usual way.

Please contact the Finance Office if you require a reminder of your ParentPay log in details or require further information.

Homework – Mr Anderson, Assistant Headteacher

Research evidence shows that homework, on average, can add five to eight months' additional progress each year for your child. The research is clear, homework has an integral role to play to improve the academic achievement of your child. It is because of this that we have introduced a structured homework timetable for all years. The timetable will stipulate what homework your child will be set and on what day. Your child can use the timetable to keep organised and to help with workload. The expectation is that your child completes the work set on the same evening although we will give reasonable deadlines to complete the work in.

Please see below the proactive support that will be in place for your child prior to the homework being handed in:

- Ask the teacher in lesson for advice/clarification etc. about the task.
- Speak to the teacher at the end of the lesson/break/lunch for advice or clarification if they are too shy to ask in class.
- Choose to attend a Subject Support Session on a Monday or Wednesday (1hr after school) where a member of staff will be on hand to provide advice and help with the homework.
- Choose to use the school's Learning Resource Centre after school or at lunch for a quiet place to complete the homework and use the resources (open every day until 4.30pm).
- Make use of the structured timetable that will ensure no more than two pieces of work being set on the same night.
- If not handed in by the deadline, we will give one final opportunity to hand the work in by break the next day.
- If work is not handed in by break the day after, no demerits will be given but, they will be issued with a (H0) Subject Support Session where they will have to attend a support session on a Monday or Wednesday after school for one hour.

To ensure no student falls behind in their learning we will put in place the following:

- If a student has been issued with a (H0) Subject Support Session but chooses not to attend or if they do not complete three pieces of homework within a week, indicating they are perhaps struggling and in need of support, they will be put on a (H1) Compulsory Homework Club with their Year Head. These will take place Monday to Thursday after school, where they will be provided with structured support to ensure they catch up on work missed while also establishing effective learning habits.

Detentions – Miss Marshall, Assistant Headteacher

Our school prides itself on high standards of behaviour and attitude to learning. Focussed learning and minimal disruption in lessons is essential for the progress and attainment of all pupils. Alongside the introduction of Merits and Demerits we have made some key changes to our behaviour detentions to ensure students understand there are rewards and consequences to their actions.

- Detentions will now be issued with a whole school approach to behaviour management. Detentions run on a **Thursday evening commencing at 3.10pm** and are supervised by a rota of staff. Please note detentions will not be changed to an alternative night or re-arranged unless in exceptional circumstances at the discretion of the Year Head.

How do they work?

- Pupils who are issued with a D2 or D3 over the week (Wednesday-Tuesday) will be issued a 1-hour detention.
- Pupils who are given **two** D2 or D3 sanctions in the week (Tuesdays- Wednesdays) will be given a 2-hour detention (3.10pm- 5.10pm).
- **Three** D2 or D3 sanctions over the week will mean that your child is given 1 day in the Internal Isolation Room (IIR) followed by a 1-hour detention (3.10pm- 4.10pm) on the same day.
- **Four or more** D2 or D3 sanctions over the week will result in your child receiving 1 day in the IIR followed by a 2-hour detention (3.10pm- 5.10pm) on the same day.

How will I be notified?

- You will continue to receive texts to notify you of a detention. These will be sent on a Wednesday for detentions set the following day on the Thursday. Detentions will also be clearly displayed in school on a Wednesday at the end of school for all pupils to view.
- If your child is going to be in the IIR for the day the text will inform you of this but this will also be followed up by a phone call from your child's Head of Year or Form Tutor.
- Text messages home have a very limited number of characters to use, so our apologies for the lack of detail and directness of these. If you should have any queries, please contact your child's Form Tutor.

What if my child is absent or refuses to attend?

- Leadership Group will escalate the sanction for students who fail to attend their detention. Escalations will be dealt with by the Leadership Group on a Friday. For example, if your child does not attend a 1-hour detention set on the Thursday, a text to notify you of this will be sent and they will be required to stay on Friday for 2 hours. If your child fails to attend their 2-hour detention on a Thursday they will be placed into the IIR on Friday and will remain in school for 2 hours afterwards.
- If your child is absent from school on the day of detention the detention will be completed on the Friday if possible or re-scheduled to the following Thursday.
- By monitoring your child's behaviour via the Parent App you will be able to track whether your child will be receiving a Thursday detention prior to receiving the text.

We thank you for your co-operation and support in maintaining our high standards of behaviour and ensuring all children are able to learn in a positive environment.

Finally, we have been asked to forward the following message to you from **The Rural Transport Action Group**, and I am happy to support their request:

PROPOSED CANCELLATION OF THE SCHOOL TRANSPORT VACANT SEAT SCHEME

The vacant seat scheme allows parents to purchase a seat on a school bus for those not eligible for free transport, out of catchment or over 16. ALL students over 16 do not qualify for free travel and will need to use this scheme.

Even if you do not currently use the Temporary Vacant Seat Scheme you may need it in the future. Please take the opportunity to complete the short survey below for now and future generations, by either clicking or copying and pasting the link into your browser.

https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=TdGsJLuS1kS7qO2z0DgTzQRheX-UskdNoi7nzHHJNWNUMVRLMjVMS0pKNVQzMjIEVOMwV1owV1IDWS4u&fbclid=IwAR25b0ERYIT4hvgwQHeSMOSpqqx30W3-iT1UN6nBUi1hfpb_E0MITM8w-U

The scheme is currently suspended due to PSVAR (Passenger Service Vehicle Regulations). You are invited to share your views about the cancellation of the scheme through a survey. The survey will close at 12.00 midday on the 12th October 2021. This survey is vital to convince the council to reinstate the scheme.

PSVAR requires that vehicles with more than 22 seats must be wheelchair accessible as meet more general accessibility requirements. It only allows seats to be sold on accessible vehicles. The Council has concluded that Government guidance as to how the scheme should operate cannot be met for several years because transport operators in the region do not have enough compliant vehicles.

Therefore, the council's assumption is that the Temporary Vacant Seat Scheme will not be reinstated, unless a legal and fair solution is presented through the survey.

Please remember that even if you do not currently use the Temporary Vacant Seat Scheme you may need it in the future.

Thank you for your great support to your children and to our school. Working together offers the best possible chance of success and happiness for all our students.

Until next time, my very best wishes to you and your families.



Mrs Beck

Very proud headteacher of Sir Graham Balfour School