



Sir Graham Balfour School

Member of Sir Graham Balfour Multi-Academy Trust

7th January 2022

Dear Parents and Carers

Firstly, I'd like to wish you all a happy and healthy 2022, and hope that you had a lovely Christmas break.

Thank you for your patience and understanding this week, given the staggered start we have had to this term. I can report that of the students who have been tested in school this week, 7 tested positive for Covid, which is a pleasingly low number but even so, in catching them early, we will hopefully reduce the transmission of the virus, if only in the short term. However, at the time of writing, a further 59 students are off school either with Covid, picked up over Christmas. It is clear that the pandemic is not done with us yet.

As I have always made clear, my first priority over the past two years (outside of national lockdowns) has been to keep our school open and operating as best we can in the circumstances. The best place for children to be is in school, and we will continue to find our way through this current wave of the Omicron variant, retaining as much normality as we can.

To do this, I need your help and that of your children, all of whom I have emailed this morning.

- Please ensure that your children are carrying out Lateral Flow tests twice a week. Your child will be coming home with a new test kit this week and we are assured that, despite the lack of kits available locally, schools will continue to receive them without interruption over coming weeks.
- Please do keep your child at home if he/she is experiencing any symptoms of Covid, and if in doubt, seek a PCR test.

We all know that this new variant spreads very easily, and whilst it seems that people are falling less ill than from previous variants, it still requires people to isolate. This is therefore very disruptive to children who miss in-school education, and to families, who often have to make provision for children being at home. I am therefore very thankful to those of you who consented to your child receiving the vaccine and urge those of you who are still considering it, to consult your doctor or another reliable source if you have questions about the vaccine. Two doses are being offered to all 12-15-year olds this winter, as is already the case for 16-17-year olds. There is now clear evidence that the vaccines work, both in terms of reducing incidence of severe disease, and of onward transmission.

Another issue for you to be aware of is that of staff absence. We have written extensive contingency plans for coping with staff absence, including the merging of classes and calling on ex-teachers to help out if the situation warrants it. Unlike most other schools in the area, we have never yet had to send half or whole year groups home, and we will do our utmost to avoid this. However, it remains a possibility and one that, if it happens, I will not be able to give you much notice of, for obvious reasons.

On to other news:

- Thanks for the feedback sent in by parents of Year 7 and 8 who have now experienced our online Parents' Evenings. We aim to continue in this fashion for at least this year, and if the feedback continues to be so positive, this may become the norm in the future. Year 9, 10 and 11 Parents' Evenings will all run this half term – please look out for the message coming to you, with instructions for how to make your appointments.

- On the back of the virtual Parents' Evenings, we have placed a brief presentation on Making the Most of Year 7, 8 etc on our website. It contains an overview of what makes each year special, with some advice to parents on how to help their offspring. I hope you find it useful. Following each Parents' Evening, the link to the relevant presentation will be opened.
- Year 9 Pathways Meetings will take place later this month and, like the Year 11 Pathways meetings, these will take place online, so that parents can be involved with these very important sessions. Again, please look out for the message coming your way.
- Our Year 12 and 13 students studying A Level Sciences, alongside our Year 10 and 11 Separate Science students, will have the opportunity to take part in an online talk from Professor David Holt, who is Emeritus Professor of Bioanalytics at the University of London on the 14th January. At this meeting we will also be launching the guaranteed and funded online support for any student who attends our 6th Form (including current Year 12) and would like to apply to study medicine at university through [UCAT \(medify.co.uk\)](https://www.medify.co.uk). We are very excited to be able to offer this support and look forward to more of our students taking up this wonderful opportunity.
- On 27th January, upper school students of Art will have an opportunity to attend an online session with the artist Grayson Perry, at which they will be able to direct questions to him. We are hoping to be able to arrange other key speakers to work with our students in the future.
- Considering the challenges faced over the past year we have re-established an excellent timetable of opportunities for students to engage in enrichment activities beyond the classroom. Enrichment is incredibly important for the wider personal development of all our students and we encourage everyone to participate. There is a variety of clubs at lunches and after school to suit all ages groups alongside awards such as the Duke of Edinburgh Award (Y9-13). Please see the link to take a look what is available for your child this term [Enrichment - Sir Graham Balfour School](#).
- We are currently setting up a new App for setting homework, which will be shared with you all shortly. It is much better than the system we are currently using, and we hope it will be far more informative for you and for our students. Watch this space.
- We still fully expect exams to go ahead this coming summer for Year 11 and 13 and are actively working with our students to this end. At the same time, I am making representations to the Department for Education and to our local MP regarding the disruption these students have faced, and are likely to face during this term. It is important to me that these young people are not adversely graded due to no fault of their own and for this reason I will continue to make these representations.
- Snow Days. In the unlikely event that the school is closed due to snow in the coming weeks, I will post a message on the school website early in the morning as is normal practice, as well as posting this on the Local Authority school closure list. In the twenty years I have been at this school, it has only ever happened three times, so I have told the children not to hold their breath...

As is always the case, I am very thankful for your support of your children and of the school in these unsettling times. I have a genuine sense of optimism that we can see the path out of the pandemic this year, thanks to the support our whole community gives to each other. Thank you so much for all you do.

With very best wishes to you and your loved ones



Mrs Beck

Very proud Headteacher of Sir Graham Balfour School