



Sir Graham Balfour School

Member of Sir Graham Balfour Multi-Academy Trust

9th September 2022

Dear Parents and Carers,

I hope that this letter finds you refreshed and relaxed after the summer holidays. This letter is lengthy, but it contains important reminders and news from the school as we begin the new school year.

After yesterday's incredibly sad news of the Queen's death, I'd like to outline what we have done, and what we will be doing over the coming days, to pay our respects to her life and service to the country. At 9am this morning we stood together as a school community for a minute's silence. This was impeccably observed. During Form Time, students reflected on the life and times of the Queen with a focus on her significance to the country. We recognise that we have a big role to play during the national period of mourning to help our students understand the profound nature of this event. Our timetabled lessons will continue as normal, but our Form Time programme will focus on the Queen, our new King, the monarchy and its role in British life.

As I begin my first term as Headteacher of this wonderful school, I want to thank you for the many kind messages I have received following my appointment. I am determined that the school will continue to provide the opportunities and care for our students to enable them to leave us with the very best GCSE and A level grades possible. We cannot do this without your support. All of us here at Balfour recognise that working together offers the best chance for our students to thrive during their time here and we are deeply appreciative for the great support you provide to your children and to our school.

We have had a really positive start to the new school year. We have been able to celebrate the excellent GCSE and A level results achieved by our students in August. They really did do themselves proud and showed impressive resilience, perseverance, ambition and commitment to deal with the many challenges of the past two years. We have also welcomed new colleagues to the school. Mrs Haines has joined us as Deputy Headteacher; Mrs Auger has joined us to teach Business Studies; Mrs Davis has joined the Humanities Faculty; Mrs Humpage will be working in the Technology Faculty; Mr McKenzie has joined us to teach Computing/IT; and Mr Mills has joined us to teach Maths.

Our new Year 7s have settled in really well and are quickly getting to know their way around the school. The Year 8s have returned to school showing the extra maturity that we expect of them as they are no longer our youngest pupils. Year 9 have had their first assembly regarding GCSE options. If you have a child in Year 9, please do speak to them about this. Our Year 10s have started their GCSEs with a clear sense of purpose and enthusiasm. If Year 10 students wish to make any changes to their options, they have until Tuesday 20th September to speak to Mr Anderson about this. Year 11 have begun their final year of GCSE study with a real determination to succeed. We postponed their assembly today to pay our respects to the Queen. Over the coming weeks, we will be working with Year 11s to inform them about the content of their exams (see below for more detail) and to plan their next steps in education or employment when they finish their GCSEs. We have warmly welcomed our new Year 12 students back to school and our Year 13s are planning what they will be doing when they leave the 6th Form next year. Hearing about their plans to apply to university, for degree apprenticeships or jobs is always an exciting time of the school year.

Parents and Carers of Year 11 and Year 13 students

Given that your child will be receiving their own GCSE or A level grades next summer, I am sure that you followed the media coverage of the August exam results with a great deal of interest. To mitigate some of the impact that Covid had on learning, you may have heard reference to students having prior knowledge of which topics will be examined, the removal of content and more generous grades being awarded. For the 2023 exams the Department for Education have confirmed that students will have no adaptations made to their exams and the numbers of grades awarded at 9-1 (for GCSE) and A*- E (for A level) will return to 2019 levels. In practical terms, this means that there will be fewer top grades awarded and your child will have to study the full content of each course. We have been working on the basis that this approach would be taken, so it does not mean we have to change anything in lessons, but I will let you know if this situation changes at any point during the year.

Bike security

Sadly, we have had a couple of bike thefts from school in the last 6 months. In both cases the thieves were opportunists who took the first bike they came across that was not secured with a lock. If your child cycles to school, please make sure that they have a bike lock and use it to secure their bike during the day to help to prevent thefts such as this from occurring.

Mobile phone and Air Pod use

We have a clear rule regarding mobile phone and Air Pod use in school. Students are not allowed to use their mobile phones or Air Pods inside the building. They should not be checking phones for messages in the corridors, classrooms or dining hall. They should not be listening to music through Air Pods inside the building. During lessons mobile phones should be switched off and left in bags. Students are free to use their phones or Air Pods outside the building at break and dinner. If you really need to get an urgent message to your child, please phone the school reception and they will pass the message on immediately. We have this rule to ensure that these items do not cause disruption to learning and we will confiscate them if students are caught using them inside the building. We really appreciate your support with this issue.

Parking

For any parents who drop off or pick up their child from nearby school, could we ask that you take care not to block the driveways of local residents.

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 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. All work will be set on Satchel:One that both you and your child can access via a web browser or the App. The schedule is designed so that your child completes the work on the same day it is set. We will give reasonable deadlines to hand the work in but doing it on the day it is set will be a powerful way to ensure that your child is completing a manageable amount of homework each weekday. Please visit the area of our website for more information, to view the homework timetable and look at the vast amount of support on offer to help your child complete the work set

<https://www.sirgrahambalfour.co.uk/page/?title=Homework&pid=95>

Attendance and Uniform – Mrs Metcalfe, Deputy Headteacher

Uniform

The vast majority of students have arrived back to school in full uniform. Where there are issues Form Tutors will make contact to ensure that problems are resolved quickly. It is important that the high standards of uniform continue. Please ensure that your child is not wearing jewellery, nail varnish or nail extensions, too much make-up or their hoodies underneath their blazers. In these difficult financial times, we are offering a uniform swap where parents/carers can bring in pre-loved items and swap for the 'next size up'. We have a

stock of uniform available that is both new and pre-loved. Please contact Mrs Metcalfe (smetcalfe@sirgrahambalfour.staffs.sch.uk) if you would like to take part in this exchange or if you have any difficulty in purchasing school uniform.

Attendance

It remains to be the case that the students who have achieved so well at GCSE and A-level are the ones with the best attendance. For students to learn they need to be in school working with their teachers. Attendance percentages can give a false view of what could be seen as good attendance. 90% would be excellent in a test but as we see in the table below this would equate to 19 days and 95 lessons missed over a school year. This is a significant amount of lost learning. Please do work with your child to ensure that their attendance at school is as good as possible.

Attendance during one school year	Equivalent Days	Equivalent Weeks	Total of Lessons Missed
95%	9 days	1.4 weeks	45 lessons
90%	19 days	2.4 weeks	95 lessons
85%	29 days	5.4 weeks	145 lessons
80%	36 days	7.1 weeks	180 lessons
75%	48 days	9.3 weeks	240 lessons
70%	57 days	11.2 weeks	285 lessons

Detentions – Miss Marshall, Assistant Headteacher

Our school prides itself on high standards of behaviour and attitude to learning. High levels of focus in lessons and minimal disruption to lessons is essential for the progress and attainment of all pupils. Behaviour detentions run on a Thursday evening commencing at 3.10pm and are supervised by staff. Please note that detentions will not be changed to an alternative night or re-arranged unless in exceptional circumstances and this is at the discretion of the Year Head.

How do they work?

- Pupils who are issued with a D2 or D3 over the week will be issued a 1-hour detention (3.10pm-4.10pm).
- Pupils who are given two D2 or D3 sanctions in the week 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 text messages to notify you of a detention. These will be sent on a Wednesday for detentions set on the Thursday. Detention will also be clearly displayed on a notice board in school for all pupils to view.
- *By monitoring your child's behaviour via the Parent App, you will also be able to track whether your child will be receiving a Thursday detention prior to receiving the text.*
- 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 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 the detention, it will be completed on the Friday if possible or re-scheduled to the following Thursday.

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

School dinners – Mrs Kerr, Business Manager

Aspens continue to supply the break and lunchtime service for our school and will be working with the school council to ensure that, even during these difficult times, affordable options are available. Payments for school lunches and snacks can all be made via ParentPay. Cash can no longer be accepted and the cash loader has been decommissioned. Please contact the finance office if you need any assistance with ParentPay. If you wish to check whether you are entitled to claim for free school meals, please click on this link: [Apply for free school meals - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/apply-for-free-school-meals)

Once again, thank you for the great support you offer to your children and our school.

Kind regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Matthew Mason', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Matthew Mason
Headteacher