



Sir Graham Balfour School

Member of Sir Graham Balfour Multi-Academy Trust

Our Ref: MMM / VM

24th April 2023

Dear Parents and Carers,

I hope that this letter finds you well and that you had a restful and relaxing Easter Break. This letter is lengthy, containing important updates and news from the school as we begin the final term of the academic year.

Strike Action – Arrangements for Thursday 27th April and Tuesday 2nd May 2023

The National Education Union (NEU) have announced that they will be staging two more strike days as part of their trade dispute with the government on Thursday 27th April and Tuesday 2nd May 2023. These strikes have come after all teaching unions rejected the pay offer made by the government following negotiations in March. The pay offer would not have been fully funded by the government. Under this pay offer schools were expected to find some of the cost from our existing budgets. There are differences in school funding across the country. Given that Staffordshire is one of the lowest funded Local Authorities in the country (Source - [f40](#)) it would make it extremely challenging for us here at Balfour to find the money to fund this without having to make cuts to other areas of our provision. I will keep you informed about any further developments in this trade dispute.

Given the proximity of the strike days to the GCSE and A level exams, we will be ensuring that school is open for all of our Year 11 and Year 13 students on the strike days. They will have a mix of normal class-based lessons and revision sessions in other subjects they study all led by subject experts.

Arrangements for Thursday 27th April 2023 only

- School will be open for students in Year 11 and Year 13 only.
- School will be closed for students in Years 7, 8, 9, 10 and 12. Students in these year groups should remain at home and they will be provided with remote learning or directed revision to complete on the day of the strike.
- The offsite Year 12 Geography field trip already scheduled for this day will take place as planned.
- School buses will run as normal for students in Year 11 and Year 13. The canteen will also be open as usual in school.
- All after school and lunchtime clubs will be cancelled.

Arrangements for Tuesday 2nd May 2023 only

- School will be open for students in Year 9, Year 11 and Year 13 only.
- School will be closed for students in Years 7, 8, 10 and 12. Students in these year groups should remain at home and they will be provided with remote learning or directed revision to complete on the day of the strike.
- School buses will run as normal for students in Year 9, Year 11 and Year 13. The canteen will also be open as usual in school.
- All after school and lunchtime clubs will be cancelled.
- Year 12 Parent's Evening is postponed. We will reschedule this as soon as possible.

Toilets and Vaping

Like many schools across the country, we are currently dealing with more and more cases of students vaping in toilets and poor behaviour in toilets. This does, of course, involve a tiny minority of students in the school, but the impact is significant. We are having to spend time and resources to deal with the litter left by these students in toilets and, in the worst cases, repair damage to the toilets. In addition to this, we also have to deal with students vaping in the toilets. Vaping on the school site is banned and vapes are not allowed to be sold to those under 18 years of age. However, the way in which vapes are advertised by these companies and displayed in shops does make them highly

attractive to children and children do get hold of them (Source - [Vaping: New measures to crack down on illegal sale of e-cigarettes to teenagers - BBC News](#)). Vapes may not contain tobacco, but they do contain a lot of nicotine which is highly addictive and harms the ability of students to concentrate in lessons. We are currently looking into a range of options, such as purchasing vape sensors for the toilets, to address this. We do not rule out taking action beyond this, but please do speak to your child about these issues.

Online Safety and Social Media – Mrs Metcalfe, Deputy Headteacher

Our Pastoral Team speak with many parents about a wide range of issues. Over recent weeks many of these conversations have been about parents/carers raising their worries about the huge amount of time their child is spending on social media. Parents have reported that they are taking back control of their child's mobile phone and reducing the amount of time their children can use their phones for by putting on parental controls. Without parental controls students can access a whole host of inappropriate content on the internet at any time. In order to improve sleep, parents are taking mobile phones off their children when they go to bed. There is an app which can be downloaded from the Apple and Google stores called Family Link. This app enables parents to see what their children are viewing online. Children are wise when it comes to social media and they know how to manipulate settings so they can access content they should not. For example, we found a student in school whose age on their TikTok account age was 21 years old, despite them being in Key Stage 3. This gave them access to a host of videos which were unsuitable for someone of their age to view.

In order to provide further support with issues relating to Online Safety, Mrs Metcalfe will be running an internet safety session in school at 5pm on Wednesday 26th April (as advertised in the latest Safeguarding newsletter). Please do attend if you can make it.

Free School Meals – Mrs Kerr, Executive Business Manager

If your child is eligible for 'free school meal funding' and you register them, **we will receive extra funding called the 'pupil premium'**. We use this extra money to improve the educational provision and resources at the school. Pupil Premium funding from the government is given to schools to help all pupils reach their full potential, regardless of their background or financial situation and we currently receive an extra £985 for every eligible pupil who is registered for free school meal funding. This extra money could make a real difference to the quality of education we offer.

Pupils who are registered for free school meal funding don't have to have a meal at school. If you are eligible but you want your child to have packed lunches, you should still register because the school will receive the funding which can support your child in other ways.

You only need to register once at the school by visiting the Staffordshire County Council website using this link - [Apply online - Free School Meals - Staffordshire County Council](#)

Y7, 8, 9, 10 and 12 Assessments – Mrs Haines, Deputy Headteacher and Mr Anderson, Assistant Headteacher

We have assessment periods for all students in the above year groups between now and the end of term. You can see the dates below. In order to support the students so that they can prepare for these assessments in a productive and impactful way, we dedicate homework in the fortnight prior to the assessments to revision. All assessment schedules have been published on the Satchel:One noticeboard and emailed to your child.

- Y7 in class assessment fortnight: 5th June to 16th June.
Homework revision preparation 8th May to 19th May.
- Y8 in class assessment fortnight: 15th May to 26th May.
Homework revision preparation 1st May to 12th May.
- Y9 mixture of in class and exam hall assessments 1st May to 12th May.
Homework revision preparation 17th April to 28th April.

These will be the final formal assessments that Year 9 students have before they move into Key Stage 4. For maths and English, their assessments will take place in the school hall to give them a similar experience to sitting an external examination. The results from these assessments will be used, along with other information, to generate GCSE and BTEC target grades for the subjects that they study in Year 10 and 11. Therefore it is important that they show what they are capable of by taking these assessments seriously.

- Y10 and Y12 PPEs in Exam Hall: June 26th to 7th July.
Homework revision preparation 12th June to 23rd June.

Y11 & Y13 Homework – Mr Anderson, Assistant Headteacher

Homework for your child to complete and hand in will still be set up to and including 5th May. Most of this is now revision with a few being tasks based to aid the completion of the course. No more homework to hand into teachers will be set after this day. From Monday 8th May onwards teachers will upload material and guidance to support revision onto Satchel:One. This may include hints and tips that students will find useful, direct them to specific topics to revise or to past exam questions to complete. This is designed to complement the revision that your child is independently completing

Parking - Mrs Kerr, Executive Business Manager

We have been made aware of some issues with parking in the morning prior to the start of the school day. Parking spaces on our school site are at premium and they are occasionally taken up due to students being dropped off for school. This does have the consequence of leading to a shortage of spaces in the morning. Please do support the smooth running of the school by avoiding taking up parking spaces in this manner.

Beyond the Classroom

As well as the busy nature of day-to-day life in school, we also provide many opportunities for students outside of the classroom. We know how much the students value these experiences and how much they contribute to their education. Over recent weeks we have had school trips to:

- the glaciers, volcanoes and waterfalls of Iceland
- the Large Hadron Collider at CERN in Switzerland
- our partner school in Cambodia
- Saalbach in Austria for a ski trip
- the University of Birmingham
- a law competition at Cannock Magistrates Court
- a LEGO tournament
- see the origins of computing and code breaking at Bletchley Park
- a faith trail across different places of worship in Derby
- the GCSE Poetry Live show at Nottingham Arena

In addition to the above our students who have signed up to the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme are preparing for their expeditions and students are signing up for the activities that they would like to take part in on our Reward's Day in the final week of term. This is all in addition to our regular schedule of extra-curricular activities which you can see at this link - [Activities & Clubs - Sir Graham Balfour School](#). Please do encourage your child to have a look at these and have a go at trying something new.

Finally

We want to provide the high-quality teaching, opportunities and care for our students to leave Balfour with the very best GCSE and A level grades possible. All of us here at Balfour are thankful and deeply appreciative for the great support that you provide to your children and to our school.

Yours faithfully



Mr M Mason
Headteacher