



Sir Graham Balfour School

Member of Sir Graham Balfour Multi-Academy Trust

Our Ref: LDB/VM/16

16th October 2020

Dear Parents/Carers

Update Letter

It seems that in the blink of an eye we have reached the end of the seventh week back in school. I cannot praise our students and staff highly enough for the ways in which they have taken to our new ways of working. Thanks to you too for sending your children to school with their face coverings, and helping them to remember whether they are in uniform or PE kit on any given day! You are all doing a brilliant job.

There are a few things that I want to bring to your attention, followed by a few messages specifically aimed at parents of students in Year 7, 9, 11 and 13.

- **Attendance** – we are delighted that we have maintained very good attendance over the first few weeks of term. We have had a number of self-isolating students and staff, but as yet, there has been no cause for real concern. Our plans are now in place should we have move to a rota basis or, in the worst-case scenario, to temporarily close the school. My strongest hope is that, by us all doing the right things in and out of school, school will remain open to all throughout the coming months. To remind you again, though, please do not send your child to school if they are showing any symptoms of Covid-19; instead, keep them off and seek a test as soon as you possibly can.
- **Temperature in school** – as part of our Covid-security plans, schools were told to ensure good ventilation, with doors and windows being kept open. Inevitably, with the onset of autumn and the approach of winter, this is posing some issues with regard to the working temperature in school. We have asked for urgent clarification from the DfE and the Health and Safety Team with the Local Authority as to how we can maintain our safety but stay warm at the same time. As soon as we have clarification we will put new plans into place. For now, children are welcome to wear additional layers of clothes beneath their uniform, and to keep their coats on in class. Not ideal, we know, but for now, necessary.
- **Bike and road safety** – please do help us to emphasise the importance of staying safe whilst on bikes and when crossing roads. We have had reports of some children dodging in between cars on their bikes and crossing roads in unsafe places. We regularly remind students of this, but please do help us with this. We strongly advise too that your child wears a helmet when riding their bikes to and from school.
- **Homework** is a vital part of a child's progress in developing knowledge practising their skills. There is no avoiding this and no shortcut to it. Teachers spend time planning homeworks which help students to learn. Please do help us by ensuring your child is organised and attempting homework before the deadline – in this way, they can ask their teacher for help if they have a problem.

- **Driving on site** to drop off/collect students – I must urge you again please, do not drive on to school site to drop off or collect your children at the start and end of the day, unless they are physically incapable of walking from/to a more distant collection point. I have seen a couple of angry exchanges between parents blocking each other in, and have had complaints from the school bus drivers who often cannot park up because parents have parked in bus bays or the approach to them. Our site is simply not built to have an influx of cars at the start or end of the day, but the key point is that this puts children's safety at risk – this must be unacceptable to everyone. Please do arrange to pick up your children near Parkside shops or any of the streets off North Avenue if you need to. Thank you for your help in this matter.
- **INSET Day Friday 23rd October** – a reminder that school will be closed to all students on this day for teacher training.

Parents of Year 7 students

We are so proud of the way our Year 7 students have settled in, having been deprived of the key transition activities they should have experienced. They are a credit to you and to their primary schools.

As you may be aware, our Year 7's 'bubble' is in the Science Labs and not in our traditional classrooms. I am pleased to say that we have found the money to replace the hard, wooden, backless stools with tall seats. These will make it far more comfortable for the children to learn, and will be going into classrooms by the end of today.

Parents of Year 9 students

As with Year 11 students, we will not be able to invite parents in to the Pathways meetings as we normally do. Instead we will hold a meeting with each child individually and send home to you a form with details of our discussion. Please do get in touch with the member of staff holding that meeting if you have any questions.

Parents of Year 11 students

We have been so impressed with the positive approach our Year 11's have shown since our return. They are a wonderful bunch of young people and we will be working hard with them to ensure they get the rewards they deserve next year. Last week we delivered assemblies and introductory sessions to Sixth Form, to apprenticeships and to college courses. I am also delighted to say that Mr Parry will be working as our Year 11 Intervention lead, working closely with Year 11 Tutors and teachers. He has included a letter for your attention at the end of this one. We have given the following key messages which I would like to bring to your attention too:

- Every indication from the Government is that exams will take place as normal next year and this is what we are all preparing for. The GCSE exams have been pushed back three weeks and will start around the 7th June. Results will be announced on 27th August, which is also later than normal.
- Teachers have been feeding back on the Year 11 assessments we have just completed, which were aimed at pinpointing gaps in knowledge and understanding. We need our kids to take full account of that feedback and put all guidance into action.
- The first set of Year 11 PPEs (pre-public exams) will take place the first two weeks of December. These are of great importance, given that, if we do have to go to Centre Assessed Grades (as we did this last year), then we will need the evidence of the PPEs to help formulate our estimates. Please do help both your children and the school by making sure they are clear of the importance of these mock exams and that they are putting time into preparing for them.
- We normally welcome parents to take part in the Pathways meetings for Year 11, but sadly this year, we will not be able to do this. Instead, we will hold the meeting with your child, and will send home a form containing the details of our conversations. If you have any questions or concerns when your child comes home with this, please do contact the member of staff noted on the form.

- Finally, please do help us and your child to make sure they are getting into good habits: enough sleep, organised workspace, good hydration (not energy drinks) and the correct balance between revision and free time.

Parents of Year 13 students

- Every indication from the Government is that exams will take place as normal next year and this is what we are all preparing for. The exams have been pushed back three weeks and will start around the 7th June. Results will be announced on 24th August, which is also later than normal. Teachers have been feeding back on the Year 13 assessments we have just completed, which were aimed at pinpointing gaps in knowledge and understanding. We need our kids to take full account of that feedback and put all guidance into action.

I will close by thanking you for your support, as ever. Stay safe and healthy. I will be in touch again soon, but in the meantime, please do not hesitate to contact your child's Form Tutor if you have any concerns.

Kind regards



Lesley Beck

Proud Headteacher of Sir Graham Balfour School