



Sir Graham Balfour School

Member of Sir Graham Balfour Multi-Academy Trust

18th December 2020

Dear Parents and Carers

Having written to you all so recently, I had no idea that I would be writing to you again this term, and with such important news.

It is fair to say that you probably heard the news last night about a staggered start to the new term at the same time as we did, here in school. I have no doubt that for many of you, this will be very unwelcome news, as indeed it was to me. As you are all aware, here at Balfour our students and staff have done an absolutely brilliant job of keeping our school open; we have had very little disruption overall, and have managed, working with you and the rest of our community to seriously reduce Covid transmission in school and thus in the wider community. Our attendance has been outstanding, at a fairly constant 94% for the whole term. Wearing face coverings in lessons has almost certainly made a big difference in slowing the transmission of this wretched virus. We absolutely believe the best thing is for children to be in school and have worked so hard to make this happen, which makes this latest Government instruction quite disappointing to us all.

Some of you will have to make hurried plans for childcare in the first week of term. I am sorry about this. It is not a situation of our making, but one which we are forced to adhere to. I have made representations this morning to Stafford's MP, Theo Clark, as well as to the DfE itself. I have equally asked for urgent clarification of what the Covid (Lateral Flow) testing system will look like, which all secondary schools have been asked to plan for. When I have more information on this, I will let you know. Details are sketchy at best, at the moment.

The following then, is what you need to know:

- The Government has instructed us to have a staggered start to the term, in order to get school ready to deliver Covid tests for both staff and students from early January.
- **Only Year 11 and 13 will be in school as normal from the 4th - 8th January.** They will attend their lessons as normal, with their teachers. Buses will run as normal. Food will be available in the dining hall as normal. Uniforms are to be worn as normal.
- **The rest of our students will be working from home, remotely, according to their timetable, from the 4th - 8th January.** Their work will either be emailed to them directly, or an email will be sent with a link to a Powerpoint, which they can open and work to. It may be possible to live-stream some lessons via Teams, but we are very conscious of the fact that some of our families do not have access to a suitable device on which to work and we will not disadvantage them. We have not received the allocation of devices promised to us by the Government, which could have been used for this purpose. If your child does not have access to a laptop device, do not worry. We will make sure they have suitably challenging work to do during this week. Teachers will be in school, contactable via Microsoft Teams and/or email each lesson and will be checking up on your child's work. Form Tutors will also be in touch with your children over this week by email or by phone. Your child has been given an A4 exercise book during Pd 4 in which they will do all their work for this week. They will need to bring this into school with them when they fully return to school on the 11th January.

If your child/children are in the following groups, they are welcome to come to school for this first week of term too:

- If you or your partner is a key worker
- If your child has an EHCP

- If you are someone we have contacted, asking your child to come to school.

We will be in touch with parents of the above 3 groups on the 4th January to check which children have arrived in school and to invite in others who have not.

Thus, if your child is not in Year 11, 13 or in the groups above, please do not send them into school until the 11th of January.

If your child has Free School Meals, and lives near to school, they are welcome to come into school at lunch time to get a pack-up meal. If your child has Free School Meals and come to school by bus, then we will send a Co-op voucher home, in the post, to cover this week. If your child has Free School Meals and is in any of the groups in school for the first week of term, they can claim their meal as normal from the dining hall during the first week at school (4th-8th January)

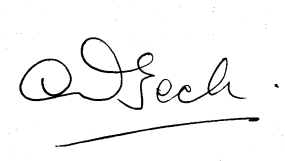
With regard to the Covid (Lateral Flow) testing system, this is what we know currently:

- **No child under 16 can nor will be tested unless we have written consent from their parent or carer prior to the test taking place. There are no exceptions to this.** There is no need to contact us about this as we will be sending out consent forms in the first week of term. No testing will commence before consent forms are collected in by the school.
- Young people of 16 and above can give consent for themselves, but again, this consent will have to be in writing before any test will be administered.
- Testing in school is to catch asymptomatic cases only (ie a person has coronavirus but are not showing any symptoms) – it is not to be used for people already showing symptoms.
- If your child shows any symptoms, they must not come into school, as now, but follow the well-known instructions of testing and self-isolation.
- Clearly, we hope that you will consent, in order to try and catch asymptomatic Covid cases, but we will fully respect any decision to withhold consent from testing in school. As you are aware, the law requires us all to seek an official Covid test if we are symptomatic, and this can be done via the channels we are all now very much aware of.
- Where a test done in school proves positive, you will be contacted immediately and your child will need to self-isolate.

We still have many, many questions which need answers from the Department for Education and Public Health England regarding Lateral Flow testing in school. As soon as we have more details, I will be sure to send them to you early in the new term. As it stands, you will almost certainly know as much about this whole process as we do, at present.

I apologise again for having to write to you at this stage, with such important information. We have worked so hard together to keep our school open safely and have succeeded really well. I must tell you that I am really disappointed that we have been told to do this, but we have no choice over it. I will be in touch with you early in the new term, to keep you informed of what is happening, so please, try not to worry, enjoy your Christmas and let us all look forward to 2021 and the hopes of normality returning.

My very best wishes to you all



Mrs Beck

Exhausted and highly frustrated Headteacher of Sir Graham Balfour School

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