



Sir Graham Balfour School

Member of Sir Graham Balfour Multi-Academy Trust

22nd January 2021

Dear Parents and Carers

As ever, I write to you hoping you are all well and doing your best to stay sane and balanced in these fraught and troubling times. As usual, a few updates and some information for you:

Remote Learning and Teaching

I'd like to thank you for supporting your sons and daughters with their remote working. Our teachers have moved very quickly over the past couple of weeks to adapt to the demands of remote teaching, the outlines of which you can see on the **Remote Learning** tab on our website. Please take the time to look at this, starting with the 'Introduction' page to show you how it all works. We are more than meeting the requirements of the DfE for remote learning and have extension activities for those who wish to push their learning even further. Please see also the **Top Tips** section, which will give you ideas on how you can help your children during this time.

In order to help you with organisation and knowing what work needs to be completed, your child's class teacher has produced a two week outline for remote learning. The links to each year group are on the website, but also below, for your convenience:

Year 7 [Year 07 - Sir Graham Balfour School](#) Click the link and find your class
Year 8 [Year 08 - Sir Graham Balfour School](#) Click the link and find your class
Year 9 [Year 09 - Sir Graham Balfour School](#) Click the link and find your class
Year 10 [Year 10 - Sir Graham Balfour School](#) Click the link and find your subject
Year 11 [Year 11 - Sir Graham Balfour School](#) Click the link and find your subject
Year 12 [Year 12 - Sir Graham Balfour School](#) Click the link and find your subject
Year 13 [Year 13 - Sir Graham Balfour School](#) Click the link and find your subject

These current plans started on the 18th January and run until 29th January; plans thereafter will be updated on a two-week cycle. They will highlight the learning objectives, links to resources and extension tasks and when live lessons will be taking place. Alongside these plans, teachers will still be setting work in the normal way via Teams and email.

We are delighted with the level of engagement in work shown by the majority of students; they are switched on, doing the tasks set and completing assessments as set by teachers. We are aware that some of you are contending with a variety of issues which can get in the way of this: family illness, internet/broadband variability and mental health issues, to name but three. Thank you for letting us know when this is the case: we are very understanding and will try to find solutions to these issues.

Just a few of our students are seemingly **choosing** not to engage with the work being set; these are a concern to us all, as they may find themselves rapidly falling behind their peers, with the consequent negative impact being felt into the future. Please do what you can to help us get them engaged; you can be assured that subject teachers and form tutors will be contacting them and offering advice on how to get back on board. We are

already considering how we will help them catch up when we get back to school; this will mean them staying behind after school to do so. Please help us persuade them that it is so much better to get through the work *now*, rather than having to stay behind, once we return to school.

Children of Key Workers/with EHCPs/children who are vulnerable

We have been open and remain open to children who fit in this category from the beginning of lockdown. I understand and support the need for some children to be in school but we have now reached the point where I have had to take the decision to **close off our Year 7 and Year 8 bubbles for new additions** and to operate a waiting list for these two groups for the time being.

I am fully aware of the Government's instruction in this regard, but the simple truth is that I cannot balance the need to offer remote learning to the majority of students, whilst looking after growing numbers of children in school who need supervision, with the requirements imposed on us to carry out Lateral Flow Covid tests, all at the same time as the new variant of Covid-19 is increasing the risk that, if there is an outbreak, I might have to fully close the school to all staff and all students.

I recognise the difficulties this might place on parents of Year 7 or 8 Key Worker parents who may find themselves in need of a school place in the coming weeks. If this is the case, please do contact us at school and we will do all we can to help.

Free School Meals Information

1. I am aware that one of the many sad consequences of this pandemic is the rise in redundancies. If you find yourself in this unfortunate position and need help on how to access Free School Meals, please see below, which is taken from our website:

Applications for Free School Meals must be made through the Local Authority's online self-checking service.

Once the application form has been completed, the system will automatically check with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) to see if you are entitled. You will then be given an instant decision and any successful application will be forwarded to the Free School Meals Entitlement Team to set up on the system and advise the relevant school(s). You also have the opportunity to print a copy of the page confirming your entitlement, and so could provide this to school to start the meals on the same day. Please ensure that you read all the declaration statements on the application regarding use of data and please be aware that applications for free school meals cannot be back dated.

For those applicants who are found to be not eligible, should you believe that there is an error you will still be requested to forward to the Local Authority the paper proof. However, if you have a query about the benefit you are receiving you should direct this to DWP or HMRC.

The link to the self-checking application form can be found on the following website
www.staffordshire.gov.uk/freeschoolmeals

2. For our families currently in receipt of Free School Meals, our team has been busy contacting you, regarding how best to get vouchers to you during this lockdown period. We think we have this sorted now, but if you have any queries about it, please do contact office@sirgrahambalfour.staffs.sch.uk and we will be happy to help.

Laptops and devices

There is no further word from the Government re its supply of technology. We have been really heartened this week, however, to receive offers from individuals who have spare laptops which they are willing to donate for use by our students. If you are in a similar position, with a working laptop which you no longer need or use, we would happily take it off your hands and pass to one of our families. Again, contact us at office@sirgrahambalfour.staffs.sch.uk if you can help.

For Parents of Year 11 and 13 only

Further to my note last week, we have now received the Department for Education and Ofqual's consultation document regarding the awarding of GCSE and A Level qualifications this summer. They are really interested to hear from parents and young people as well as schools, so please feel free to send in your views to them if you wish to. The document contains instructions of how to respond to the consultation:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/953000/6743-1_GCSE_AS_and_A_level_grades_should_be_awarded_in_summer_2021.pdf

And finally

We eagerly await the time when we can welcome all children and staff back into school. The news regarding the roll-out of the vaccines is very encouraging currently and gives us hope that full school re-opening will not be too distant. As ever, I wish you all well and thank you for your support of your children and the school. It really does mean the world to us all.

Stay safe and well.

My very best wishes to you all.



Lesley Beck

Proud Headteacher of Sir Graham Balfour School