



Friday 29th January 2021

Dear Parents and Carers

I hope this letter finds you all well. After the long update I sent you last week, which is still available on the school website, I will do my best to keep this one shorter!

School Re-opening

Just in case you missed the news yesterday, the Government has now said that the earliest schools may re-open will be the 8th March. If all goes to plan, we will get more detail of what that means to us on the 22nd February when they next plan an update. We cannot wait for the time when our school can safely re-open and you can be assured that we will be ready whenever that date comes. As and when I know any more, I will be in touch with you straight away.

Parents of Year 9 students

This is an important year, in which students choose their options for GCSE. Normally by now, we would have had Pathways meetings involving yourselves and your children. In order to make sure that face to face discussions can take place at least with your children, we are changing the dates for this process this year:

- Year 9 Pathways Meetings will take place in the week beginning 19th April
- Deadline for the return of the options form will be Friday 14th May
- Confirmation of students' options will be Friday 28th May

We will send you and your children more information about this in the coming weeks.

Parents of Year 7, 8 and 9 students

We have taken out a subscription to 'First News' – a weekly newspaper especially written for young people. You will find details of how you can access this at home at the end of this newsletter. It is a great resource and something you can point to, which will occupy your children at home. Please do not share the access links outside of Balfour families as this may invalidate our subscription. Happy reading!

Parents of Year 11 and 13 students

The DfE and exam board consultation over how grades will be awarded closes tonight (Friday) just before midnight. I have submitted my views and now we will await their final decisions. Please do try to calm your sons and daughters over any fears they may have. I am confident that the process will be both rigorous and fair. Pragmatically speaking, the Government will be wary of repeating its mistakes of last year regarding exam grades and will therefore seek to ensure no young person is disadvantaged. You can be sure of my support and that of the rest of the staff and Governors of our school; we will fight any approach which is not fair to our young people.

On a practical note, we are looking at the ways in which we can assess student's current work in order to help inform their eventual grades: we have one recent set of PPEs to work from and will find other ways to help form our judgements. The vast majority of your children are working very well; thank you so much for your support of them.

Laptops and devices

We have this week been informed that we will receive a very small number of devices shortly. As soon as they are in school, we will be sure to get these out. To repeat my plea of last week, if you, or anyone you know, has a laptop or tablet which is not used and would like to donate it to the school, we would be delighted to hear from you. Please contact us at office@sirgrahambalfour.staffs.sch.uk if you can help.

'Catch-up' Week – 8th-12th February

Many of you will remember that during the first lockdown, we had a couple of 'catch-up' weeks to allow students and families to re-set, get up to date with work missed or to reinforce and revise so that children were able to get to a similar point before new work was introduced. We will be doing this again the week after next. During this week, teachers will not be setting new work or teaching lessons; instead they will let your children know what they are supposed to be doing, whether it is catch-up work, revision or assessments. For those children who are fully up to date, they will be able to access the Scholars' task to enrich and broaden their knowledge still further. Teachers and Teaching Assistants will be on hand for help and advice throughout that week as normal.

Half Term week 15th-19th February

As in normal times, this will be a holiday week and school will be closed to all staff and children, including those of Key Workers. We will re-open for those children only, from 22nd February.

Reporting positive Covid tests over half term – for parents of children currently attending school only

Please do contact school using office@sirgrahambalfour.staffs.sch.uk if your child has symptoms and subsequently tests positive for Covid during half-term week. We will then be able to instruct the other children in their present bubble to fully self-isolate according to the current rules. For those of you who have given consent, we will carry out Lateral Flow Tests with your children twice next week, and will let you know, as now, if your child tests positive.

And finally

I cannot help but feel, this past couple of weeks especially, that we are all feeling really exhausted, frustrated, sad and worried at the moment. I can sense this in your children, in our staff and no doubt amongst you too. It truly is a tough time. I, like many of you, have lost a loved one to Covid; my uncle passed away just before Christmas. I have close family and friends who have lost their jobs in recent weeks and months. I feel the toll this pandemic is taking on all of us, whether it is the enforced separation from our loved ones or the worry of the unknown. I just wanted to say: please, be kind to yourselves and look out for yourselves too. You are doing a brilliant job supporting your children and holding everything together. Please just do what you can in supporting home learning, but don't panic about it – let us know if it's getting too much – we will do all we can to help. Spring is approaching, there is an end in sight. Hang on in there – better days are coming.

My very best wishes to you all



Lesley Beck

Proud Headteacher of Sir Graham Balfour School