



Our Ref: LDB / VM

20<sup>th</sup> March 2020

Dear Parents and Carers

I am sure that by now, you will be aware that the Department for Education has ordered that all schools will close from the end of today, until further notice. This being the case, I want to bring you up to speed with what this means for your children, yourselves, our staff and wider community. Please note, in this rapidly changing situation, some of the following is likely to change. Where that is the case, please be assured I will be in touch with you straightaway.

## School Closure

The school will be closed to the vast majority of students and staff from Monday 23<sup>rd</sup> March. It will remain closed until further notice. I have sent you a couple of letters regarding how we have planned work and contact with your child over this period, but more detailed information is included at the end of this letter, on exactly what is entailed for your children. They have all been told this face to face, and have been sent the same information by email. We have no idea when we will be able to re-open, but be assured that we will be in touch about this as soon as we know. The Government has intimated that it could be at least three months before schools and public areas re-open.

## Informing and reassuring your children

We have been at pains to keep your children well informed over current events, seeking to calm and reassure them as best we can. We held assemblies with every year group throughout the day yesterday, outlining what school closure will mean to them, our expectations over how their work will be set and assessed. We stressed that they need to stick to their established routines, following their school timetable as now, and doing the work set for them by their teachers of every lesson. Please do what you can to help your child stick to those routines. They have been told that their teachers will be available to contact via their email address, which can be found on the school website. We also stressed the reasons behind the need to self-isolate and maintain social distance. Again, please help the country's combined efforts in making sure your child follows our very clear guidance, which is intended to help to minimise the rate of spread of coronavirus.

Our students have been truly outstanding over recent days and weeks, in the ways that they have listened, asked questions, and tried to make sense of what is happening at the moment. I have never been prouder of our kids and feel humbled to be their Headteacher.

Our staff have been equally amazing, doing everything in their power to be the voice of reason and calm. They always go the extra mile; over recent days and weeks they have run marathons.

## Children of Key Workers

I have this morning sent out a separate, urgent letter about this. **If you believe yourself to be a key worker, please do read and respond to that email by 3pm today**, in order to help us decide on what provision we can offer. In that letter, I have urged parents who are key workers to make every possible attempt to keep their children away from school, in order to minimise the risk of contracting and therefore transmitting coronavirus. I

can give no guarantee that any service offered will be ongoing and uninterrupted: it will depend entirely on the very small number of staff I have available to help with this, staying healthy and fit to work. All other children must stay at home and must not be sent into school from Monday 23<sup>rd</sup> March onwards.

### Deep Clean over Easter

Please note that the school will be closed for the pre-planned Deep Clean and routine maintenance over both weeks of the Easter holiday. **There will be no access to the school for any students or staff over the period Monday 6<sup>th</sup> April to Friday 17<sup>th</sup> April.** In cases where schools are closed, the advice we have been given from the DfE <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-maintaining-educational-provision> is to contact the Local Authority <https://www.staffordshire.gov.uk/Homepage.aspx>

### GCSE and A Level examinations

It was almost inevitable, but nonetheless shocking, to hear the announcement that the GCSE and A level examinations are cancelled for May and June. As I write this, we still do not know the fine details of how this unprecedented decision will be resolved. As soon as I do, I will let you know. We have been very conscious of preparing students for all possible eventualities, ie for the possibility that they will have to sit their exams at a later date, to the use of predicted grades by teachers, or a combination of both. Emotions were running understandably very high amongst our Year 11 and 13 students yesterday, as they tried to make sense of this. They are amazing young people, who have worked so hard up to this point and many understandably feel cheated, and resentful, that they may not get the chance to sit their exams, and reap the rewards for their hard work. We salute them and the brilliant attitude they have brought to their studies.

As far as applicants to SGB Sixth Form go, please be assured that we will accept all students into our sixth form, whom we feel meet the necessary entry criteria. We will be in touch with these students in the weeks to come, setting out their transition work from each of their desired A level subjects.

If your child has applied to Stafford College, we have received the following assurance:

- *If you have already applied to NSCG, had your interview and accepted a place you will receive further communication from us in due course about induction events and enrolment.*
- *If you have applied to NSCG and not yet had your interview, please be assured that we are arranging for our faculty staff to contact you to conduct a short telephone interview. This will be an informal discussion and an opportunity to explore your course options. You will also have the opportunity to ask us any questions you have about life at NSCG.*
- *If have not yet applied but are looking to study at NSCG in September, it is not too late. We will continue to process all online applications received via our website [www.nscg.ac.uk](http://www.nscg.ac.uk).*

With regard to Year 13 students and their university application, we have been told that communication will be forthcoming in the next few weeks.

### Free School Meals

As I write this, we are still awaiting further clarification from the Government over how we can maintain this provision. Be assured that we are working hard to come up with a solution for next week and will be in touch separately to let you know what we can do.

### Student welfare in the coming weeks

It is highly likely that the Government will take even more stringent decisions to further isolate us all in the coming weeks. This being the case it is really important that, in addition to them completing the work we have

set and will continue to set, that they continue to engage in activities which will help alleviate their anxiety and feeling of loss at being separated from their close friends. Social media when used well, could be a positive way for children to support each other in this period, but spending time chatting with other household members, and taking time to read, listen to music, develop a new hobby or learn a new language will be equally valuable. I have shared with all our students that it is my intention to learn some Japanese during evenings when I too will be isolated. Please do encourage them to do things other than sitting behind their tablets and pcs for hours on end!

### **Ongoing communication**

As I have been doing to date, I will continue to be in regular contact with you, to keep you informed of anything I need to, and to maintain our links in these troubling times. I am deeply grateful for the large number of messages and emails you have sent in, which have offered great relief and encouragement in what has been the most trying time of my professional career to date. I look forward to the time when this is behind us all, that school has re-started, when I am giving out Headteacher's Awards and telling students to tuck their shirts in again.

I remain the very proud Headteacher of this amazing school.

### **Notice given to all students and parent on how to access school work**

We have now reached the point with the Coronavirus epidemic where the government have decided that in order to suppress the spread of the virus schools must close down and students must carry on learning from home. We have been preparing for this to happen for the last week and I would like to use this email to let you know how this is going to work and what we expect from you during the shutdown.

You do need to remember that, despite the uncertainty of the current situation and the worries that we will all have for our family and friends, you will have to return to your education. Therefore it is really important that you maintain a routine that allows you to keep studying so that you do not fall behind during the period when the school is shut down. If you get into bad habits of not doing work then you will find it really difficult to get back into the routines of school life when we return. Clearly, we do not want anyone to be in this position.

You also need to remember that self-isolation means that you should be in minimal contact with other people in order to help to prevent the further spread of the virus. You should not be going out to see friends or go into town and you should remain at home. Ignoring the advice to remain in self-isolation means that there is a greater chance of the virus spreading and affecting the vulnerable people in your family and local community. These are serious times and you need to listen to this serious message.

So, you will be required to follow your timetable at home so that you can follow the normal pattern of lessons that you have in school. So if on a Monday period 1 you have English, you need to spend the time from 8.50am to 9.50am completing the English work that has been set for you. If you have Science on a Monday period 2, you need to spend the time from 9.50am to 10.50am doing the Science work that has been set for you and so on.

Your teachers will be using both email and the SIMS Student App to set you work and tell you where to find the resources that you will be using. The resources will be shared in the Student section of Sharepoint on Office 365 which you can access with your email username and password. If you have forgotten your email username and password then please contact [itsupport@sirgrahambalfour.staffs.sch.uk](mailto:itsupport@sirgrahambalfour.staffs.sch.uk) with your name and year group.


## Guide to Access the Work

- Check your school email and the SIMS Student App for details of the work that has been set for you.
- All of the work that teachers set for you will be kept in the Student area of Sharepoint on Office 365.
- If you do not have Word, Excel, PowerPoint, Publisher etc. please follow the instructions in the video guide at the link below to download this software to your computer. There is no cost to this, it is free for all students.
- <https://web.microsoftstream.com/video/c3d4c0ff-5b42-4eb6-8140-3350cfbaf3eb?list=studio>
- To access the Student area of Sharepoint you need to go to [www.sirgrahambalfour.co.uk](http://www.sirgrahambalfour.co.uk).
- Click on the +QUICKLINKS button and select Office 365.
- Log in with your username and password.
- Within each Year group there is a section for each Faculty. Each subject has a section.
- Within the subject section there will be a folder called Self-Isolation Work.
- Each teacher has their own folder with the class name and their name e.g. 9R3Geog Mr Mason. It is here that teachers will be saving the instructions for the work that they want each class to complete.
- The work will be set weekly and will also be emailed to your school email address and set for you to see on the SIMS Student App.
- If you are experiencing difficulties accessing the internet in order to find your work, as described in this letter, please contact Mrs Metcalfe on smetcalfe@sirgrahambalfour.staffs.sch.uk
- who will endeavour to get work sent out.


Please see below for a picture guide of how to access Sharepoint on Office 365.

### Access resources on Office 365


Add Subtitle Here



1 On school website, click on **QUICKLINKS** and select **OFFICE 365**.



2 Enter your username (your full email address as shown above) and click **Next**.




3 Enter your password and click **Sign in**.



4 Click on **Student** portal.



5 Now, select your respective Year group portal e.g. **Year 7**



6 Select **Resources** from the left to access your resources.

## Feedback on the Work

Obviously, with the teachers not being physically present when you are doing the work this will create challenges in terms of providing feedback. Teachers will be contactable by email and providing they are fit and well they will be responding to emails that you send during the school day. So if you have any questions or

queries about the work please do email them to your teacher. The work instructions will contain details of what you need to send back to your teachers in order to prove that you have done the work that has been set. Please do follow these instructions. In addition to this you will get feedback on your work when you return to school in the following ways:

- When we return to school all Y7-10 and 12 students will have an end of year exam. This will need to cover all work done so far this year, including work done during the shutdown.
- When students return to school they will be expected to bring with them a folder of work for each subject with all the work they have completed during any shutdown inside it. It is your decision whether to print or write the work. I strongly suggest that, where possible, you write the work as that is how you will be learning when you return to school. Sanctions will be issued if you have not done the work.

This is an extraordinary time and, as we said to you in assembly, please do your utmost to keep to the routine of your school day and keep on learning. We expect you all to follow this advice and if you do you will reap the rewards throughout the rest of your life.

If you have any questions about the work, or wish to discuss anything, please do not hesitate to get in touch with myself or anyone else in the Leadership Group.

Yours faithfully



**Mrs L Beck**  
**Headteacher**