



Balfour Newsletter Christmas 2018



Dear Parents, Carers, Students, Grandparents and all other members of our Community

It feels like it was only a few weeks since I was writing my last introduction to Balfour News, back in the months of our seemingly endless summer. Whilst the weather may have cooled quite considerably, my pride in our school, our students and staff has only continued to heat up! From big events like our Dodgathon or the trip to SGB Cambodia, to the individual acts of kindness, care and consideration I see on a daily basis, our school amazes me constantly. Our Year 11 students achieved wonderful results in the summer, enabling them to progress to apprenticeships, sixth form or college. They are to be congratulated warmly on making the best progress of any school in Stafford – a wonderful achievement. All of our Year 13 students passed their exams, enabling them to go on to the University of their choice, or to an apprenticeship and a few to gap-years. This term has been incredibly busy and hugely positive – we are again seriously oversubscribed for September 2019 and have been approached by the Local Authority to fit in more students, such is our popularity. That popularity does not happen by chance, however; it is entirely due to the hard work, commitment and support from staff, parents and our wonderful students. I thank every one of you for helping our school go from strength to strength.

As ever, there are a few things I would like to share with you:

Vision and Values of Sir Graham Balfour School

As you will be aware, we completely overhauled our Vision and Values statement at the start of this academic year. I am delighted at how this has been received by our students and our whole community. The pride shown by our students in every aspect of school has been wonderful to witness; they care about their uniform, about their teachers and lessons, their community and about their future. The aspirations we have for each other in this school are sky high. Our students can speak knowledgeably about our values and are proud to live them. This is simply wonderful.

Update to Behaviour for Learning procedures from September 2018

Our re-vamped B4L procedures came into force from September. They were deliberately adjusted to make sure every student can learn in an atmosphere of calm and excellent behaviour; they were also aimed at making sure our expert teachers (and we do have expert teachers in every

single classroom) can teach without disruption. I am very proud to say that there has been a big reduction in the amount of low-level disruption, and the incidents of serious disruption have drastically reduced. In a school filled with 1000 young people, this is no mean feat. Our behaviour is not yet perfect *all* the time, but it is well on the way to being so.

Sixth Form unconditional offers

These remain a lively concern for us and for all sixth forms across the country. I have spoken extensively to Parents of year 13 students, and to the students themselves. I continue to urge you to think twice about accepting an unconditional offer, but if you do, please make sure that you redouble your efforts to get your target grades; it will be well worth it in the long run.

Funding

Funding also remains a very lively concern for us. We run a very tight ship and have done for many years. We have, with very careful management of funding, been able to maintain our staffing levels and the full range of subjects we have always prided ourselves on. Fairer Funding will mean a little extra money coming into school, but it does not cover the increased contributions we will have to make to pensions, NI etc. I therefore urge you to contact your local MP, (for Stafford this is Jeremy Lefroy) and ask them to stand up for your children's rights to a more equal share of funding. In many parts of the country, schools still receive anything up to an additional £3,000 per child per year – in a school of 1000 students, you can see the difference this would make.

Dining Room and Parent Pay

Our new catering company have been in place since September and the changes to the quality of food have been monumental. Students universally praise the quality and choice of food on offer when I speak with them and the new biometric system appears to be working very well. If you have not yet signed up to Parent Pay, please contact our Finance Department, who will be happy to help you.

Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE)

We have taken an innovative approach to making sure all students receive age-appropriate lessons and assemblies on the aspects of growing up which a normal school curriculum may not cover. Since September, some of the topics we have covered with different year groups include: puberty, E-safety, careers and cancer awareness. After Christmas we will cover aspects including road safety, dementia awareness, first aid, healthy relationships and sexual consent. Our half termly Safeguarding newsletter is published on our school website. This edition has a particular focus on 'how to keep your children safe online' with some advice and guidance from the NSPCC. If you require any more information about the above, please do contact Mrs Hartley or Mrs Hedges.

Junior and Senior Student Leadership Groups (SLG)

This term, we have disbanded our previous School Parliament, and have introduced in its place the Junior and Senior SLGs. These are made up of student representatives, chosen for their willingness and ability to meet with me and other senior members of staff, to represent the views of all students. These are serious and important roles, as I fully expect them to help me make further changes to our school. In our meetings so far, we have covered aspects relevant to them on: the environment and litter concerns, the length of the dining hall queues and the changes to the B4L system. The Senior SLG also told me of their perception that there is not always enough recognition for the majority of students who do the right thing, every day, all the time. This has resonated with me, and already we have brought changes into being. Our first Academic Excellence Rewards Assemblies will take place Thursday 20th December, celebrating the students whose attainment, effort and progress have been noted by their teachers.

Uniform

As ever, I want to thank you for your support of our school uniform. I receive many expressions of support and admiration of it on at least a weekly basis. If you are out buying new items over Christmas, please do look carefully at the uniform requirements on our website – some items sold under the label of ‘Schoolwear’ in shops do not conform to our uniform policy. It’s better to be safe than sorry! Many thanks for your consideration of this.

Student Advocates

I was absolutely delighted to receive backing from our Governors and Trustees to appoint three of our staff to senior Student Advocate roles from September this year. These are brand new posts and will, we sincerely hope, help to raise even further the aspirations and outcomes of all our students.

- Miss Watson was appointed to be our Information, Advice and Guidance Advocate; she works closely with students, staff and outside agencies to promote careers advice and to arrange access to quality, professional work places, colleges and universities for all our students.
- Mrs Healey was appointed to be our Pupil Premium Advocate. She works very closely with our Pupil Premium students and parents to ensure that all children will receive the help, encouragement and aspirations needed to become accountants, doctors, pilots, writers or whatever else they aspire to.
- Miss McConnachie was appointed as our Scholars Advocate. She works very closely with our most able and talented students, to ensure their needs are met. She has already set up a wide range of activities which have been incredibly well received by our brightest and talented students, and has great plans for the coming year.

This is a wonderful development for our school, and one of which I am incredibly proud.

And finally

May I first thank you for your unstinting support of your children and our school and second, wish you all a restful and relaxing Christmas break.

Lesley Beck
Extremely Proud Headteacher of Sir Graham Balfour School

Careers

Volunteer It Yourself

On Wednesday 7th November and Wednesday 28th November, Volunteer It Yourself, an external company that support young people to gain employability skills, came into school to work with some of our Year 9 and 10 students. In the first session, the students were tasked with making the tallest structure that they could with only straws and marshmallows. They had to work in a team, communicate effectively and some displayed excellent leadership skills in order to complete the task successfully. They also learnt about different tools that are used across different trades (painter/decorator, plumber, electrician, builder etc).

In their next session, they had to cut and then join together plastic plumbing pipes with plumbing joints. The students did this successfully and it was great to see the pride that this brought to some of them who had worked really hard at creating the perfect join. All of the work they have done in these sessions are in order to prepare them to work together as a team, and eventually build some benches with the support of qualified and professional tradespeople. They will be coming into school on Wednesday 9th January for a full day constructing their benches. We will hopefully be able to showcase the round picnic benches in the next Newsletter for everyone to see the results of the students' hard work! Miss Watson

NHS Event at the County Showground

On November the 13th. I took some year 8,9 and 10 students to Staffordshire County Showground for an NHS event. The event was aimed at giving young people an opportunity to learn more about the huge variety of careers that are available within the NHS. The students were able to speak on a one to one, or group basis with healthcare professionals ranging from Paramedics to Surgical Assistants, Midwives to Pharmacists, Navy Doctors to Occupational Therapists and Community Nurses... the list goes on! Students engaged in conversations and were forthcoming with questions to fill any gaps in their understanding of job roles. It was a very positive and beneficial event. The students also got to try out some more 'hands on' activities and were able to experience getting their blood pressure taken, deliver a baby (plastic doll), perform CPR, bandage each other, practice sorting medication (Tic Tacs) just as Pharmacists do. It was great to see all of the students getting involved and gaining a greater understanding of potential career pathways.

Watch this space, as this is an event that has ran for the last 2 years and so is very likely to be on again in 2019! See Miss Watson if you are interested!

SGB Careers Fair and Business Enterprise Event

Our annual Careers Fair and Business Enterprise Event is due to take place on our next PSHE Day – Thursday 24th January. We already have over 35 confirmed organisations attending the Careers Fair and students from Year 7 through to Year 13 will have the opportunity to attend.

In addition to the Careers Fair the school also co-ordinates a Business Enterprise Event throughout the day with students attending various workshops, which will introduce them to many aspects of working within a business. This year we will also be running a Challenging Stereotypes Event,

encouraging students to consider a range of different careers that they may not have thought about previously.

We would very much like to hear from any friends/family who are also business people, who would be willing to come in for part of the day to take part in the Business Enterprise Event, or the Challenging Stereotypes event. Please contact Mrs Gannon at the school

lgannon@sirgrahambalfour.staffs.sch.uk

Community Activities

St Mary's Christmas Tree Festival

The annual St Mary's Christmas Tree Festival was yet again an outstanding success, attracting thousands of visitors. Over 100 trees from local organisations and companies adorned the church including our very own Sir Graham Balfour Tree.

This year we decided to decorate our tree in recognition of the 100 Years Centenary of the Armistice of World War 1. The Balfour Remembrance Tree was decorated with poppy themed bunting and felt poppy decorations handmade by students in our Textiles department. The tree was also accompanied with a selection of poems written by our students. This year's theme was the culmination of various projects and competitions the school has been involved in to celebrate the Armistice. There have been various competitions and displays in school and a school visit to the Weeping Window poppy sculpture at Middleport Pottery.

The Mayor of Stafford officially opened the festival on the Tuesday evening and the event was then open to the public from Wednesday 28th November to the close of the festival on Sunday 2nd December, culminating in a festive carol service. All monetary donations were in aid of the Mayor's Charity Appeals.



Thank you to everyone who contributed to yet another beautiful tree representing our school.

Choir at St Mary's Church – 6th December 2018

In addition to decorating a tree for the festival, on Thursday 6th December our school choir was invited to perform a selection of festive songs to entertain visitors and supporting friends and families.

Our students performed beautifully, thank you to them for their hard work and outstanding performance and to Mrs Braverman, Head of Music.



Orchestra at Parkside – 5th December 2018

For the second year running, our orchestra was invited to perform at the annual switching on of Parkside Precinct lights. They were supported by the choir from Parkside Primary School who sang a lovely selection of Christmas tunes. Both schools were fantastic spreading some Christmas cheer, despite the disappointing winter weather, a credit to their professionalism.



Perkins Tennis Ball Challenge

On Thursday 19th July, Mrs Lavelle, 6 students and Mrs Gannon attended the annual Perkins Tennis Ball Challenge at Perkins Engines based on the Tixall Road in Stafford.



Previously, the event had involved pre designing and engineering a manual 'tennis ball launch machine' in school. The aim being to launch the tennis ball the greatest distance, compared to other schools in the competition. This year, the criteria had been changed to challenge the teams of students with tasks on the day, all involving problem solving and working as a team. There were 3 challenges in total, along with a full tour of the factory.

It was a really great day; albeit slightly stressful for Mrs Lavelle and Mrs Gannon who could only stand and watch our students undertake the tasks and not being able to have any input. Despite not bringing back to school the top prize, our students were an absolute credit and definitely came away from the event with valuable new skills and a school cheque for £250.00. Well done team.



Youth Panel Meeting – Stafford Borough Youth Voice

In June, Mrs Gannon attended a meeting involving the Safer Neighbourhood Panel (SNP), which are a panel of residents within the Stafford area, whose main role is to scrutinise the performance of the Local Policing Team (LPT). The purpose of the meeting was to encourage local secondary schools to have a youth voice regarding local policing and in turn, can be fed back via the SNP. It was agreed, each school in the area would select 2-4 students who would form a Youth Panel called Stafford Borough Youth Voice, with meetings taking place three times a year.

The first student based meeting took place on Wednesday 24th October at Stafford Manor High School. Guest speakers included:

- Chief Inspector Gemma Ward, Local Police Commander, Stafford Borough
- Victoria Farrar, (Vicky) Head of Governance and Assurance for the Staffordshire Police Commissioner's office.
- Steve Frodsham, Vice Chair, Stafford Borough Safer Neighbourhood Panel.

Students were encouraged to mix with peers from other schools and each group was then given the opportunity to ask the guest speakers questions. Thank you to our students Josh J, Lola H, Nicole W and Zack GF for agreeing to be part of the panel and their exemplary conduct and professionalism throughout the meeting.

Competitions

WW1 Competition

Thank you to Miss McConnachie who ran a competition to commemorate the Armistice of World War 1. Students were given the task of producing artwork, a poem or model. Thank you to the following students who were all given a prize and congratulated in assemblies; Caitlin M, Charlotte C, Ruby H, Megan C, Katie G, Hollie K, Phoebe R, Grace E, Dyna S, Tom B and Jessica GM.

Christmas Recycling Competition 2018!

Thank you to Mrs Hill who launched our annual Christmas Recycling Competition. Each house group was tasked with producing a Christmas themed object for display, made from recycled materials. I am sure you will agree there are some great designs. Here are some of the entries: We will keep you informed as to the winning House Group in due course.

Shoe Recycling January 2019!

During the month of January, our Eco Club has decided to collect unwanted, but usable shoes in aid of charity. A collection box can be found under the stairs in main reception for all donations.





Department News

News from the Music Department

- Well done to Ruby R in Year 8 who took Grade 2 Piano exam this week.
- Congratulations to everyone who took part in the School Christmas Concert on Monday 17th December 2018. The concert was brilliant– the students were amazing and very brave to put themselves forward in the way they did. Thank you to Miss Braverman and the team of Peripatetic teachers who helped support the students so well.

News from the English Department

Class **8A2** has put together an outstanding work display. This piece has taken them several lessons to complete including all the remarkable written and creative works of art. Since the class has studied the book 'Private Peaceful' by Michael Morpurgo as a way of remembering the First World War as well as developing their English skills at the same time it seemed that a poppy display would tie quite nicely into this, and it has. 8A2 have also investigated Wilfred Owen's poem 'Dulce et Decorum est' which really brings to light what the war was like through a soldier's personal view point and this has also been included in the remembrance display. They have all grasped a real understanding of respect and the war and their effort has been tremendous throughout the entire project. Mainly though, it was done to commemorate all the soldiers who fought and died in the First World War with it being exactly a hundred years since the end of World War One. This masterpiece can be found in room **46** (Languages corridor).



Fundraising

Children in Need 2018

Our annual fundraiser for Children in Need took place on Friday 16th November. Students were asked to wear non-uniform for a donation and our Sixth Form organised various activities to support the event. In total, we raised over £1000.00 in support of this worthy charity.



Reverse Advent Calendar

For the second year running, Sir Graham Balfour has launched the Christmas Reverse Advent Calendar. Rather than receive a treat, students have been asked to donate food and toiletry items on a daily basis in their House Groups, throughout December. On the last day of term all of the items are amalgamated into four hampers, one for each House and collected by The House of Bread, the local provider of food and donations to the homeless and those in need in the Stafford area.

Thank you to all of the families of Sir Graham Balfour students for supporting this worthy charity and so generously donating items that will really make a difference at this time of year.

School Trips

Birmingham University Visit – 20th November 2018

Some of our KS4 students attended the Physics and Fine Art workshop at Birmingham University on Tuesday 20th November. They were given a master class in Particle Physics and then asked to express their thoughts and emotions through the manipulation of materials.

In the morning, students created a charcoal base on paper and then they worked into the paper with an eraser, revealing the white paper underneath to create the images. Working from cloud bubble/ chamber images of particle movements, the charcoal ground is disturbed by the movement of the eraser in the same way that the substance in the chambers would be disturbed by the movement of the particles.

Following on from this activity, the students used more experimental approaches, restriction on the movement of the pencil by elastic, to explore forces acting on the particles and the transferring of your drawing to your neighbour, to explore the decay of one particle into another.

The students finished the day representing their knowledge with the use of **shadows on the screen** involving actual movement to be filmed and photographed, using techniques of a shadow puppet theatre.

‘I really enjoyed the trip and learned a lot about what is inside a proton and neutron. As soon as I got home I told my mum what I did’

‘The trip was a great idea! It brought together new ideas in a fun way that helped easily implement these things into our minds’

‘I think the elastic band drawing, of trying to separate quarks, looks smart, as it was hard to draw reminding us that it is very hard to separate them’

‘It was a very enjoyable day and it was really interesting to combine physics and art, to create a new method of learning. It would be great if there would be more opportunities like this, as I found it a valuable experience and I believe others would too’



Staffordshire Youth Debate

On a Wednesday lunchtime, Miss McConnachie and Mrs March run a weekly debate club. In recent weeks, they have been preparing the students for their first competition.

As a result, on Wednesday 7th November, Miss McConnachie was lucky enough to take 10 of our students to the Council Chambers yesterday to take part in the Staffordshire Youth Debate 2018. This is a competition, which is held each year, and on this occasion, there were nine other schools/organisations there. Our students did exceptionally well! We led the proposing argument for a motion based around knife crime and early intervention. In addition to this, any of our students could give a 1 minute speech in response to any of the other motions (there were 5 different debates) and many of them added their views to the arguments.

Thank you to all of the students who took part, it is not easy to stand up in front of a chamber of people and speak as clearly and eloquently as our students did. These students truly were a credit to themselves and our school.

Well done to: **Ben L (Y9), Isobel E (Y9), Xavier E (Y9), Robert S (Y10), Thomas D (Y10), George A-D, (Y9), Joseph F (Y9): Matthew M and Kelby A-M (Y9): Lauren A (Y8).**



Student News

Christmas Post Box

Thank you to Faye B (Y8) and Lauren A (Y8) for organising and making our very own Balfour Christmas Post Box. They have been busy spreading Christmas cheer and delivering Christmas cards to House Groups for the past two weeks. Well done to them both.



Right Stuff Boxing Programme

Congratulations to the following students who are currently participating on a training programme organised by Right Stuff Boxing. They have recently undertaken their first test which they all passed with flying colours, well done to Phoebe R, Harry D, Taleah J, Ethan P, Mason T, Will F and Brendon G.



Ruby S (Y13) wins Silver in Portugal – A report from Andy Whitehall (Right Stuff Boxing)

Ruby boxed her way into the Semi Finals on Saturday 15th December at the 3500 seat stadium in Odivelas, Lisbon, Portugal. Her opponent was a boxer from Cyprus in the Female Youth 60kg category. Ruby was superb, forcing two standing 8 counts and causing the referee to rescue her opponent in the second round.

In the finals on Sunday 16th December, she met England and GB international Ellis Hopkins of City of Leicester Boxing Club and a veteran of 30 contests compared to Ruby's 15 bouts. Ruby put in the best performance of her boxing career matching Hopkins blow for blow. Clearly winning the third round but losing on points by the narrowest of margins (1 point on 2 of the score cards) to take a Silver medal in the tournament.



Future Events

- **Rotary Young Photographer Competition** – Closing date Wednesday 13th February 2019. See Mrs Gannon for further details and an application form
- **Year 10 Work Experience Week** - All Year 10 students will be undertaking their work experience placements from Monday 8th July to Friday 12th July 2019.
- **Year 11 End of Year Prom** - Our Year 11 Prom has now been confirmed and will take place on Monday 1st July 2019 at The Moathouse, Acton Trussell.

**Have a fabulous Christmas break
and we look forward to
welcoming students back in
school on
Tuesday 8th January 2019!**

**Staff Inset - Monday 7th January
Closed to students**

