



Sir Graham Balfour School

Member of Sir Graham Balfour Multi-Academy Trust

Our Ref: MMM / VM

17th February 2023

Dear Parents and Carers,

I hope that this letter finds you all well. As we reach the halfway mark of the school year, I would like to bring you up to date with some important reminders and news from the school.

As always, we have had a busy half term. Our Year 13 students have been receiving their university offers. They are working incredibly hard and fully deserve the recognition of getting offers from some of the country's top universities, including Oxford, Cambridge, Manchester and Lancaster. Our Year 11 students have also been completing their applications to carry on their education with us at Sir Graham Balfour Sixth Form or making their applications to a variety of colleges and for apprenticeships. They are entering a really important time, with Pre-Public Exams (PPEs) taking place after half term providing a real impetus to their preparations for the GCSE and A level exams which begin on 15th May. Years 7 - 10 have had a PSHE day focused on careers. They got to speak to wide range of employers and higher education providers in our Careers Fair and also had a wide variety of tasks and challenges to complete during the day. Year 9 are now making some very important decisions about their future as they are picking their GCSE options. Years 7 and 8 are experiencing the full range of school life, from completing their first set of assessments, to playing in our sports teams and taking part in our Faith Trail and LEGO robotics trips.

The cast and crew of Matilda are busy rehearsing and getting ready for the big day on Wednesday 22nd March when they will premiere the production. We have three shows running on Wednesday 22nd March, Thursday 23rd March and Friday 24th March. Tickets cost £3 for adults and £1 for under 18s and can be purchased from our school finance office from Monday 27th February. It would be lovely to see the school hall packed out for these performances, so please do come along.

NEU Strike Action - Arrangements for Wednesday 1st March 2023

The National Educational Union (NEU) will be staging the second day of their strike action as part of their formal trade dispute with the government on Wednesday 1st March. The latest information we have is that whilst talks have been taking place between the unions and the government covering a range of issues such as teacher recruitment and pay, no progress has been made in resolving the issues to avoid this strike action. At Balfour we play a big role in teacher training to support the recruitment of subject experts to teach here. We are the lead school for the Stafford Hub for Teacher Training and through this we know that the national and local picture in the recruitment of trainee teachers for the 2023-24 academic year is already proving extremely challenging, especially in subjects such as Maths, Science and the languages. The significant concerns that the governors and I have regarding teacher recruitment in the future remain, and I have shared these concerns with our local MP.

Please see below for details of our arrangements for **Wednesday 1st March only**. As before, these arrangements are a pragmatic response to the impact of strike action by our colleagues on that day.

- School will be open for students in Year 7, Year 11 and Year 13 only.
- School will be closed for students in Years 8, 9, 10 and 12. Students in these year groups should remain at home and they will be provided with remote learning or directed revision to complete on the day of the strike.

- School buses will run as normal for students in Year 7, Year 11 and Year 13. The canteen will also be open as normal in school.
- All after school and lunchtime clubs will be cancelled.

Further strikes are planned for Wednesday 15th and Thursday 16th March. If these go ahead, then we will be in touch prior to the strikes to confirm the arrangements.

Mobile Phones, Air Pods and Social Media

I'd like to remind you of our clear rule regarding mobile phone and Air Pod use in the building. Students are not allowed to use their mobile phones or listen to music through Air Pods in the building. During lessons mobile phones should be switched off and left in bags. This rule is in place to ensure that these items do not cause distractions or disruption to learning. We will confiscate them if students are caught using them inside the building.

I am sure that you are well aware of the many challenges that the world of social media brings to your children. In school our pastoral team spend significant amounts of time dealing with the aftermath of issues on social media. We also dedicate a significant amount of time in our PSHE programme to educating students on being safe online. The issues we deal with range from making nasty or abusive comments about people to the spreading of rumours, photos or videos. I can assure you that we will always provide our full support to any student who is on the receiving end of this type of deeply unpleasant behaviour. However, our ability to stop this behaviour from taking place is significantly limited by the fact that we do not have control over the content put onto social media, especially that posted outside the hours of the school day. Please do support us in dealing with these issues by being aware of what your child is posting online and, if necessary, speaking to them about it. You can always contact the school for advice and support if you do have any concerns or queries. We will also be arranging after school information sessions for parents on dealing with social media, so please do keep a look out for these dates.

Uniform

As we make our way through these difficult financial times, I'd just like to remind everyone about our uniform swap shop where parents/carers can bring in pre-loved items and swap them for the "next size up". We do have a wide stock of uniform available in school and we can also help if there are difficulties in purchasing school uniform. Please contact Mrs Metcalfe (smetcalfe@sirgrahambalfour.staffs.sch.uk) or Ms Travis (ttravis@sirgrahambalfour.staffs.sch.uk) for further details.

I hope that this letter gives you a flavour of all that we are doing as a school to provide your children with the opportunities and care to enable them to leave Balfour with the very best GCSE and A level results possible. We know that it is a team effort and we are incredibly grateful for the great support that you provide to your children and to our school.

Yours sincerely



Mr M Mason
Headteacher