

PRINCIPAL: S.W. BLACK, M.Sc.



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6th January, 2021.

Dear Parent/Guardian,

I hope that this finds you well at the commencement of 2021. I would wish to extend a “Happy New Year” message to you and your family.

Despite the numerous challenges which we have faced since March, the past twenty-four hours have perhaps seen some of the most significant changes to impact upon our school in a single day. Since my letter of 31st December, 2020, unfortunately, the deteriorating situation posed by COVID-19 has necessitated further changes to education in Northern Ireland. We all recognise the importance of keeping schools open given the damage that school closures can have on pupil mental health and well-being and that, no matter how well managed any remote learning programme is, how the removal of face-to-face learning impacts on each child’s educational experience. However, it is evident that the public health situation makes it impossible for schools to remain open at this time.

All pupils, other than vulnerable children or the children of key workers, will be taught remotely for this “half-term”, with face-to-face teaching resuming no earlier than Monday, 22nd February. If your child fits into this category and you would wish him/her to attend school during this period, please complete the Google Form by clicking on the link [Supervision in school 11 Jan to 12 Feb 2021](#). Supervision will be provided for these pupils and we would ask that they attend in school P.E. kit as physical activities may be included as part of the school day.

Your son/daughter should now be fully engaged with remote learning and further information on this has been, and will continue to be, forwarded to you by Mr. N. Patterson (Vice-Principal). Usage of the on-line learning platform is being monitored and we will inform you if your son/daughter is not engaging with the learning programme. During this period, all pupils should be ready to start their school day by 9.15 a.m., as would be the case normally, and registration will take place each morning through the agreed Head of Year Information classroom. Details of this will be provided by Mr. R. Ross but I am certain that you would support us in seeking to ensure that all our young people establish clear routines for the next six weeks.

In addition to the academic tasks to be undertaken, a range of pastoral messages will be delivered through the “Head of Year Information” classrooms and additional links to physical recreation activity will be provided. We hope that your son/daughter will engage with these in the days ahead.

Today we have learned that all GCSE, ‘AS’ and ‘A’ level examinations due to take place in this academic year have been cancelled but, as yet, no clarity has emerged on how grades in the external examinations will be awarded. We trust that whatever plan is put in place, it will deliver a fair and consistent way of grading the qualifications and, very importantly, to allow the young people to progress without hindrance. In these circumstances, it is vital that pupils in Years 12 – 14 continue to cover the curriculum, as directed by their teachers, in order that we, as a school, have objective and verifiable evidence to support any judgements which the school may have to make as part of the grading process. Due to the current school closure, it will not be possible to hold ‘mock’ examinations for pupils in Years 12 – 14 as planned and we will reschedule assessments, as best we see fit, once further clarity on this year’s GCSE, ‘AS’ and ‘A’ level grading processes has been provided.

We fully recognise the uncertainty and frustration that this decision will cause but please be assured that we will seek to do all that we can to support any of our pupils. As soon as further information becomes available, it will be forwarded to you but, in the interim, it is vital that young people continue to broaden their knowledge and diversify their skills through our learning programme.

While the school buildings may be effectively closed and external examinations cancelled, other aspects of our work continue in the best interests of our young people. Parent consultation events, via telephone, will take place for parents of pupils in **Year 8 (Thursday, 4th February, 2021)** and **Year 10 (Wednesday, 13th January, 2021)** – details of the appointment process will be forwarded to parents by Mr. T. McLeister (Vice-Principal). Careers interviews, again via telephone, will be organised over the next few weeks for pupils in **Year 10** and **Year 12** as they seek to make subject choices for GCSE and ‘A’ Level respectively. **Wednesday, 13th January** will be a Staff Training Day and therefore pupils will not be required to engage with the learning programme on that day.

During the period of closure, we wish to maintain appropriate means of communication. Pupils will continue to have access to their teachers through Google Classroom, while parents may contact us by e-mail at info@balacademy.ballymena.ni.sch.uk or by telephoning the School Office which will be manned during normal working hours (Monday to Friday 9.00 a.m. to 4.00 p.m.).

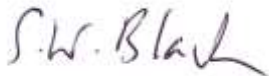
I appreciate that this is an unsettling time for everyone and, as further information becomes available on any aspect of our provision, I will continue to update you.

Once again, I thank you for your support and understanding.

Best wishes to you and your family.

Take care and stay safe.

Yours faithfully,



S.W. Black (Principal)



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