



To begin with thank you for forwarding your email address to us. Our text messaging system is great for the shorter and more immediate announcements, but in the current situation especially, the use of email, will be a more compressive way of getting in touch.

I want to thank you all for your co-operation and understanding over the past couple of weeks. While our digital work had been developing over the last couple of years, it had to take a mammoth leap from Friday 13th March when we suddenly found ourselves in the Distance Teaching and Learning space. We were not left with as much time to train our students in the use of the various platforms as we might have wished - I give great credit to those who have come on board so well and like so many of us, have learned as they have gone on.

I realise that Teachers are using a variety of Platforms and means to get work to their students – Edmodo, Google classroom, the Microsoft Office Suite and even email. Some Teachers had been using Edmodo and Google Classroom for some time and felt that their cohort of students were familiar with these platforms. In the Summer of 2019, we switched to using Microsoft Office 365 and as we moved along through the year, Staff began working on and receive training on the Microsoft Office 365 Suite (OneNote, OneDrive etc). Unfortunately, events snowballed before we could provide training to Students on these platforms. It has been a steep learning curve for us all, especially perhaps for our students. We are getting there – please continue to be patient and there is no doubt but that there is plenty of work online to keep young people busy!

Details of Online Teaching and accessing platforms: Digital work from home – Check list

To ensure you have the ability to liaise with your teacher while working at home you must be able to:

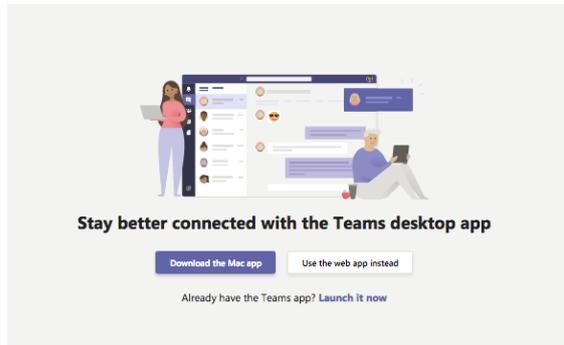
1.	Log on to Office 365 - https://www.office.com/ Sign in using your school email address and associated password	
2.	Open outlook and access to access your school emails	

We understand that some students have had difficulty accessing Office 365 programmes/applications (Outlook, OneNote, Teams, Word etc.). Here are a few points to remember.

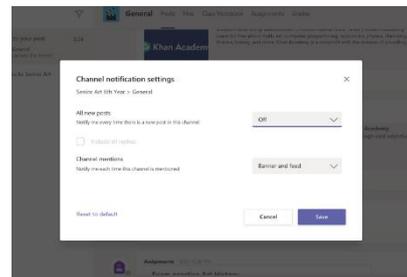
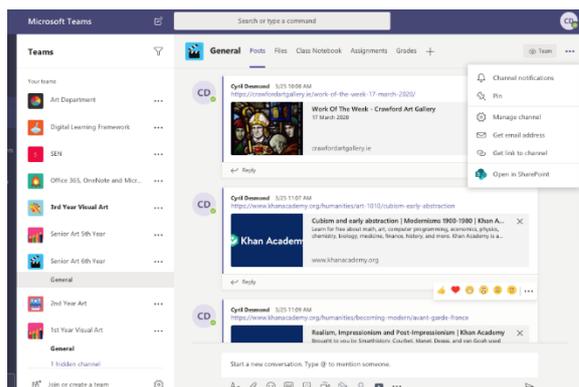
1. If you want to access Office356 from your mobile phone or tablet, you need to download each Office 365 app **individually** from App Store or Google Play. (See App names above.)
2. You can also access Office 365 apps through any browser (Safari, Chrome, Explorer etc.) on a desktop computer or laptop. First, sign in to your school email in Outlook. From here, **YOU CAN** access Office 365 programmes/applications by clicking the nine dots on the top left of the screen (this is the App Launcher).



- The first time you log onto Outlook from your desktop browser, you will see the following pop-up message. Click on the white button which says *Use the web app instead*.



- When you open the link to your Class or Subject Team, please ensure that notifications are turned on, so you can see exactly when school-work has been given. Click on three dots on the top right of the screen to open Channel Notifications and select **ON**. (See images below).



- Please remember that you can communicate with teachers directly through their school email if you have difficulty accessing these platforms and apps.

SNA Assignment.

You may have heard on the media that all Special Needs Assistants throughout the country, have been asked to register with a Public Servants Assignment scheme. This may result in SNA's being transferred to support the HSE in their efforts against Covid 19. If this does happen, our SNA Staff will not be available to link in with the students who were in their care during school time. If this situation materialises, I would ask that if your son/daughter has SNA access, and you have issues or concerns, please email us on info@balcs.ie

Obviously when schools reopen, our SNA's will be back to us.



State Examinations:

Yesterday evening, the Taoiseach, Leo Varadkar, made a firm declaration that the State Examinations in Junior Cert and Leaving Cert would go ahead. Hopefully that announcement will end the uncertainty for our 3rd, 6th and Leaving Cert Applied Students. Our teachers are issuing work all of the time – it is very important that students pick up on that work, as this will be the main source of preparation that you will have until we return to school. If you have not been applying yourself as well as you should have since the 12th March when the schools closed, use the Easter break to catch up.

Practical Work: The State Examinations Commission has expressed an intention to include practical work and project work as part of the examinations. The deadline for this work has been extended to the 15th May. We are awaiting further clarification on this and will let you know as soon as we have that information.

Fees – students are advised to continue to pay their examination fees or log details of their medical card if they have an up to date one of these. In the days prior to the closure of schools, Leaving Certs were given a letter with the instructions for paying fees – this contained a PIN to access the fees portal on the State Examinations Commission's website. The same letter was posted to Junior Certs and Leaving Cert Applied students. All matters relating to fees must be directed to the SEC, **the school is not involved in collecting money for the exams**. Once you have paid your fees or inserted your medical card details, there is a "Proof of Payment/Medical Card" section that must be posted to the school. Please remember that it must be posted, as school buildings were officially closed on Monday 30th March.

The telephone number of the State Examination Commission is 090 6442744 or there is a facility to email once you click on the fee portal tab on the home page of the State Examinations Commission's Website.

Continued support available on line from Chaplain and Guidance Counsellors.

The Chaplain and Guidance department will continue to be available to all students online during the school closures. They will be available via email during the normal school day. Students can contact the above via school emails. Students wishing to avail of one to one counselling supports can do so by sending an email to request an online appointment. The student and Chaplain/Guidance Counsellor will choose the method of contact. Communication will be between Microsoft Teams phone call or phone call on parents' phone. Chaplain/Guidance Counsellor will continue to adhere to Child Protection Procedures.

Students can contact the above via school emails at: annmarie.whelan@balcs.ie, anne.fleming@balcs.ie and grace.ocarroll@balcs.ie



Young People Socialising:

As we enter the holiday period, and hopefully some fine weather, our young people may be tempted to go out to meet up with friends. Obviously this is neither acceptable or appropriate in the current situation. The following is a notification from the Department of Education and Skills sent to us on the responsibility we all have to maintain social distancing and comply with current restrictions to help stop the spread of Covid 19:

As you will have heard there has been a further announcement by the Taoiseach that, in line with public health advice, schools will remain closed until 19 April. In addition to maintaining ongoing engagement with students, one really important message you can assist with, is to convey to students, the absolute need to practice social and physical distancing, and to minimise physical contact with each other, to help avoid the spread of Covid-19. This should include advice to avoid meeting up and in all circumstances to adhere to HSE guidelines. As part of your school community, parents and guardians should also be urged to support their children to maintain the restrictions on congregating for the safety of all in their community. In order to support you in getting this important public health message across to your school communities information notices (in 17 different languages) are available here:

www.hse.ie/eng/services/news/newsfeatures/covid19-updates/partner-resources/covid19-translated-resources/

Twitter

We have a very active Twitter account where we tweet items relating to our own school and retweet items of interest for our students and you their Parents. If you have not yet done so, download the Twitter app – it is for Student and Parents – and our Twitter handle is @balcsie

End of the Term.

This term has ended in an unprecedented way. We are very conscious that it has been a difficult time for you our families, as you not only get to grips with the Distance Learning that we are providing, but many of you are adapting to changes in your own personal and family circumstances as well. For the students who have worked so hard and been ever present with us, I want to say well done. I know that others have tried to stay in touch but issues around technology and broadband have caused them huge frustration. Thank you to this cohort of students for sticking with it. If your son/daughter falls into the category of “yet to engage”, I would ask these students to not let time pass unproductively – there will not be time to redo the work that is being covered now when schools open.



All of that said, I would again like to thank, you our families, most sincerely, for everything that you have done over the last couple of weeks. Thank you for your patience and understanding as we moved an entire school community of approximately 900 people online.

The Easter Holiday period begins at 3.45pm today, Friday 3rd April. We are working to a return date to school of 20th April as per the official announcements from the Government at this time. We know nothing around any possible extension of the date for opening. Over the next couple of weeks, I urge you to listen to all official announcements and updates – this is largely where we get our information also.

As we begin a much needed holiday period, after a couple of very fraught weeks, I ask our exam students to do what you would have planned to do in terms of work during this holiday time. 5th Years may also receive some work from their teachers, but I urge you to plan your approach to it. All other students (and indeed you their parents) should be able to step back completely from the work. I will be asking our Teachers to take a step back also, so unless they have asked to do otherwise, I would appreciate if you could refrain from contacting them over the next couple of weeks. Indeed, all of us are going to take a break and indeed have been advised to do so by our Managerial body the Association of Community and Comprehensive Schools. The main point of contact with us remains the email info@balcs.ie I would appreciate it, however, if you would only contact that in the case of an emergency during the next couple of weeks.

Finally – I hope that you all continue to look after yourselves – stay safe and stay well.

Kathleen Lowney

3rd April 2020