

15<sup>th</sup> September 2014

Dear Parents & Carers,

### **Homework, prep sessions and "Show My Homework"**

We thought it would help to send home a newsletter specifically about some **improvements we have made to homework this year**.

I think it is fair to say that homework is one of those things that a school can never really get "right" as everyone has different views on what is appropriate, in terms of quantity, frequency and type of task set.

During the past two years I have had roughly as many families and students tell me we set too much homework as tell me we set too little, so **I think we have broadly been in the right area in this regard**.

As a teacher, I value the way a good homework task can shine a light on what students have – or haven't – grasped from a lesson. As a parent I know that if it's not done right homework can be a major source of stress for students and their families.

However, as Principal **I have become increasingly convinced that we need to change how we approach homework overall** if BFS students are to leave us with the knowledge of the world & exam results that we want for them. In short, we need to ensure that:

- **more homework is set**, full stop;
- **staff are consistent** in the frequency & amount set, and following up non-compliance;
- **homework tasks are focused**, of high quality and generally capable of being done alone;
- **students are clear when they will receive homework**, and when it is due in; and
- **families know the homework timetable** too.

### **What we have done to improve things...**

There are FOUR main things we have done to achieve the five things above. We have:

- 1) drawn up clear **guidance for teachers** on when (& what) to set as homework;
- 2) created **homework timetables** for all year groups;
- 3) carved out daily **prep sessions** in school to enable some homework to be done here; and
- 4) **subscribed to [www.showmyhomework.co.uk](http://www.showmyhomework.co.uk)**, so that ALL homework set can be logged by teachers and viewed by students and their families anywhere.

### **How much homework to expect for your child...**

Obviously **this will vary from day-to-day, depending on which subjects students have when**. It will also vary across year groups.

- For Years 7, 8 and 9 we have asked staff to ensure homework tasks take no longer than about 20 mins each
- For Years 10 and 11 task should be about 30 mins.
- **Year 7s** will average around 3 pieces of homework a day (**so around an hour**)
- **Year 8s and 9s** will average 4 pieces a day (**so around 1½ hrs in total**)
- **Years 10 and 11** will average 4 pieces a day (**so ~2hrs daily**)

This does mean that your child will have more homework at BFS than elsewhere – and we make no apologies for this as we are convinced it will help them achieve better outcomes. However, **once you factor in the daily prep sessions, they shouldn't have more work to do outside of school than local state or private schools.**

### **Keeping track of what your child should be doing...**

Attached to this letter should be **the school homework timetable** – this shows what subjects should set homework on which lessons on which days over the fortnight of our timetable.

(For years 7, 8 and 9 you just need to identify your child's form group; for years 10 and 11 you need to identify which science group they are in.)

**Teachers will still expect students to note down in their planners what homework is set each lesson** – but to help families and the school keep track of what is *actually* being set (as opposed to what students say is being set) we have subscribed to a service called [www.showmyhomework.co.uk](http://www.showmyhomework.co.uk). (Many thanks to Mr Moore & Mr Donald for sorting this out.)

If you go to this website and search for "Bedford Free School" you will see a calendar with EVERY homework set in the whole school! You can filter by year group, teacher, class and so on – you should be able to find any homework your child has been set – and when it is due in.

So next time they tell you that they haven't been set anything, you will be able to respond:

*"Darling, I am sure you are right, but let's just check on Show My Homework shall we..? We wouldn't want you to miss anything & have to stay for extended prep, would we..?"*

In time, students will have their own individual logins, so that you can see just the homework set for them – for now though, it is easy to see what they have anyway.

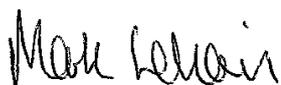
### **And we still have Homework Club every day...**

We expect that for most students daily prep sessions should enable them to stay on top of things. However, many students do like to get all their work done before going home – so remember: we still have homework club after school every day until 6pm (5pm on a Friday).

With the four changes we have made - stricter guidance for staff; fixed HW timetables; prep sessions; and [www.showmyhomework.co.uk](http://www.showmyhomework.co.uk) - we think that students should be able to get the most out of homework without too much stress.

That said, I know that we won't get everything right straight away & that it will take time for things to bed in properly. As ever, **we welcome your feedback on this and other aspects of school life**. I fully expect that some of you will think these changes are brilliant, and that a few will tell me we've got it wrong – please don't hold back either way.

All the best,



**Mark Lehain.**