

10th June 2015

Dear Parents & Carers,

Where has the time gone?!

First of all, an apology for not having written to everyone since Easter. Please don't interpret this as a sign that things have been quiet here at school. On the contrary – it has been *incredibly* busy, perhaps our busiest half term yet.

I want to use today's newsletter to share some of the events of the past 8 school weeks, and also to flag up some brilliant and exciting events that will be happening between now and the end of term.

Exams to date

As you will no doubt know, **we have had our first set of GCSE exams this term**. We have all been so proud of the way that our Year 11s have conducted themselves through this. Being so important, formal exams are always stressful, but with the support of staff and families, I think our students have been brilliantly prepared and supported through the experience.

A massive thanks **Mr Donald, Mrs Edge, Mrs Farooqui and Mr Burrows**, and to many others too, for organising everything & helping things go as smoothly as they have.

The very last exam is a week away – and then our students can let their hair down at the Leavers' Dinner on the 18th at The Swan Hotel. As to how they've done..? Well, more about that later.

End of Year exams for Years 7, 8, 9 and 10

There is no doubt that **one of the main reasons why the GCSEs have been going so how we have been preparing our students for them over the last few years**.

Starting **next Monday, Year 10s have their formal Exam Week** – and they should be well into their preparation for these already. They will be assessed in virtually every subject they are studying, and it is perhaps the first time all our students will experience the pressures of sitting a significant number of tests in a short period of time – a vital part of preparing for the real thing less than a year away.

For students in Years 7, 8 and 9, there will be formal tests in at least English, Maths and Science. They should be revising for these now – outcomes will help us to assess how they have done this academic year and which groups they will be placed in next year.

Year 9s & GCSE options

A few parents have been in touch asking when their child will be told which GCSE option subjects they have been allocated. Fear not – we haven't forgotten! There are one or two final tweaks to make to staffing & the timetable for next year - Mr Donald and myself are currently finalising details & **we should be in the position to talk to students sometime in the next week or so**.

Sports update – including Sports Day – 15th July

The past weeks have continued to see **BFS students take part in a huge number of sports fixtures** – including:

- the year 7 & 8 athletics league
- the rounders league for year 9 and year 10
- teams in the cricket league for years 7 & 8 and years 9 & 10
- the Year 9 & 10 District Athletics championships

And we still have the year 7 & 8 District Athletics championships, year 7 & 8 and year 9 & 10 cricket tournaments and year 9 & 10 volleyball all to come!

Under the inspirational leadership of **Mr Cox** this year, I think it's fair to say that BFS has seen a complete turnaround in the range and quality of sporting opportunities for all our students. We now have a level of participation comparable to any school in the region – and a firm base to build upon next year.

(NB If you want to keep a close eye on everything going on BFS sports-wise, then you can do so at www.twitter.com/BFS_sport)

Related to this – **I'd like to draw everyone's attention to our Sports Day on 15th July**. Once again, we will be taking the whole school down to the athletics stadium for the day, and families and friends are welcome to come and join us for the afternoon session. More details to follow, but please get that in your diaries now.

Art & Design Exhibition

I think it is fair to say that everyone has been blown away at the quality of the work produced by our GCSE Art & Design Technology students this year. I am delighted that **Mrs Scorer** and her team are putting on an exhibition of their work – **this will be in school on the evening of the 23rd June, 6.30pm – 9.00pm**. Everyone is welcome to come along – it should be a brilliant evening & a great way to celebrate their achievements to date.

Honk! – 14th – 16th July

A reminder that our first ever school musical is happening this term, under the supervision & inspiration of **Miss Goodship & Miss Wood**. Performances are at 7.30pm on 14th, 15th and 16th July, at Trinity Arts & Leisure Theatre on Bromham Road, & it's shaping up to be a production to remember.

We would love to see as many people as possible there. Tickets are £3/£2 and available from the school office now.

School Quiz Night – Friday 3rd July, from 7pm

A heads-up for our annual Quiz Night – Friday 3rd July. These have been a huge amount of fun in the past, and this year's should be the same again. Team sheets & further details will be out in the next few days – but get prepping now, to make sure Mr Donald doesn't have a chance to win...

Celebration Assembly

One of the highlights of last year was our whole-school end of year Celebration Assembly. We have booked the Park Inn hotel again, and will hold this year's on the **16th July, 1.30pm – 2.30pm**. **All are welcome** – it's going to be even bigger and better than last year's (and hopefully the air conditioning will work this time.)

Looking ahead to next year and beyond – all change here...

As you can see from the above, the summer term is going to be jam-packed throughout. However, as a school we are already well into our planning for next year and beyond too:

- the Government have abolished the National Curriculum "levels" that we have used to date in Years 7, 8 and 9, and schools have had to design their own, more effective ways of assessing and tracking students in their learning – thanks to hard work by **Mr Donald, Mr Moore and Mr Blake** we have now designed a BFS system that will *really* help students, families and teachers do this properly;
- with **completely new GCSEs being introduced this autumn and over the next few years**, all our teachers are busy planning for these significant changes;
- **Mrs Edge** and myself spent a long day last week interviewing companies to build our rooftop extension – we will be able to announce the outcome of this very soon, and we will then get straight into the design & planning parts of this process;
- **student numbers for Year 7 this September look to be our best ever** – with a small but steady stream of additional applications coming in since initial offers were made in March.

And of course, there is our first ever set of GCSE results, due out on August 20th. I think it is fair to say that **as a school we are as excited/nervous about these as our students are**. There is

tremendous interest, locally and nationally, in how we will do – particularly as we are the first brand new free school in the country to have a full set of GCSEs.

(If you're interested, I have written a piece about this for a national blog:

<http://www.newschoolsnetwork.org/what-are-free-schools/free-school-views/principal-blog-bedford-free-schools-first-gcse-students>)

We anticipate that **our overall performance will be extremely strong, both in terms of raw grades and the progress students have made since joining us.** That said, given all the (extremely necessary) changes to the exam system over the past few years, no-one can be completely sure about anything! All I know is that both the staff and students have thrown **everything** at it – everyone really did “go the extra mile”.

There is no doubt though **that seeing how the past three years has gone, I have had to reconsider my previous views on the pros and cons of the three-tier school system.**

Even though the teachers behind BFS were always keen to open a secondary school – to provide parents with diversity and choice - I have never really held strong views about whether a particular set-up was better or worse. This is no longer the case. Given the way education in England is now structured, with Key Stages, testing at 11, 16 and 19 and so on, **I now have no doubt that being able to work with students from Year 7 (rather than Year 9) is far more effective.** Our Year 10s and 11s will get a brilliant set of GCSE results this summer and next; our Year 9s are a different story altogether – being able to work with them from age 11, their current performance and mindset is quite something to behold!

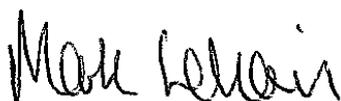
Given recent announcements by local lower-and-middle schools, it seems that others have come to this conclusion too, and the mixture of lower/middle/upper/primary/secondary schools is about to change once more. Whilst only 3 schools have announced so far a switch to primary/secondary, it is entirely possible that other schools will make similar moves in response.

So: **interesting times lie ahead.** Whatever other changes take place, the key thing for students here is that it will be business as usual at BFS, and they will be insulated from any disruptions elsewhere along the way as other parts of Bedford Borough go through this process.

Our school Trust has agreed that we will monitor these changes closely & consider ways that we can support parental choice & student standards. We stand ready to work more closely with interested schools. We've been asking ourselves questions such as “how will we continue to serve families in Kempston, as well as Bedford, if we reach the point of becoming over-subscribed in Year 7?” and “what can we do to learn from others & share our experiences, to better serve younger students and give our students more options post-16?”

The wonderful thing from the perspective of BFS families is that we already have a settled, focused, high-performing school here, with a dedicated staff body, committed families and hands-on Governors. **Whatever changes occur around us, we will be in a strong position to respond in ways that benefit our students & families, as well as the wider community.**

All the very best,



Mark Lehair.

Key dates

13th June	Saturday Taster Sessions – for prospective Year 5 and 6 students – 9.30am – 12.30pm
15th – 19th June	Year 10 Exam Week
18th June	Year 11 Leavers’ Dinner, Swan Hotel
22nd – 26th June	Year 10 Work Experience week Exam weeks for Years 7, 8 and 9
23rd June	Art & Design Exhibition – in school, 6.30pm – 9.00pm – all welcome
1st July	Transfer Day for students joining us in September
2nd July	“Meet your tutor” evening for new students
3rd July	School Quiz Night – 7.00pm onwards
10th July	Sports Awards Evening – details to follow
13th July	Bedford Borough Fiddle Fiesta – some Year 7s taking part in this
14th – 16th July	Honk! – school musical at the Trinity Arts & Leisure theatre
14th July	School “Mocksted”
15th July	Sports Day – Bedford International Athletics Stadium – all welcome to come and watch – details to follow!
16th July	End of Year Celebration Assembly – Park Inn Hotel – 1.30pm – 2.30pm – all friends & family welcome
17th July	Last day of term – school finishes for students at 1.30pm
20th August	GCSE results day
2nd & 3rd September	Staff induction days
4th September	New Year 7s in school Rewards Trip for Years 8 – 11
7th September	Schools starts – 8.25am, ALL students in school, week ONE on timetable