

9th December 2016

Dear Parents & Carers,

Advent(ures)!

We're already well into December, and with only five school days left before the Christmas holidays it feels as good a time as any to reflect on how the term has gone so far.

Before that however, a few reminders and notices:

"Once on this Island" – 14th and 15th December

Another reminder that the school musical is on next week, on Wednesday and Thursday the 14th and 15th. It will be over the road in Bedford College's studio theatre. Tickets have been selling well, but there are still some available from the main office.

(Please note, Miss Damon is *still* refusing my request to be allowed take part in the show. Obviously this is an outrage, and should any of you wish to express support for me online, the hashtag is #LetLehainSing)

Christmas Assembly – next Friday, from 2pm

We are really looking forward to having our annual whole-school Christmas Assembly at St Paul's Church next week. It will be on the very last day of the term this time, which is such a lovely way to finish things off.

For those of you whose child have joined us since last time, it's a real highlight of the school year - and a major logistical exercise too! We walk all our students over to St Paul's – in groups of 15, released from the site every 30 seconds, with military precision – and it is quite a sight to behold.

We have record numbers of students at BFS these days – 513 last times I looked – and so the church is going to be completely full. That said **we know that lots of friends and families like to come along and join us**, and it is always wonderful to see so many there. Please be aware that if you are coming along, it is going to be chock-a-block, so it could be standing room only – but please don't let that put you off!

After the assembly we will escort all students back to school, and then **release them a form group at a time from around 3.15pm** – it might be a bit later if it takes longer to get everyone back to school.

Consultation regarding our multi-academy trust

As I have mentioned in the last few newsletters, we are looking to form a multi-academy trust with Elstow School. **We are now running a consultation as we would like to hear the views of families, friends and the wider community about our proposals.**

Please do let us know what you think - you can find more information about our plans on our website: <http://www.bedfordfreeschool.co.uk/about/multi-academy-trust.php>

This term...

It really has been a busy and successful term, in a whole range of ways. We've welcomed and settled in a record number of Year 7 students, and lots of other students into other year groups

too. The new timings of the school day, and accompanying routines, have been introduced and we've seen the positive impact that they have made to our students and staff.

We've seen the number of students involved in performing arts grow again. As well as the musical next week, this **Wednesday evening saw 85 Year 7s and assorted other student musicians performing a musical version of Scrooge at the local Salvation Army's Congress Hall** – watched by over 200 people too! This of course is all on top of our usual "Music for All" programme, orchestra and choirs too.

Sports-wise, Mr Cox and the P.E. team have been as busy as ever – with 35 fixtures in 35 days this half term alone. We've also had quite a few students achieve personal sporting successes outside of school – including **Hayden Ledwick, who broke an UK archery U18s national record in a recent competition!**

Running alongside all of this, the 50 clubs available in our electives slots, and the academic lessons, we have had the continuing building works for our extension. At Easter the completion date was pushed back to the end of January, but the good news is that things are running to schedule, so **we can look forward to taking possession of it next term.** I for one cannot wait – and I'm sure Miss Damon is looking forward to having the activities studio to teach in rather than the canteen.

I'm writing this the morning after our Year 11 Progress Evening & Next Steps event. And I have to say, **it felt like one of the best evenings we have had at BFS since opening.** We had nearly 100% attendance from students and their families; every single local 6th form provider present to chat to them about their post-GCSE options; and incredible maturity and focus shown by everyone present.

Having sat mock GCSEs last month, we gave students their results from these – and **it looks like we are on track for another great set of exam results next summer.** Putting to one side the uncertainty we (and every other school in the land) face with new GCSEs in Maths and English, **our teachers are telling us that by nearly every measure this current crop of students should comfortably out-perform previous cohorts.**

We have a long way to go still, and lots of hard work is needed from every student and their family to get there, but we face 2017 with optimism and in good spirits. When one considers all the changes going on elsewhere, and the uncertainty that naturally brings, **it is a relief to be in a school that isn't undergoing upheaval, and has a track record of academic success** in exams, post-16 destinations, and all the other things which are so important in a child's education.

I'll write again next week to wrap up the term properly - have a great weekend

Mark Lehain.

P.S. In case you haven't noticed yet, next year local schools seem to be holding their Easter holidays at a variety of different times – some like us finishing on March 31st, some a few days later, and some on April 7th. I thought I'd flag it up in case anyone has children at other schools who are doing dates different to us – it is probably worth checking ahead.

Key dates for 2016-2017

14 th & 15 th December	"Once on this Island" – school musical – at Bedford College Studio Theatre (over the road from BFS)
14 th December	School Christmas dinner
16 th December	Annual Christmas Assembly – St Paul's Church – 2pm Last day of autumn term – student released from school ~3.15pm/3.30pm
3 rd January	Staff training day
4 th January	Students return for spring term – line up at 08.25am as usual
12 th January	Year 10 - Progress Evening (students leave 3.20pm, appointments from 5.30pm)
26 th January	Year 7 – Progress Evening (students leave 3.20pm, appointments from 5.30pm)
13 th – 17 th February	Half term holiday
w/c 20 th February	Year 11 - mock exams week
16 th March	Year 11 – Progress Evening (students leave 3.20pm, appointments from 5.30pm)
23 rd March	Y9 – Progress Evening AND GCSE Options presentation (students leave 3.20pm, appointments from 5.30pm)
31 st March	Last day of spring term
w/c 3 rd & 10 th April	Easter Holidays **Y11 GCSE revision sessions will run during this time**
18 th April	Start of summer term
27 th April	Year 10 – Progress Evening (students leave 3.20pm, appointments from 5.30pm)
1 st May	Bank Holiday Monday – school closed
4 th May	Year 8 – Progress Evening (students leave 3.20pm, appointments from 5.30pm)
29 th May – 2 nd June	Half term holiday (Venice trip also away during this week)
w/c 19 th June	Year 10 – End of Year exam week
w/c 26 th June	Year 7, 8 and 9 core subject exam week & Development Days Year 10 – Work Experience week
21 st July	End of summer term