

1st February 2017

Dear Parents & Carers,

Nearly halfway through...

Friday next week marks the halfway point in this academic year – where has the time gone?! The spring term is always a bit of a funny one: it is relatively short, but very intense in terms of the things to achieve in it, and all during the coldest, dampest and darkest part of the year.

However, I have continued to be impressed by the focus displayed by our students, and the efforts that they and the staff continue to put into things. Guests are constantly taken aback at the positive attitudes and high standards they see here and, while we know we are not perfect and can always strive to do even better, I think it appropriate to comment on it at this time.

Recent Progress Evenings

I want to thank people for such fantastic attendance at the recent Progress Evenings. We literally only had a handful of people not make it in without letting us know, and it is more evidence of the fantastic commitment of BFS families to their children's education.

I'd also like to thank everyone who came for their patience where we ran late on the night... We do try our best to ensure staff are able to get through their appointments to schedule, but it can prove tricky, and we are always thinking of ways that we can improve on things.

If for any reason you didn't manage to catch up with a particular teacher, or indeed ever want to find out how things are going for your child generally, **please don't hesitate to drop them an email to arrange a catch up or ask whatever questions you have.**

Year 11 mock exams – week commencing 20th February

There is a definite sense of anticipation growing among our Year 11 students as they approach their second, very important, Mock Exam week – which is immediately after half term. Their teachers are preparing all their classes for these – and **we know from the last few years that student performance in their February mocks is a really, really good indicator as to how they are going to do for real in the summer.**

As I pop in and out of Year 11 lessons, I am impressed at what I see. What they do in their own time in the evenings and weekends is vital too. They should be revising hard for their exams at this stage, and if your Year 11 child isn't yet doing two-to- three hours of homework or revision a day, then now is the time for you to ensure that they do. Hard work is the **only** route to success, I am heartened at how much of this I see in school, and if families play their part too, then everyone is a winner.

Year 10s – finalising work experience placements

A quick reminder to Year 10 students and their families who haven't yet finalised a work experience placement: **we need you to finalise this as soon as possible and return your form to Mrs Runnegar-Clark.** If you are struggling with this, let her know ASAP too, and we will see what we can do to help.

Sports joggers at Josens

We've been asked to flag up to families that our uniform supplier, Josens, now has the school jogging bottoms back in stock.

Travel rules/reminders

Flicking through previous years' newsletters, it is normally around this point that I remind all our families about the rules we have regarding the manner in which students make their way to school.

While we talk all students through these at the start of every academic year, and again at the start of each term, it's worth listing the key points again here so everyone has them:

- **The designated drop-off/pick-up spot for students coming by car is the Melbourne Street car park.** It's only a short walk away, and we have staff on the pedestrian crossing before and after school to manage the flow of people there.
- **Only people on business at Bedford College can use the college car park across the road** from us – please do not wait there for students as you will get picked up at some point, and may even get fined.
- In a similar vein – **please do not drop off or pick up students at Home Brook House or in the 5Site/Techies/Peking Palace car park next door.**
- Please don't ever ask your child to get out of the car at nearby traffic lights – even if you are running late. It can be incredibly dangerous, we forbid it, and if we see students do this, we will have to sanction them – so please don't put them in this awkward position.
- We staff the pedestrian crossings by Borough Hall and the King's Arms pub, to ensure our students can cross safely – and they should only cross on a "green man", even if there appears to be no traffic approaching on a "red man".

I appreciate that the above is a lot of "thou shalt not" – but it is vital everyone plays their part and sticks to the rules. We are on a road that can be incredibly busy, and we are also incredibly visible too. One of the conditions of us opening on this site was that we drill into students and their families safe practice around getting to and from school – thank you for supporting us in this.

Looking ahead – GCSE option requests & the school budget

I have had a few Year 9 students ask me when they will get the chance to make their GCSE option requests. The good news is that they won't have to wait too long before we start discussing the process with them – this will kick-off the latter part of this term.

As a smaller school, we are able to run our option request process a bit later than others – in order to give students and their families more time to consider what they want to continue with into Year 10 and 11. (Some schools do options in Year 8 or early in Year 9; we are proud that we can do it later and keep things flexible for people as a result.)

Alongside GCSE options, **the next couple of months is also the time when we start seriously preparing for the next academic year:** drafting budgets, looking at likely student numbers, the staffing level required, and so on. As a complete geek, I love this part of the job!

Looking ahead to 2017/18 and beyond we are in a really strong position. The school is full and likely to be significantly over-subscribed again next year, and our income solid as a result of this. I have read some scare stories in the press recently about the financial pressures schools are facing. While it is true that schools face flat funding and rising staff costs, I think it is also fair to say that we have been lucky and not faced the level of strain and cuts that other parts of the public sector have.

Savvy schools have got ahead of the curve and adjusted things in advance of the tightening, ensuring that their staff and students are protected as best they can be. At BFS we have been extremely cautious and built up reserves that give us flexibility should things get tighter. Given our healthy numbers, and the phenomenal management of finances by Mrs Edge, BFS is well placed to keep on going from strength-to-strength.

Multi-academy trust update

All being well, the work going on behind the scenes in setting up our multi-academy trust should have gone largely unnoticed, other than the public consultation. Just before Christmas we received approval to bring Elstow School into our Trust as partner, and we hope to complete this by April. Currently our academy trust has the catchy name of "The Bedford and Kempston Free School Trust" – which is quite a mouthful.

We've decided to rename it "Advantage Schools" – which is much easier to say, expresses some of what we believe our schools give our students, and also places us near the top of any list done in alphabetical order!

We're currently working our way through the sorts of things that one has to do in this situation: consulting with staff at both schools, keeping the Department for Education informed of progress, running a "TUPE" process, and so on. The key thing for BFS families and staff is that nothing is really changing any time soon, and any changes that evolve over time as the two schools work

more closely together will only happen if they have a positive impact on the education we can give students. (It's the only reason why I was keen to work on such things.)

Related to this: on the 19th January we had our interview at the Department for Education regarding our application to open a new secondary school in St Neots. We won't hear the outcome until late spring. As soon as we hear anything in this regard, we'll let everyone know.

I think that's it from me for now. I'll do a review of the year so far for everyone in my next newsletter, at half-term. In the meantime, as usual, we welcome any and all comments and feedback you may have for us as a school – please pass them on through the usual channels.

Mark Lehain.

Key dates for 2016-2017

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
13 th July	BFS Sports Day (Bedford Athletics Stadium)
21 st July	End of summer term