

20th October 2017

Dear Parents & Carers,

### **Where did that time go?**

It still feels like the new academic year is in it's infancy, and yet here we are at the end of half-term, with the clocks about to be turned back again and the darker mornings and evenings signalling that winter is on our doorstep.

This half term has been incredibly busy. It has been my pleasure to meet pupils throughout the school, and they have made all of the new staff and me feel very welcome.

We have welcomed so many new pupils into the school, in Year 7 and elsewhere. As in previous years, we ran a number of evening events for families, to try and ensure useful information was given out as early as possible. In particular, year 10 and 11 pupils, who are entering the most important years of their schooling so far, had small events where we went through expectations, support and clarified some things. I personally enjoyed meeting families and starting to get to know the community. One of the key messages that we are looking to maintain is the strong relationships between families and the school in support of our pupils - the interests of whom we maintain are paramount in everything we do. For the very few families who missed the year 11 presentation you should have a letter asking you to come to the repeat presentation on Thursday 9<sup>th</sup> November at one of 2 times, either 3.30pm or 6.00pm, because we think it is so important. We also hosted a Year 7 meet the tutor evening and it was great to meet with each new family.

Thank you to all parents and carers who have come to our events. As I regularly say when I present at parents' events, sometimes it can feel difficult to know what your part of the partnership entails. Most of it is genuinely showing up - it makes such a difference to achievement if parents know what is going on and have a shared understanding and purpose with pupils and the school.

Year 11 have started superbly this year, and have really focussed on their work. I'm grateful to the staff at BFS for their commitment - there are an enormous number of interventions going on before, during and after school in order to ensure that our pupils do as well as they possibly can. The staff team at BFS is undoubtedly strong, and we are hopeful that our GCSE outcomes this year will be the best that BFS has ever had.

Year 10 have also started well and had a great half term with their new GCSE courses. It has also been a pleasure to see the new Student Leaders, who are great with all their responsibilities to ensure the school runs smoothly. So confident are we with conduct around the school that we now ask the pupils to show visitors round, answering questions honestly and with candour. We further say to visitors that nowhere is out of bounds because we are confident of the quality throughout the school.



While I am talking about visitors, we offer tours to prospective parents or community members, but if current parents or carers want to see what goes on in the school and would like a tour, please do contact Mrs Logan via [info@bedfordfreeschool.co.uk](mailto:info@bedfordfreeschool.co.uk)

It is sometimes the case that parents arrive at the school or contact the school asking for support or help, or with frustrations. I am really grateful to parents who recognise that our receptionists and pastoral support staff do everything possible to be supportive and helpful. Occasionally, a very small minority can forget that their frustration does not lie with the colleague receiving that initial call and I would ask you to try to remember this. If we have made a mistake, we are always happy to learn from it; to investigate, and to talk it through to a resolution, in a manner that is in line with our values and home-school agreement.

Years 7-9 have also started well - in fact the school feels like it has settled quickly into a routine of excellence. Senior Teachers, including myself, try to walk into every classroom every lesson to check that pupils are as focussed as they can be and standards are very high indeed.

Attendance of pupils throughout the school has been excellent. With very few exceptions, pupils have very high attendance and we know that this puts them in an excellent position to achieve very highly. I recognise that this is the work of parents and carers and hence I thank you very much for keeping this expectation.

I hosted our first parents' forum, where parents gave positive and honest feedback to me on what the school does well. The group of parents that were there were absolutely determined to see BFS become the best that it possibly can. I really enjoyed that the feedback was robust, that we were able to agree and disagree openly but always with the best for the pupils in mind.

We also had an incredibly busy Open Evening and Open Morning. We anticipate being oversubscribed for Year 7 once again next September as a result, even with parents having more secondary school choices than ever before.

I have been particularly struck during my start to the school by the electives programme - it is amazing to see the pupils engaged in extra-curricular activities from setting up a business to understanding the intricacies of Greek mythology, computer coding or mindfulness colouring and creating models for their Warhammer games, for example. And that's not to mention the incredible range of sporting electives and sporting fixtures. And I can't mention sporting fixtures without mentioning that our Year 8 netball team won their league this term!

This term has also featured a wide range of educational visits. These have included the rewards trip to Thorpe Park, the traditional MK Dons trip, the year 11 Geography residential, the whole of year 7 on a faith tour round Bedford, and even today there have been trips to Games Workshop with the Warhammer elective and an Art trip to Fitzwilliam museum. In all cases, as you would expect, pupils' conduct has been impeccable.

I am really excited that we will be running a trip open to the whole of year 7 at the end of this year where we invite them to climb Mount Snowdon. This term we have been talking to pupils about climbing the metaphorical mountain to success – developing resilience, empathy, teamwork and hard work. For year 7, we are going to climb a mountain literally! Further details will be with year 7 parents when we return from the half-term break.

I've also been in conversation with Ms Goodship and Ms Barber about extending our school orchestra and building further on the incredible music provision we have at the school. I hope to be able to write more about this in my next newsletter. We do continue to run our 'Music For All' programme in Years 7, 8 and 9 – supported again this year by the local Salvation Army, who are delivering small-group brass lessons and loaning instruments, completely for free.

Over the next half term, we have the following events that I would like to remind you of:

Key dates for Autumn Term:

9 <sup>th</sup> November 2017	'Making the most of Year 11' for parents not able to attend the first one. 3.30pm or 6.00pm (letter sent home)
9 <sup>th</sup> November 2017	Class of 2017, GCSE Celebration Evening (by invite only)
10 <sup>th</sup> November 2017	Year 10 Art Trip to Cecil Higgins, Bedford
13 <sup>th</sup> – 17 <sup>th</sup> November	Year 11 Mock Examinations week
30 <sup>th</sup> November 2017	Year 11 Progress Evening and 'Next Steps' event
6 <sup>th</sup> & 7 <sup>th</sup> December 2017	School musical
14 <sup>th</sup> December 2017	Christmas Lunch
15 <sup>th</sup> December 2017	Christmas Assembly at St Paul's Bedford
3 <sup>rd</sup> January 2018	Back to School

In particular, I would like to point out how important the 30<sup>th</sup> November is for our Year 11 students. Not only will they receive their mock exam results that night (and if they are not revising now, they really should be!), they will have a chance to immediately discuss them with their teachers, and then meet representatives from every single local sixth form, college and apprenticeships provider. It is vital that students and their families take this opportunity to find out more about the kind of options they have for when they leave BFS – and having it all under one roof is the easiest way to do it.

We were given some feedback that it would help families if we published dates for all Progress Evenings well in advance – so please see the link to the website - <http://www.bedfordfreeschool.co.uk/events/>

I hope you find this useful.

On the subject of dates – term dates for this year and the next, are available on our website in an easy-to-use format – you can find them on the link - <http://www.bedfordfreeschool.co.uk/students/term-dates.php>

Finally, I'm aware that with so many new families to the school you may have forgotten that our designated drop off point is Melbourne Street carpark. Unfortunately, we've had one or two embarrassing conversations with our neighbours or local residents who are annoyed when parents haven't stuck to this, so I'd like to remind you of this drop off point. BFS staff are on duty at the crossings to ensure that all pupils get to school safely if you drop off at Melbourne Street.

Thank you again for your support this half term. I hope you and your families have a restful half-term break and I look forward to welcoming the pupils back on Monday 30<sup>th</sup> October at 8.25am.

With very best wishes,

Stuart Lock  
Executive Principal