

1st December 2017

Dear Parents & Carers,

As we approach the Christmas holidays I'm delighted to write to you with our latest newsletter, updating you on some of the activities and things that have gone on over the last half-term or so.

Mohammed Yasin visit

I was delighted to host a visit this month of our local MP Mohammed Yasin. Mohammed toured the school, met with our Head Boy and Head Girl, and was very impressed with the focus and dedication of the students. It was superb for us to host Mohammed and I thank him for taking the time out of his busy schedule to visit the school. I was able to talk to Mohammed about our ambitions for the school and its pupils, that we hope that all our pupils can go to university or have the option of doing so at 18, and that the majority will be able to go to "highly-selective" universities, and to talk about how we work in partnership with families and students to provide the best possible opportunities for our pupils.

High School Musical

The musical is next week! I cannot wait to see the product of the hard work of the "HSM team" led by Ms Damon, Ms Miller and Ms Goodship. They have worked so hard and I can't think of a better way to end a really successful really exciting term. I hope many of you have tickets and are coming and I look forward to seeing you there.

Year 11 Legacy

We hosted a brilliant celebration of our alumni from BFS – last year's year 11 pupils. They were in high spirits and we swapped amazing stories and reflections on their time at BFS. Staff and ex-pupils were celebrating superb results. It was such a pleasure to welcome them back. We also welcomed back founding Principal of BFS, Mark Lehain. Mr Lehain delivered a humorous and inspirational speech reflecting on the lessons he and the staff and student team had learnt from setting up BFS in 2012. I was inspired by the visit of this group – trailblazers who joined the school in year 7 when it opened. I spoke to all the pupils the next day in my morning address to ask them, 'wonder what their legacy will be, what stories they might swap, and what achievements they might celebrate in 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021 or 2022'.

Year 7 Applications

The efforts of our staff and our pupils – who are our best ambassadors of the school – have had such significant effect that we will once again be massively oversubscribed next year for year 7. I am delighted that BFS is now established as a beacon in Bedford, and really proud of the school. To this end, if parents haven't seen the school in the last year or so and would like a tour to witness for yourself the incredible and focussed atmosphere, I'd love to host you for a tour and coffee. Please contact Mrs Logan on info@bedfordfreeschool.co.uk

Visits to Bedford Free School

In early November, 15 Headteachers and Senior Leaders from schools across the country came to visit BFS. They wanted to see what it is that makes our school special. They were interested in the routines and structures, the very high expectations, our morning meetings, assembly programme, student leader initiatives, prep time, DEAR time and our lessons focussed on knowledge. Our 100% books and expectations with the achievement card were also a huge focus, as is the extensive CPD

we operate. You may not know that staff at BFS received professional learning every morning as part of our morning meetings before we go and get the pupils for the start of their day.

This reflects the excellent and growing reputation of BFS across the country. I'm especially proud that on these days we choose pupils to show our visitors round. They are not supervised or told what to say and the visitors always asked or say variants of two things:

"What amazing pupils you have – they are a credit to the school"

And

"is it always this calm – I didn't realise such a focussed atmosphere was possible".

The school continues to host visits from colleagues and education professionals once a month because we think that collaborating and learning from each other will benefit our pupils all the more, and we receive useful feedback from colleagues in other schools about how we can sometimes consider doing things even better.

Trips

Our extended school offer is a key part of our offer to our pupils and families. I know that you have agreed via our home-school agreement to support these trips and I thank you for doing so. I am pleased to report that we have had a significant number of successful trips this term. These include:

- A trip to the Fitzwilliam museum, Cambridge
- A trip to the Higgins Art Gallery and museum, Bedford
- Warhammer elective trip to Games Workshop
- Football trip to MK Dons
- The year 7 faith tours trip
- Geography trip to Flatford Mill
- A trip to the Imperial War Museum for the Passchendaele at Home initiative

One of my personal highlights of this term was the year 7 pupils who came to see me to exhibit the extraordinary amount of knowledge they gained from their faith tour trip. I learnt a great deal from them.

As you would expect, feedback from all of our trips has indicated that pupils behave impeccably and make us very proud.

Year 7 Snowdon trip

I am beyond excited for the Year 7 Snowdon expedition. I am negotiating with Mrs Leahy to try to get myself as one of the staff supervisors on the trip, but I'm not sure I'm going to be able to. This is a new tradition at BFS – we want EVERY group of year seven pupils to experience climbing a mountain. We will exhibit courage, resilience, determination, teamwork, and discipline in doing so, and we will do so as a whole team. This will significantly expand our pupils' horizons and open them up to new possibilities, and we believe it to now be a BFS entitlement. It is really important to me that all our year 7 pupils are able to attend. Please attend the parents' information evening on this **Tuesday, 5th December, either at 6.00 – 6.45pm for 7KB and 7LT or 7.00 – 7.45pm for 7AE and 7CD**, please do sign up and provide your deposit. If there is anything that is stopping you from enthusiastically allowing your child to go on this trip, please book a meeting in with me. Whatever the barrier – financial, cultural, or safety-worries – I expect to be able to put your mind at ease so that as we agreed in the Home School Agreement, our first group of trailblazing year 7s to climb Snowdon can be supported to participate in these wider extra-curricular events.

Year 11 Mocks and next steps evening

The year 11 evening was a huge success. My enormous thanks to the parents for the 97% turnout. While we strive for 100% and always will, I want to recognise that this is significantly higher than any other school I know of, and your support will make such a huge difference to the pupils' achievement. Pupils received concrete next steps in their subjects, were reassured that the 'six strategies' that make up the science of learning feel hard, but that's because they work – learning literally changes the brain and hence is hard, and were able to talk to representatives from 6th forms

and colleges. If there is anything further we can do with regard to advice for colleges and 6th forms for your child, please do let us know.

PE Update:

We have competed in 75 fixtures since the beginning of term in September. Sports we participated in are football, basketball, netball, sports hall athletics, badminton, table tennis, boys' rugby and dodgeball. All fixtures (apart from rugby in this case) are for boys and girls and for every year group. As always, if you want to play for the school team, we make sure you get to play for the school team and as a result 92% of our pupils represented the school last year.

Our year 8 netballers went undefeated in their league campaign to win the league. Our Under 15 girls football team finished runners up in their league. Finally, the Under 15 basketball girls were **district champions**. They are progressing to the county championships which will be held in the new year.

Passchendaele at Home:

Passchendaele at Home is a nationwide initiative for schools and community groups funded by the Department for Communities and Local Government, marking the centenary of the Battle of Passchendaele.

The project is a challenge to discover graves in the UK that belong to British soldiers who were wounded at the Battle of Passchendaele, Belgium, but who died of their wounds in the UK. 12 students from year 7 have earned a place on the project by performing fantastically in their opening history assessments. They have chosen their own soldiers to research from a database of those that fell during the time during and slightly after the Battle of Passchendaele. The students have used the National Archives to research census records, medal rolls and if they are extremely lucky, WW1 service records (two thirds of which were destroyed in German bombing in WW2).

Highlights include Daisy of 7LT researching Private Walter Henry Long of the Sherwood Foresters, who died of his wounds suffered at Passchendaele aged 19. She discovered that he lived in Leicester and assisted in the family business of beer making at the age of 13! He suffered gunshot wounds in the front line on the 2nd of August 1917 and died just over a month later back in England.

The students conclude the project with a visit to the Imperial War Museum on Monday the 4th of December to meet the creator of the project and to discover more about life in the trenches.

Christmas Lunch

As you will be aware, our Christmas lunch is on Thursday 14th December. The menu is roast turkey with trimmings, vegetable & cheese strudel or a packed lunch. A reminder that to have a Christmas lunch, pupils must pay £3 in cash, the deadline has been extended to Monday 4th December to Miss Carter or Mrs Forster in our Finance office.

Friday 8th December

A reminder that the school will be closing early on **Friday 8th December**. I am sorry that we were unable to publish this at the start of this term. We are fortunate that three of our colleagues were able to be trained by Doug Lemov of "Teach Like a Champion" fame when he was over from the United States, and we are keen that all of our staff benefit from this cascaded training. On that Friday we are closing 95 minutes early and my colleagues will be working well beyond this time going the extra mile. I simply couldn't see another time that we could carve out without closing the school slightly early and I thank you for your forbearance. We have of course offered to supervise an extended prep and homework club until 4pm if this causes your family any difficulty and ask that you email Mrs Logan if you would like to take advantage of this on info@bedfordfreeschool.co.uk

Christmas Assembly – Friday 15th December 2017

On Friday 15th December we will have our Christmas assembly. As is now tradition at BFS, all pupils are expected to attend and we will walk down to St Paul's church in the afternoon. This is a really lovely celebration of the term, of our family life and holidays and is a great event. I would like to invite pupils to join us. If you would like to do so, please contact info@bedfordreeschool.co.uk and while we cannot reserve you a place we do look forward to welcoming you.

Staff changes

We are sad to inform you that Janet Lewis, our brilliant SENCO, has left the school to care for her mother in her native South Africa. Mrs Lewis has been brilliant with our staff and pupils, and made such a huge difference to a significant group of families. We wish her the very best and thank her for her efforts. Mrs Herron, Head of School, will be the school's Acting SENCO, and Mrs Smith will be Acting Assistant SENCO. We are also expecting to make two Learning Mentor appointments next week.

In addition, we are saying goodbye for a second time to Jim McGrath. Mr McGrath stepped in at very late notice in September to cover a vacancy we had in Science, and we are very grateful to him. He has now progressed in his career and has an exciting opportunity that he had to take at a local school. We wish him well. He is always welcome back at BFS and I am grateful for his assistance. We also wish him well with his soon-to-be extended family.

The school is advertising for a science and a maths teacher with a flexible start date but either could be as late as September. If you have friends or family that are teachers, the unbelievable conduct of our pupils and their persistent hard-work makes BFS a great place to teach. Please do encourage anyone you know to contact me with a view to applying.

Volunteering opportunities:

Parents will be aware, I hope, that our **Combined Cadet Force** partnership is a strong one, offering unrivalled leadership opportunities for over thirty of our pupils. We are eager to recruit a member of the community to support our work with CCF. As with all appointments, these are subject to safeguarding checks, but if you have experience in the military, or if you don't, this is an incredibly rewarding thing to get involved in. If you feel you could give up your time, please contact me at the school.

In a previous newsletter I wrote and asked for volunteers to sit on our Local Governing Body as **parent governors**. Governance is an amazing role – insightful and rewarding but also hard work. We did have some interest, but in order to fulfil the requirements of our formal procedures, I will write to you separately requesting nominations and making arrangements for an election in due course.

Parking and drop-off

I am sorry to have to ask again that parents and carers do not drop pupils off in any road or car park other than our agreed drop off point at Melbourne Street car park. Most recently a small minority of parents have continued to drop their children off in Cardington Road and elsewhere. This has led to complaints to the school, and some embarrassing conversations. It is unfair on our neighbours and unfair on us to compromise the very good reputation of the school and I want to appeal to those parents and carers to please use our agreed point. Staff from BFS are on duty from 8am and at the end of the day to ensure safe crossings for our pupils, and we enforce 'only crossing at the green man' to keep our pupils safe. We would really appreciate your support with this please.

Thank you

Finally, I want to thank you all very much. The support you have shown your children over this term is the most significant factor in what has been a great term. It has been my privilege to witness significant progress over the term, and share in the successes of the young people. I want to also thank you for the welcome you have shown me over the last

Pupils have worked really hard over this term. I know that they will have some studying to do over the holiday period. But when it arrives I also hope that you have some time to spend with loved ones and on hobbies, and that you have a really enjoyable and restful holiday period.
With very best wishes,

Stuart Lock
Executive Principal

***Key dates:**

6 th & 7 th December 2017	School musical
8 th December 2017	Early Closure at 1.40pm due to extended staff training
14 th December 2017	Christmas Lunch
15 th December 2017	Christmas Assembly at St Paul's Bedford
3 rd January 2018	Back to School
11 th January 2018	Year 10 Progress Evening (school finishes at 3.20pm)
25 th January 2018	Year 9 Progress Evening (school finishes at 3.20pm)
1 st February 2018	Year 8 Progress Evening (school finishes at 3.20pm)
8 th February 2018	Year 7 Academic Mentoring meetings (by invite only)
12 th – 16 th February 2018	Half term (students back in on 19 th February)
19 th – 23 rd February 2018	Year 11 Mock exams
8 th March 2018	Year 11 Progress Evening & Mock results
22 nd March 2018	Year 9 Academic Mentoring & Options Evening
30 th March – 13 th April 2018	Easter Holidays (students back in on 16 th April)
26 th April 2018	Year 10 Progress Evening (school finishes at 3.20pm)
3 rd May 2018	Year 8 Academic Mentoring (by invite only)
7 th May 2018	May Bank Holiday (school closed)
10 th May 2018	Year 7 Academic Mentoring (by invite only)
14 th May 2018	GCSE Examinations begin
28 th May – 1 st June 2018	May half term
18 th – 22 nd June 2018	Year 10 Mock exams
25 th – 29 th June 2018	Year 10 work experience
12 th July (tentative)	Sports Day
13 th – 15 th July 2018	Year 7 Trip to Snowdon
20 th July 2018	End of Year Celebration Assembly! Park Inn Bedford

*Please note that all dates are subject to change and we will notify you as soon as any changes are made.