



BEDFORD  
FREE SCHOOL

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25<sup>th</sup> January 2023

Dear Parents/ Carers,

### **Regarding: Term dates 2023/2024**

Happy New Year! I trust that you had a good break and that your children are now well settled back into the routine of school this new year.

I've loved visiting each of our schools regularly. I'm very proud that we run exceptional schools where pupils can learn because teachers can teach. I want to thank you, therefore, for supporting your child's school and ensuring that children stick to our routines and focus on their learning.

I am writing attaching term dates for each of our four schools for the next academic year. **The 2023/24 term dates are at the bottom of this letter.**

My apologies that this is later than we had originally planned. This is because we have been talking to staff, our local authority partners, a selection of parents, and to other schools and trusts regarding **trailing** a small change in our term dates.

You will know that we endeavour to run the best schools in the country. To do this, we are unafraid to innovate and hence try new things. Our schools currently have features you will recognise including:

- a firm approach to behaviour – all children can learn and all teachers can teach
- an academic curriculum, including expert teacher instruction on reading in the early years
- an expectation that all pupils are entitled to extra-curricular opportunities

And of course, many other aspects. **Our schools are also open for longer than many other schools every day.**

Having learnt from some of the best primary and secondary schools in the country, we are looking to trial a slight tweak to our calendar this year.

Because the Autumn term is very long, particularly for pupils, I spoke to a number of parents in our schools at the end of the term about how we can support this further. Partly as a result of those discussions, we are looking to break up the Autumn Term with a 2-week half-term for pupils in October. This has been a fairly common approach taken by some very high-achieving

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schools, particularly in London. We have spent the last three months learning from their experience.

This means that, **in the first instance for 2023 as a trial**, we will have a 2-week half term in October. Schools will therefore be closed to pupils from Monday 23/10/23 to Friday 03/11/23. The 30<sup>th</sup> October – 3<sup>rd</sup> November is an additional week.

The benefits of this are:

- Pupils are more productive during the term
- Increased staff retention – we have excellent staff retention that bucks national trends for teachers (almost all teachers that move, move for reasons other than our schools, e.g. career progression, moving location) but at the same time many colleagues from our schools have said that while we take a reasonable approach to workload, the extra hours have meant that they can feel exhausted, particularly in the Autumn Term
- We are enhancing our efforts to attract the best teachers in the country – this has been one of the primary benefits from the schools we have learnt from as teachers have time to plan, prepare and assess
- Opportunity for families to plan in a substantial break
- Recognition of the extra time all our staff and pupils put in with longer school days and “going the extra mile”
- The opportunity to look at any works that need completing on our buildings

**We know that there are some drawbacks**, and the most important one is that **some families**, particularly at our primary schools, **may find it difficult to arrange extra childcare**.

Despite this being a relatively minor tweak to the school year which we firmly believe will make our schools better, we know that this may be an issue even with 9 months of notice. **That is the reason that we are seeking your feedback on anything we can do to make this work for you.**

In our discussions with high-performing schools that have moved to this model, they have advised us that a significant minority of parents have been nervous or unsupportive about the move in advance of the first year, but **overwhelmingly supportive afterwards**.

We are committed to working with you to give this the best chance of having a positive effect, and we know that we won't know every pressure on all of our families.

**We therefore ask you to fill out the linked brief survey by the end of the week:**  
<https://forms.gle/tHnFgH6n5yWwhjq36>.

We are really keen to see what we can put in place in the event that this causes your family any difficulties. Even if it causes you no difficulties, we would be really grateful if you would fill the brief survey out.

In investigating this move, we've already spoken to Local Authorities. Representatives from the Local Authorities that we work with have been supportive, though they have pointed out that Local Authority-led initiatives (any vouchers, holiday clubs that may exist) that run may not be available for our second week of that half term. We are therefore investigating, for example, whether we can run something ourselves, if required for the week of 30<sup>th</sup> October.

