



BEDFORD
FREE SCHOOL

www.bedfordfreeschool.co.uk

29.09.23

Dear Parents / Carers & Pupils,

A great start and coming up...

It has been such a positive return to school this Autumn Term. We have been incredibly impressed with the new year 7 and the year 10s and 11s have showed maturity as they have progressed onto GCSE courses and into their final year of GCSE exams.

We have an evening for Y7, 10 and 11 coming up, **Thursday 12th October**. Year 7 parent/carers will have an online (SchoolCloud) meeting with your child's tutor to check-in that they have settled in ok and to answer any queries, you will be sent a letter by email with full instructions. On the same evening there is an information evening for year 10 & 11 in the school hall which we urge every parent/carer (of pupils in these year groups) to attend, (from the Home School agreement signed by all parents: *"I will...attend all parent meetings..."*) You will also receive a letter by email inviting you to attend. Please see below for all other dates of Progress Evenings etc.

Visit from Dame Rachel De Souza (Children's Commissioner)

We were delighted to welcome Dame Rachel last week to have a look around BFS. She said she had heard great things about the school and her visit certainly didn't disappoint. She and her colleagues enjoyed a tour (led by Head Pupils Prenitha and Jessica) and spent some time talking to a fantastic, articulate group of pupils from all years (see BFS Facebook page for photos!) Following her visit Dame Rachel said "Fantastic visit to Bedford Free School ...absolutely stunning teaching and curriculum. Brilliant happy students who have given us so many solutions on how to make childhood better...Thank you for having us".

Dame Rachel has asked that we share a link with pupils so that they may take part in a survey for 'The Big Ambition':

[About this survey : The Big Ambition - Have your say! \(smartsurvey.co.uk\)](https://smartsurvey.co.uk)

Autumn Half Term Break

We have a **two-week** half-term now in Autumn. This is so that pupils may benefit from a longer break to rest and recuperate in what is traditionally a long, often cold, damp and dark term. The break this year runs from 23rd October to 3rd November (return to school Monday 6th November). This means that we can also benefit from using some of this time for additional revision sessions, trips or visits. This year for example the year 11 GCSE geography pupils are using three days in the second week to complete their residential field trip to Dorset. This avoids them having to miss valuable time in their other subjects.

Uniform and equipment

Remember that PE kit may only be worn on the day that a pupil has PE in their lesson, elective or fixture. It is not an alternative uniform. At BFS we do not have a summer uniform per se, however, long black school shorts are an option (all year round) and, in the Summer Term (and in the first few weeks of October) only, jumpers are optional. Jumpers must be worn to school at all other times. This year jumpers become compulsory again from 2nd October 2023 until 16th April 2024.

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RESPECT • HONESTY • HIGH EXPECTATIONS

Mini white boards (MWB)

This is a resource that pupils are asked to use regularly in most of their lessons. It is an amazing tool for teachers to track pupils' understanding (and enables teachers to act accordingly). Using MWBs with pupils enables teachers to check ALL pupils' understanding in one go (rather than hands up where only a minimal number of pupils can demonstrate understanding). Thank you to all families who have ensured their child has and always brings a MWB and WB pen to school with them. If families of year 7 pupils have been unable to organise a MWB and pen for their child, please ask your child to tell their tutor who can supply a long-term loan.

Your child and online Activity

Please monitor your child's online activity very carefully. These are words that some of you may have heard me say already:

In 2017 the American psychologist Jean Twenge discovered the following:

- The arrival of the smartphone radically changed every aspect of teenager's life including:
- Negatively affecting sleep, increasing rates of depression, anxiety, loneliness, and even suicide has spiked suddenly to all-time highs.
- Intellectual lives have also been altered for the worse – reading for pleasure has all but disappeared: in 1996 half of teens read regularly and in 2017 it was found that only 1 in 10 do.
- The 'like' buttons found in apps like Instagram and Facebook are addictive – they create short-term dopamine hits which give a sense of well-being. But if you don't get the likes this is much worse and can induce low self-esteem. It used to be that, if you were bullied at school, you could go home to your family and leave that negative environment – now it is in your pocket.
- Screen time degrades the ability to concentrate and stay focused for long periods of time. Attention is central to every learning task and the attention paid by learners shape their outcomes.
- Because even more time was spent online. the pandemic has worsened this situation. I cannot stress enough how worrying the situation is. There is a mental health crisis, and it comes directly from online activity.

The good news is there are antidotes. Increasing face-to-face social interaction, sharing laughs together, exercising, playing sports, and STAYING OFF THE PHONE. Attending a school, Bedford Free School, which doesn't allow phones to be seen and heard helps – it means that pupils haven't got their nose in them all day and believe me at some schools this is not the case. **YOU can also help by restricting screen time to as little as possible and CAREFULLY monitoring what your child is doing online. Ensure the phone stays with you when they do their homework and when they are revising and studying.**

At BFS our job is to teach your child lots and lots of knowledge and the procedures, structures and routines are in place to enable your child to learn.

For further advice:

- <https://www.internetmatters.org/resources/ukcis-social-media-guide-for-parents-and-carers/>
- <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/online-safety/social-media/>
- <https://www.ncsc.gov.uk/>

Drop off / Pick up

For new and old parents/carers this is a reminder that a section of the agreement between us and you states that you:

- ...only **drop your child off** in the designated travel plan place of **Melbourne Street Car Park, (and absolutely NOT outside school).**

This arrangement is in accordance with requirements from the Local Authority and in order for us all to keep pupils, families and others using the St John's roundabout safe.

Time off for religious holidays

We have an incredibly diverse community and therefore diverse pupil body at BFS. We are a harmonious community with pupils of many different nationalities and religions. As such we appreciate that occasionally pupils may request time off school to observe and participate in a religious holiday. We encourage this and, having taken guidance from community leaders and religious leaders, despite the well-known impact of absence from school we will support by authorising one day per religious celebration.

We need you!

We are excited to provide the opportunity to parents, pupils and staff to contribute to a conversation around how to tackle big issues such as gender and race within the curriculum. We would like to invite members of the BFS community to join us for an evening of discussion from **4.30-5.30pm on Monday 16th October**. There will be tea and biscuits! If you would like to attend, please register your interest by email at cmcperson-george@bedfordreeschool.co.uk

Yours faithfully,



Jane Herron
Principal

(See Key Dates below)

Bedford Free School – Key Dates 2023-2024	
Autumn Term	
Thurs 12 th October 2023	Year 7 Settling in and info evening (via School Cloud- details to follow) Welcome to Year 10 & Work Experience Getting the best from Year 11 evening (information to follow) (normal finish time -4pm)
<i>Mon 23rd October – Fri 3rd November 2023</i>	<i>2 Week HALF TERM (school is closed)</i>
Mon 6 th November 2023	Pupils back to school
Mon 6 th November – Fri 10 th November 2023	Year 11 Mock Exams
Thurs 30 th November 2023	Year 11 Progress Evening (school finishes at 3.30pm)
Fri 1 st December 2023	School starts later – gate closes at 8.55am
Fri 15 th December 2023	Christmas Lunch
Tues 19 th December 2023	Christmas Assembly
<i>Weds 20th December 2023- Weds 3rd January 2024</i>	<i>CHRISTMAS HOLIDAYS</i>
Spring Term	
<i>Weds 3rd January 2024</i>	<i>Staff training day (school closed for pupils)</i>
Thurs 4 th January 2024	Pupils back to school
Thurs 11 th January 2024	Year 10 Progress Evening (school finishes at 3.30pm)
Fri 12 th January 2024	School starts later – gate closes at 8.55am
Thurs 25 th January 2024	Year 9 Progress Evening (school finishes at 3.30pm)
Fri 26 th January 2024	School starts later – gate closes at 8.55am
Thurs 1 st February 2024	Year 8 Progress Evening (school finishes at 3.30pm)
Fri 2 nd February 2024	School starts later – gate closes at 8.55am
Thurs 15 th February 2024	Year 7 Progress Evening (school finishes at 3.30pm)
Fri 16 th February 2024	School starts later – gate closes at 8.55am
<i>Mon 19th – Fri 23rd February 2024</i>	<i>HALF TERM</i>
Mon 26 th February 2024	Pupils back to school
Mon 26 th – Weds 6 th March 2024	Year 11 Mock Exams
Thurs 7 th March 2024	Year 9 GCSE & Options Evening (normal finish time – 4pm)
Thurs 21 st March 2024	Year 11 Progress Evening (school finishes at 3.30pm)
Fri 22 nd March 2024	School starts later – gate closes at 8.55am
<i>Fri 29th March – Mon 15th April 2024</i>	<i>EASTER HOLIDAYS (Good Friday - Fri 29th March and Easter Monday - Mon 1st April)</i>
Summer term	
Mon 15 th April 2024	Staff training day (school closed for pupils)
Tues 16 th April 2024	Pupils back to school
Thurs 25 th April 2024	Year 10 Information Evening- destination and Mocks (normal finish time – 4pm)
<i>Mon 6th May 2024</i>	<i>BANK HOLIDAY (School is closed)</i>
Thurs 9 th May 2024	Formal GCSE Examinations begin
Thurs 9 th May 2024	Year 8 Preferences Evening (normal finish time – 4pm)
<i>Mon 27th May – Fri 31st May 2024</i>	<i>HALF TERM (BANK HOLIDAY – Mon 27th May)</i>
Mon 3 rd June 2024	Pupils back to school
Mon 24 th June – Thurs 27 th June 2024	Year 10 Mock Exams
Mon 1 st July – Fri 5 th July 2024	Activities Week/Year 10 Work Experience
Thurs 11 th July 2024	Sports Day (tbc)
Thurs 18 th July 2024	Year 10 Progress Evening/next steps event (school finishes at 3.30pm)
Fri 19 th July 2024	BFS End of Year Celebration Assembly
<i>Mon 22nd July – xx September 2024 (return dates tbc)</i>	<i>SUMMER HOLIDAYS</i>