

17th May 2016

Dear Parents & Carers,

The calm before the storm...

And so we have finally started the GCSE exam season "proper"!

Yesterday saw 102 Year 11s sit the first half of their GCSE R.E. exams. This year we are doing the exams off-site as we wanted students to be away from the building works. It also means less disruption for the rest of the school as we don't need to move other students out of rooms otherwise used for exams. I cannot think of many schools that would be able to trust one hundred of their students to move *en masse* across town – that we can do this with ours is a testament to their maturity, and typical of how this cohort have been throughout their time at BFS.

It has been a busy first half of this term – key aspects of which I will go into detail about below – and there hasn't been a day go by where I have been struck by the way staff and students have gone the extra mile to make great things happen, with minimal disruption to others. Thank you, everyone.

Annie

This really was a triumph – both nights were packed to the rafters, with brilliant group and individual performances from the cast. I loved last year's production of "Honk!", and it was wonderful to see the leap forward in quality and professionalism this year, as we developed the talents and expertise within BFS students and staff.

A massive "thank you" to everyone involved with the show – including **Miss Damon, Mr Keech, Miss Goodship, and Mr Smart.**

Building works

The first few weeks of the term saw the building works on the roof really take off. We had been advised that there would be some noisy periods, as builders broke open the roof to prepare for the new structure, but I think it is fair to say we were taken aback at quite how loud it was at times.

The way that staff and students managed this unexpected disruption was impressive – we took to moving lessons away from the noise where we could, and this generally ran smoothly. To improve things we agreed a change in the works programme with our contractors, and so the last couple of weeks have seen a pause to allow for quiet for the Art and Drama GCSE exams.

We have now reworked the next stage of the building project to ensure the noisiest elements will definitely take place when they will have minimal impact on the running of the school. (I need to thank the builders for doing this, gently *encouraged* by **Mrs Edge's** persuasive charms.) It means we will have a much smoother run in the summer holidays. Alas, it also means that the works will run into the autumn, probably up to the October half term. Whilst this is a bit of a disappointment – we were all looking forward to having our new facilities from the start of the new academic year – it means far less disruption to everyone in the short-run, and will make the completion all the sweeter when it happens.

BFS students earned £££s for charities through "FirstGive"

A massive thank you and well done to Mr Smart and a whole load of our Year 7 students.

"FirstGive" is a charity giving foundation run by the Harper Trust. As part of their "Extended Projects" programme, students formed groups and chose a charity to seek funding for, culminating in presentations to external judges and guests in front of the year group.

The top three groups' charities were chosen to receive significant funding from FirstGive - £250 to the runners up, and £1000 to the winners! Feedback from the judges was phenomenal – all concerned should be very proud of themselves, and it is exactly the kind of thing I want to see BFS students involved with.

Summer Uniform

I want to take the opportunity to remark on how particularly smart our students are looking at the moment. Since the May Bank Holiday we've been into summer uniform (i.e. students do not need to wear their school jumpers). Whilst in previous years I have had to do a bit of nagging regarding untucked shirts or ties being too short, so far this year it hasn't really been the case. We all know how important it is to keep our uniform smart and it is a genuine delight to see our students continue to set the standard locally. Thank you to everyone for their support with this.

Saturday Taster Sessions for Year 5s and 6s – Saturday 21st May

A reminder that our next Saturday Taster Sessions is on this weekend, May 21st – should you have any children in these year groups who want to experience how we do things at BFS, or know of any other families in this situation, please encourage them to come along.

It is noticeable that we have a growing number of Year 5 students coming along to these. Parents seem to be thinking about secondary school options earlier these days; it is reassuring to see how our reputation has grown amongst younger year groups, and bodes well for future recruitment.

Friends of BFS Quiz Night – rescheduled for July 15th

You will remember that we had planned a Quiz Night for the penultimate week of last term, but we postponed it in the end as we had just been inspected by Ofsted. **We plan to run this on Friday July 15th** – and I'll get new forms etc out after half term. In the meantime, please put it in your diaries & start brushing up on your general knowledge...

School attendance

For a whole range of reasons, we continue to see much better attendance this academic year than before. We think that Catch Up Club is helping lots of students who have missed time at school to plug the gaps that come from absence – it will be interesting to see what end of year exam results tell us about the overall impact here.

The prickly issue of term time holidays has been in the national press this week. I'm sure many of you will have heard about a High Court ruling which, at first glance, might seem to give the green light to such breaks. I have had a couple of families get in touch to ask what the implications are. My message to them has been simple: it doesn't change a thing at BFS. **All our families have freely entered in to our Home-School Agreement, and promised to ensure that their children are in school at all times.**

We work really hard as a staff at BFS to make every day count. There may be a lingering misconception amongst some parents that the starts and ends of terms are not so important, or are filled with DVDs and the like. That may have been the case in our youth or at other schools, but it really isn't the case at BFS. **We carefully plan out the academic year as a whole**, to make sure students get the full range of school experiences, academic and otherwise. If a student misses these through deliberate parental action, it isn't just the academic aspect of their school life that is affected, and this is why we explicitly ask parents to commit to us that they will do all they can to support 100% attendance.

Following on from Ofsted...

Since I last wrote to you the official Ofsted report has been published, and we are now "officially" a "good" school. As you would expect from us, **we take it all with a very large pinch of salt. The list of things I want us to do even better is as long as ever** – and I know from interactions with our families that whilst we are generally doing a good job, we are far from perfect.

The governors and leadership team met last week to reflect upon the inspection and what we learned from it. We also considered how to approach the suggested improvements made in the inspection report. It would be tempting to relax now that we have Ofsted out of the way, but we are doing the exact opposite and strengthening our plans for school improvement into the future.

Part of this involves us becoming an "academy sponsor". In essence this means that the Department for Education assesses our ability to maintain standards here at BFS should we link with other schools. **It means that in the future we will be able to open new schools, or link up with other schools, and form a "multi-academy trust".** (Whenever people ask me what a multi-academy trust is, I describe it as simply a group of like-minded schools overseen by a single group of people – just like the Harpur Trust does with its schools locally!)

As I have mentioned in previous newsletters, **we are open to discussions with other schools about formal and informal links that will benefit students.** Many local schools are now exploring links with one another, and our Ofsted has made initiating such discussions easier. Should we reach the point that we were looking to do anything substantial in this regard, we would of course share it with our families – **BFS only exists because of you, and so it is only right that we consult with you if there are any big decisions to be made.**

The term ahead

We still have 9 weeks of term to go before the summer holidays, and aside from the day-to-day lessons it will continue to be packed full of events:

- Transition Evenings for prospective students
- Exam weeks for Years 7, 8, 9 and 10
- Years 7, 8 and 9 have Inter-House Sports Competitions & Development Days
- Year 10 have a week's Work Experience
- 120 Year 6 students will join us for their Transfer Day in July
- Sports Day at the athletics stadium
- Sports Awards Evening
- Friends of BFS Quiz Night
- Our end-of-year Celebration assembly on the very last day of term

As you can see there will be no letting up until the afternoon of the 22nd July. We are already drawing up our plans for next year too – and I have been visiting some of the best schools in the country to see how they do things, in order that we can continue to get even better. We may trial some changes next half term, to see if they would work in BFS – I will write to you about this nearer the time thought. In the meantime, thanks again for your ongoing support and feedback.

All the best,

Mark Lehain.

Key dates

30 th May – 3 rd June	Half Term – Y11 Revision sessions running all week
6 th June	Back to school – week ONE on timetable
w/c 20 th June	Year 10 Exam Week
27 th /28 th /29 th June	Year 7, 8 and 9 – exams in core subjects AND Development Days
w/c 27 th June	Year 10 Work Experience
6 th July	Year 6s visiting for Transfer Day
8 th July	Sports Awards Evening
14 th July	Sports Day – at Bedford International Athletic Stadium – details to follow
15 th July	Friends of BFS Quiz Night
22 nd July	End of Year Celebration Assembly – all welcome - more details to follow Term Ends for summer!
25 th August	GCSE Results Day