

19th September 2016

Dear Parents & Carers,

Welcome!

A warm welcome to the new academic year at Bedford Free School, particularly to all of those joining us for the first time! It was an extremely busy summer holiday for BFS, with a whole range of works taking place on site, our second set of GCSE results, and then supporting students as they left us to start the next stage of their journey at sixth forms and so on.

There is quite a lot to update people about, but to avoid information overload, I'll split it over a couple of newsletters – so expect one today and another in a few days' time. Let's start with...

Summer results

I had hoped that the pre-results nerves would be less extreme this summer, but to no avail - and I know that if the staff were feeling nervous, then it will have been even tougher for students awaiting their grades too! **Overall we had a really strong set of results** – with our (already great) maths and English pass rates going up again, and other headline statistics rising too. (For those interested in such things, they're published in detail on our website.)

Whilst we were chuffed with how things came out in the end, we also know that there are always a whole range of things that we can do even better at. **We will not rest on our laurels:** after all, we set BFS up to transform outcomes for students, not merely do a bit better than elsewhere.

Before the new term had even started, the senior team had met to go through things line-by-line: identifying any students in need of appeals or remarks, seeing how the final results matched up against our forecasts, and seeing what they told us we'd got right and missed the target with.

We will be working with governors, staff and families to make sure we do even better next summer and beyond – but for now, I want to thank every member of the BFS team who helped students do so well this summer. No school can be better than its staff, and **at BFS we are lucky to have a bunch of people who go the extra mile every day for our students.**

Welcome to new staff

We have had stability in our staffing this year, with only a few people moving on elsewhere – and as such we only have a small number to welcome in their place.

Mrs Sturge has now started her maternity leave, and we are delighted to have **Miss Gribbon** back with us for the year in her place.

To boost our ability to support students even better, I have appointed **Miss Foley** to our Senior Leadership Team, where she is Assistant Principal in charge of Student Achievement & Wellbeing.

We also welcome **Mr Constant** into English, **Mr Rawlins** and **Mrs Lehain** to Humanities, **Mr Preece** to Music, **Miss McPherson-George** to Science, and **Mr Miralles** to Languages. (Excitingly, the last two mentioned are additional teachers, recruited in response to the school growing to full capacity.)

It has been a pleasure to see everyone go out of their way to look after new staff. I am confident that we have got the strongest team yet, who will take BFS to the next level in our development.

Open Evening & Open Morning

This Wednesday sees our Open Evening (from 5.30pm), and we will have our Open Morning on Saturday 1st October (from 10am.)

We invite all of our friends and family to come and see us in action at either of these events – they always have a love feel to them, and our students and staff always do us proud.

In order that we have time to get the school ready for the Open Evening this week, **we will let students go early on this day**. They will be allowed to leave after period 6 – at 3.20pm. (**There will be no Homework Club that day either**, so that we can set things up in the library.)

Upcoming events for students & their families

Attached to the end of this newsletter are key dates for your diaries. Please note in particular that on the 6th October we will be holding three sessions as follows:

- **Year 7** Parents Evening
- **Year 10** - "How to survive the GCSE years" – for students & their families
- **Y11** – "Making the most of Y11" – for **selected** students & their families

We'll have details for these out very soon, but I wanted to flag them up in advance now.

An update on some BFS projects...

The more eagle-eyed among you may have spotted on social media that we have launched a bid to open another secondary school – "St Neots Academy". Our plan is to model it closely on BFS – small in size, 11-16 in age range, academic in curriculum – and if we are successful with our bid to the Department for Education it would open in St Neots in September 2018. (You can find out more about it at www.stneotsacademy.co.uk or www.facebook.com/stneotsacademy)

I should emphasise here that the Governors and I haven't rushed into this. We are acutely aware that **our primary responsibility is making BFS even better over time**, so that our existing and future students are in the best possible school.

We can all probably think of other organisations that have over-stretched themselves with projects, and suffered as a result. I have a healthy level of paranoia about this myself, and that is why we have carefully prepared things at BFS before starting to look at additional opportunities.

Whilst money has been tight in the public sector for some time now, **we have been extremely cautious with our resources here**: planning conservative budgets, sticking to them, and then reinvesting some of our surpluses back into the school. This is how we have funded much of the improvements to the school site, and how we have recruited extra staff in key areas.

As the school has grown in size, we have built up sizeable reserves along the way. Given the recent Ofsted, and a couple of strong sets of exam results, we are in the position that **we feel we can – indeed, should – look to carefully explore other projects by which we can help children elsewhere**.

However, before starting on anything else, we have grown the team this end so that we have the capacity to do additional things. Last term we appointed Mr Blake and Miss Foley to new Assistant Principal roles, so **we have more people around to support Mrs Herron in running things day-to-day**. This has freed me up a bit, so I can dedicate a proportion of my time to setting up a small group of schools – known as a "multi-academy trust".

(As part of this **we are also in discussions with other like-minded schools about building closer links with them**; should anything come of this we would of course consult with our BFS families.)

Quite rightly some families might be thinking "how does this affect my child?" or "how do I know it won't distract the school from getting things right at BFS?" Well, if done correctly, none of these things will affect our students day-to-day initially – but **we believe that being part of small group of like-minded schools will, over time, make us stronger**. We think that this will enable us to do an even better job for our students, staff and families in a whole variety of ways.

When there concrete developments with any of these projects we will let you all know. If you have any questions about this, or anything else, don't hesitate to get in touch in the usual ways.

Have a great week!

Mark Lehain.

Key dates for 2016-2017

21 st September	Open Evening, from 5.30pm – friends & family welcome to visit! Note: school will finish at 3.20pm that day & Homework Club will NOT run
1 st October	Open Morning, 10am – noon, friends & family welcome to visit!
6 th October	Y7 – Parents Evening Y10 – “How to survive the GCSE years” – for Y10 students & their families Y11 – “making the most of Y11” – for selected Y11 students & their families (details to follow soon for all of these)
24 th – 28 th October	Half term holiday
3 rd November	Y9 Progress Evening
10 th November	GCSE Awards Evening – for those who sat GCSEs this summer, details to follow
w/c 14 th November	Y11 - mock exams week
1 st December	Y8 Progress Evening
8 th December	Y11 – Progress Evening
16 th December	Last day of autumn term
3 rd January	Staff training day
4 th January	Students return for spring term
12 th January	Y10 Progress Evening
13 th – 17 th February	Half term holiday
31 st March	Last day of spring term
18 th April	Start of summer term
29 th May – 2 nd June	Half term holiday
21 st July	End of summer term