

26th January 2018

Dear Parents, Carers and Pupils,

It has been a super start to 2018, with some fantastic achievements, a really calm and focussed school, and a really determined atmosphere. Pupils in years 7, 8 and 9 have completed their mid-term examinations. I want to thank parents – we had 95% attendance at our year 10 parents' information evening, 97% at Year 11 parents' evening and 87% at our Year 9 parents' evening, this makes such a huge difference to attainment.

We are already over half-way through this half term.

Our year 11 pupils are well into the preparation for their GCSE examinations. Their second set of mock exams start very soon and I know they are committed to making the best use of them. I wish them the best of luck.

Visits to the school:

We had 14 school leaders visit BFS last week. They wanted to see what we do that is different and special. They visited lessons, listened to presentations, and had tours led by pupils. Feedback from them was exceptional including:

"Your school is truly fantastic and inspirational, I'm sure you and the staff are very proud of what you have achieved thus far. Please thank the students who did the tour on my behalf, they were great ambassadors for your school." Mr Webster, Principal

"A very inspiring and thought provoking CPD day at Bedford Free School. Thank you to Mr Lock, his team and students for being so informative and welcoming! Now to build our own knowledge-based curriculum!" Ms McLaughlin, Head of Humanities

"Your school is amazing" Mr Elliott, Head of School

"You're doing truly amazing work" Mr Thomas, Head of School

"'Absolute freedom of discussion, absolute unity in action'. A great mantra from Mr Lock during an inspirational and thought-provoking visit to the exemplary Bedford Free School" Mr Kidd, Headteacher

There were more along the same lines and all the credit has to go to our pupils who set the best example. I am very proud of them.

A part of the reason for these visits are to ensure that we are heard about – so great teachers from across the country hear about us for when we have vacancies. In an era where most schools report getting no applications for maths jobs, for example, BFS received 17 – and we've recruited a superb teacher to start after half-term. We have had very hard decisions to make over the new teacher we have recruited in Geography, for September, because of the quality in the field. We appear to be attracting exceptional individuals. I hope this continues!

Behaviour system:

I have spoken to the pupils and staff over the past few weeks about simplifying our behaviour system. It does not need a radical overhaul, because behaviour is excellent at BFS, but we do want to ensure that it is understood and applied fairly.



Currently the consequence staircase has a 'non-verbal warning' in it. In my conversations with some of the pupils, I have come to understand that they don't really understand this step, partly because something non-verbal is so easily misunderstood, and partly because it just gets in the way of addressing the expectations. Staff have told me that they often have to tell pupils verbally that they've given them a non-verbal warning. Which means it is now a verbal warning! This can cause problems.

Our simplified procedures are shown in our graphic at the end of this letter as part of our metaphor to climbing the mountain to success. In almost every case, pupils will not notice the difference, but it just means that we are making our practice and our procedures clear and consistent. As I have said to pupils, I'm happy to talk to them about this if they want to.

Attendance:

Attendance at BFS is the highest it has ever been. However, since Christmas we've noticed a relatively high amount of absence. We would like to continue to encourage you to send your children to school if you are 'not sure'. We will send them home if they get worse. The correlation between attendance and the outcomes – bluntly their life-chances – is so strong that this is one of the best things parents can do (along with attending parents' evenings and the like).

Please do keep us informed and use me as the reason if you like. For example, "you might have a bit of a headache, but I'm sending you in while we see if it goes – blame Mr Lock as he has said you have to!"

Obviously, you know your children best, and if they are genuinely and definitely ill we do want them to recover properly at home. We will insist they attend interventions and catch up with work they miss, as you would expect of BFS.

Electives:

Pupils are now settled in their new electives for this term. Of particular note for me is the Orchestra. It will be so good to have an orchestra at the school and I know that the pupils, the Salvation Army (who we are very grateful to) and the staff are working very hard indeed. The Eco-club promoted 'switch off Friday' at BFS leading to a remarkable drop in energy used that day.

Sport:

Since the last newsletter our Year 10 Girls have secured a bronze medal in the basketball county championships, making them the third best team in Bedfordshire.

Most recently, at the end of last week our Year 7 and 8 Handball team have won the district championships, beating ten teams along the way, and will now compete in the county championships.

We continue to be about participation and it is fantastic to see so many pupils competing for the school – if you want to represent BFS, you get to represent BFS.

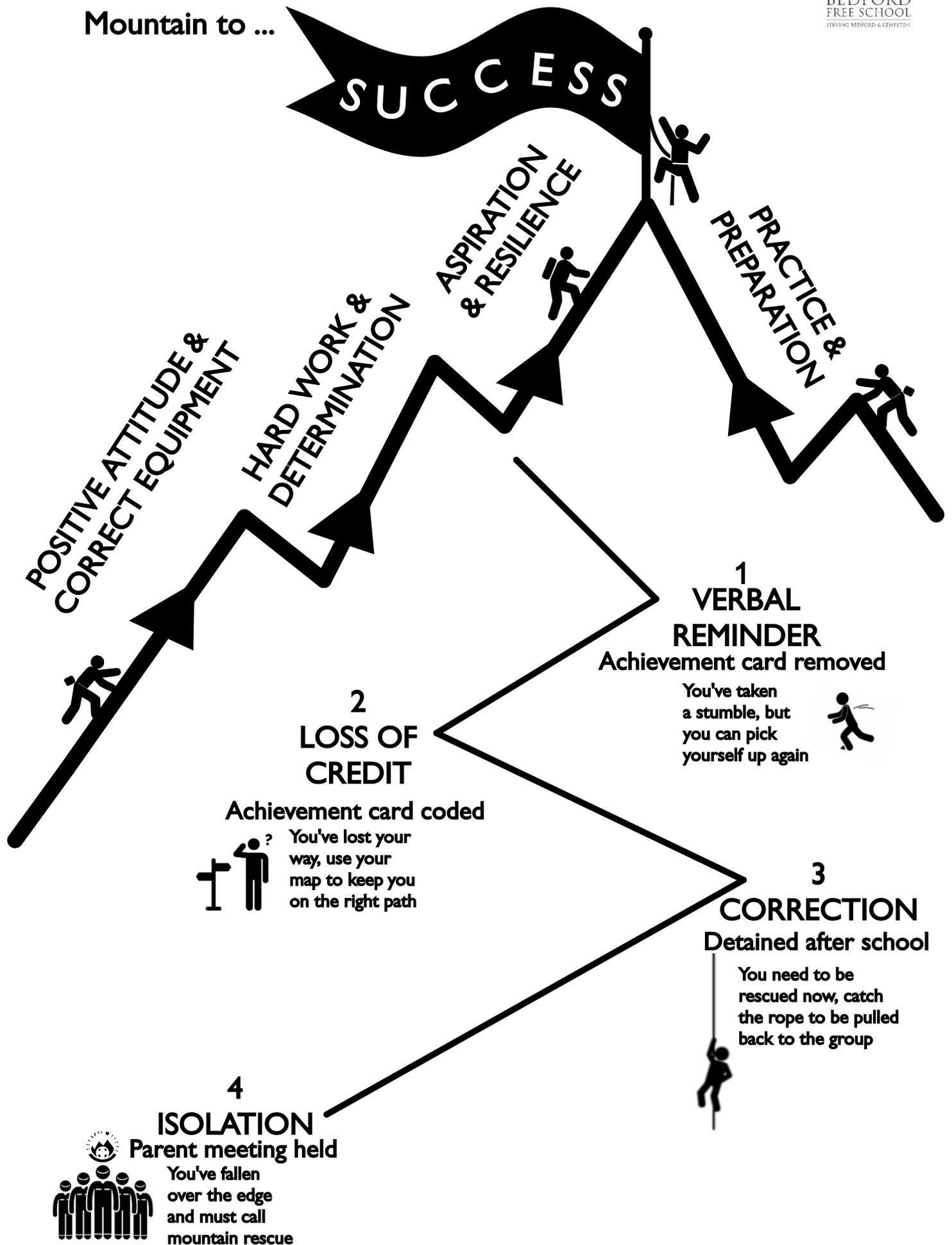
Come and see us!

Parents and carers, if you would like a visit to the school, and a tour to see how things are on a typical day, please come and visit us. Our pupils love showing people round and are so proud and the coffee is always hot. Mrs Herron, myself and the Senior Leadership Team will find time to answer any questions and we want to encourage you through the door as much as possible.

Very best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Stuart Lock', with a horizontal line underneath it.

Stuart Lock,
Executive Principal



***Key dates:**

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 + Year 11 revision sessions (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 (school finishes at 3.20pm)
22 nd March 2018	Year 9 Academic Mentoring & Options Evening (school finishes at 3.20pm)
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) (school finishes at 3.20pm)
7 th May 2018	May Bank Holiday (school closed)
10 th May 2018	Year 7 Academic Mentoring (by invite only) (school finishes at 3.20pm)
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

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