

16 July 2020



Dear Parents and Guardians,

I write to keep you informed of updates from school, as I will no doubt continue to do periodically throughout the summer.

September return

We fully expect a whole school return to the site in September. We will also be aiming to provide (so far as is possible) a return to 'normal' provision – our mission “to teach boys to think intelligently, act wisely and be fully engaged in a challenging and changing world” is as apt as ever. However, it is also becoming obvious as we plan that the mindset of everyday living is going to need to change and this will in turn require changes (some fundamental) to the way the school day operates, at least in the short term.

The digital pencil case

It is inconceivable that in 100 years' time pupils will be walking into school with heavy bags full of exercise books and text books. The question that all schools (including our own) have been asking for the last 20 years is, “when is the right time to start making that shift” towards wider use of technology for learning. Some of the early adopters made that decision 10 or 15 years ago, often (but not exclusively) by choosing a device-specific approach. From this September, we will start on our own next step on this journey by requiring every boy from Year 5 to Upper Sixth to return with a laptop (or similar device). Our approach to mobile technology has received clearer definition since our Director of Digital Learning introduced us a few years ago to the idea of 'The Digital Pencil case'. We are keen that the computer does not become a driver of what we do, but is available to us as a tool to support the boys' education. Therefore, what that device can do is more important than the make of that device, and there is some guidance on this in the BYOD (Bring Your Own Device) letters attached. Please do take some time to read it.

The timing of this decision is relevant, but far from the only consideration (i.e. this was coming at some stage!). The past few months have seen an acceleration in the technical proficiency of boys and (particularly) staff; there is a wider understanding of the possible; and some of the logistical and pastoral concerns of the past (many still legitimate, of course, and requiring mitigation) now feel surmountable. Furthermore, Bedford is a school that places great value on the verticality of its systems – ie boys *across* year groups interact continually at House and school level on curricular and extra-curricular activity, and yet we are (understandably) asked by the Government next term to operate in horizontal (ie year group) bubbles. The wider use of technology will allow us to 'break out' of these year group bubbles and maintain vertical educational opportunities throughout the school. More prosaically, it will help us to overcome various COVID-specific issues: for instance, with social distancing in place, if a class is doing some written work, a teacher can no longer lean over shoulders to provide individualised advice; but they can easily maintain an individualised approach if they monitor everybody's progress in real time online from the front of a class. This is not to say that everything will be online next term – it absolutely will not be. We are not intending to change our teaching approach to suit the needs of a computer; but we do know that the time is right now to list a device as a key part of the daily educational toolkit.

School uniform

Having said only a couple of weeks ago that we will start next term in summer uniform (to allow for ease of daily clothes washing), the Government has changed its guidelines to allow blazers and ties after all. Please could you make sure therefore that your son has all he needs by September – ie normal school uniform. We can then make the decision (summer uniform or not) in September based upon the weather as much as the guidelines. Whatever happens at the start of term, it is likely that we will not be using changing rooms next term, so your son will be in sports kit all day on sports days. More on that before term starts.

This is also a reminder that the School Shop is not onsite for the foreseeable future (its premises were wholly unsuitable for the current situation). The stock is now held and traded at the sports and schoolwear company 'No Limitz', 25 Shuttleworth Road, Elm Farm Industrial Estate, Bedford MK41 0HS.

The Nearly New Shop, run by the Parents' Guild, will operate from the School's Cricket Pavilion until 5 September, during its busy August period, to give it more space and fresh air. Further information, and opening times, will appear in subsequent correspondence.

In other (slightly surreal) COVID-related news, your son will (sadly) no longer need to carry a hymnbook at all times (we are unlikely to be allowed to sing in great numbers), but will be required to carry some hand gel. We will of course provide plenty in various spots around the site as well, but small individual bottles are easy to come by and we will be enforcing regular handwashing no matter where the boys are on site.

COVID hardship funding

As you are aware, in response to the economic challenges that COVID has placed on many of our community (and thanks also to a number of you who forewent the fee rebate last term), we have been supporting families with hardship funding where it has been most needed. Our hardship funds have of course been doing this for years, but the current crisis has brought this provision into more acute focus. Application forms for support for the Autumn Term may now be requested from the [Harpur Trust Fees team](#). The application process follows the financial principles of our Bursary Awards scheme, but will be based on an assessment of estimated income levels for the period August to November 2020. The deadline for submissions (with supporting evidence) will be the 31 July 2020. The Harpur Trust Fees team will assess and process all applications and a Bedford School committee of senior Governors and management will review all eligible applications and make decisions on the final awards.

A Level and GCSE results days

In recent years, these have been run on-site as both celebratory days (for boys to catch up with each other socially) and support days (for those who need it). The nature of these days will necessarily change this year, as we cannot host large (or non-essential) gatherings. Initial information on the A Level and GCSE results days are therefore contained in a separate letter as part of this correspondence (more will follow nearer the time). We will be providing all the usual support, but not necessarily onsite.

In terms of celebration, I have promised this year's leavers a big party (i.e. Leavers' Ball or equivalent) and will stick by that promise! However, again necessarily, we are no nearer to a date and will just have to wait and see how things progress; sadly, I cannot see it happening in 2020 (though it is hard to predict).

IB results

I am aware that the newspapers have been full of doom and gloom; and I am also well aware that it is always rather dangerous to speak about results as a whole, because ultimately they are a personal

thing. It also feels strange to pass on my congratulations to this group, as they will feel the pain of not having had the opportunity to take the exams, but I am genuinely proud of them, the way they have worked over their Sixth Form, and the manner in which they have faced up to a very difficult situation. They are a great credit to themselves and their families. This year's results have been as strong as recent years (at a school level) and therefore (on a macro level), the newspapers are unhelpful. However, as happens in a 'normal' year, some boys have done better or worse than expected and this is a particularly painful year (for all of us) for the latter to happen. The primary purpose of these exams is, of course, to provide transition to the next level. The initial signs with this cohort are very good – they will hear more in due course when UCAS make their final decisions at A Level results time. I must stress that we have a strong team and invariably excellent outcomes on this front, and we have realistically high hopes for the boys' options on UCAS declaration day.

Staff news

Many congratulations to Jonny Egan, Deputy Head of the Prep School, who has been appointed Head of Framlingham College Prep School. He will take up post in September 2021.

With all best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J Hodgson', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

James Hodgson

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