

July 21st 2017

Dear Parents,

The summer holidays are here and I am sure all of the students are ready for a break. They deserve it as do all of their teachers. It has been a hugely successful year at Balcarras and I would like to thank all parents for their continued support for the school.

Farewell to staff

As ever the end of the summer term is tinged with sadness as we say farewell to several valued colleagues. Mr Mark Lolley (D&T) is retiring after 26 years of outstanding service at Balcarras. Mrs Di Duxbury (Maths) is moving onto another school in Gloucestershire having taught here for 23 years – for 11 years she was Head of Foley House – she has made an exceptional contribution to the school.

Mr Jeff Draisey is retiring having led the D&T department with distinction since 2000. My fellow historian Elizabeth Gill is moving on to another school in Cheltenham having taught so successfully here since 2003. Miss Katleen Iskra will be sadly missed from the MFL department as she leaves to take up a teaching post in Dubai. Mr Alex Davis (English) is moving to another school in the county as are Miss Chloe Rigby (Maths), Miss Samantha Load (Psychology) and Mr Richard Duffy-Turner (Physics). Mr Owen Thomas is relocating to Hampshire. Mr Noah Phelps-Johnson, Miss Amy Carter and Miss Beth Westlake have all completed apprenticeships in various areas of the school's work and will be moving on this summer.

I would like to pay tribute to all of those colleagues who are leaving and thank them very much for their contribution to Balcarras.

One final person I would like to pay tribute to is Rob Dundas who is stepping down from his role on the site team. However, I am delighted that Rob will be staying on to manage the school's cleaning team and to continue coaching Badminton. His goal next year is clear – we want to be National Champions!

Tribute to the PTFA

I would like to publically thank the Balcarras PTFA for all they do to support the school. This year they've raised way in excess of £20,000 which is amazing. But more important than that, they help to foster a real sense of community around the school.

One of the main reasons for the success of the PTFA over recent years has been the leadership of Beccy Roberts. Last Wednesday I attended the final PTFA event of the year to present Beccy with a small gift as she steps down as Chair. Beccy is a remarkable person and she's been an invaluable asset to this school. I would like to thank her very much and also to thank all of the other parents who have contributed so much to the life of the school.

Thanks to the governors

I would like to thank the school's governors for their outstanding commitment to Balcarras once again this year. They do an awful lot of work and they continue to provide not just invaluable support but exactly the right level of challenge. I hope they all enjoy a pleasant summer holiday.

Activities Week

I think activities week is a great way to end the year and I would like to thank all of the staff for putting on such a broad range of different activities. Special thanks go to Mrs Massey who organises it all brilliantly.

New school for Cheltenham

I hope you got my letter on Wednesday regarding our plans to submit a sponsorship bid for a new school in Cheltenham. Once again I want to reassure you that we won't for a second take our eye away from Balcarras. Making this a successful and happy school day in, day out, remains our number one priority. If you missed the letter it's on the website.

School Funding

I am cautiously optimistic about the government's announcement this week regarding the size of the schools budget and the minimum per pupil funding benchmark for secondary schools. More needs to be done for sure but I get the sense that the mood music has changed!

Sporting success

On Wednesday Mr Baxter and Mr Harvey organised a special photo-shoot for all of the winning sports teams – it makes for an impressive photo especially when you consider that students in Year 11 to 13 are not in the school this week.



Here's the full list of all of our amazing sports victories this year.

Year 9 girls athletics Year 8, 9 and 10 boys swim teams Year 7 girls swim teams KS3 boys badminton team Table tennis team Mountain Biking team	Year 9 boys basketball team Yr 8 and 9 boys cross country team Year 10 girls rounders team Under 14 girls hockey team Year 9 boys rugby team Archery team
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Year 7 Public Speaking

One of the responsibilities of being head is judging the Year 7 public speaking competition alongside a guest judge. This year I was very pleased that Chris Healy agreed to judge the competition with me and to show me the ropes. It was a great afternoon and a keenly fought competition. Well done to 7G1 who won the overall trophy and Nicola Trowbridge who won The Healy Cup for the best individual speech.

Dancefest

Dancefest 2017 was an amazing event – I was genuinely struck by the quality of the dancing on display. I would like to congratulate all of those who took part and in particular the winning house – Ottewell and Molly Hughes the winner of the Lewis Cup.

House Languages

Another great House competition run by Mrs Hockenhill, Mr Daniels and Mr Bennett. The range of languages involved in each play was superb. My congratulations to everyone involved and particularly the winning House – Foley.

Midsummer Music

Midsummer Music is one of my favourite school events. It's a great community occasion and I just love the variety of music on offer. My thanks to all those students who performed or helped out and to all of the staff – in particular to Jane Watts and Dan Armstrong.

Plans for the summer

When the teachers go on holiday the site team get busy! And they're going to be extra-especially busy this summer supervising a number of exciting projects – the main one being the new Music Block which is going to be great. We're also building a new science lab; transforming the Pavilion into the Year 11 common room with an outside covered area; building a covered area between maths and the canteen as well as having a full programme of decorating around the school.

#MUSIC4BALCARRAS Funding campaign

Don't forget we're still in the market for donations for the kitting out of the new music block. Please see the website for ways to get involved.

Expeditions

I am going to Wales next week and I am very excited but 30 of our students have gone even further from home and are currently on expedition in Nicaragua. I'll get them to report on their adventures in September.

Chinese Homestay Visit

On Thursday October 5th we will be hosting a homestay visit for 23 Year 8 pupils from Changshu International School in Shanghai. The visit will last until Wednesday October 18th. We will require host families to accommodate either 1 or 2 Chinese students. These visits are funded. We will be in touch in September with more information if you are interested.

Visit of 4 Hungarian students

These last 3 weeks we have had 4 Hungarian students visiting Balcarras. The link with Hungary goes back as far as 1991 and it was a pleasure to host them once again. My thanks to all those students involved.

Have a great summer! – Message from the Chair of Governors

It's been another very demanding year at Balcarras, with continued strains on the budget and staff having to introduce or deliver new GCSEs and A-levels and working to a new (numerical) GCSE grade system for maths and English this year. At the same time, Cheltenham is under increasing pressure to provide more places for a growing population and, as the town's most over-subscribed school, a lot of that pressure falls on Balcarras. We agonise over this every year of course – it's horrible having to turn children away. We're looking for a longer term solution next year that doesn't involve expansion of Balcarras (we've no room), but in the meantime we are accommodating a temporary expansion to next year's Y7, at the LA's request, and building a new teaching room (science lab) to give us the space, as well as creating two new covered areas and upgrading the pavilion.

I hope you saw our announcement about sponsoring a new school for Cheltenham this week. It's an exciting project and the governors will make sure that everything is in place to support the bid and to ensure that Balcarras continues to operate successfully.

I would like to pay tribute to all the staff of Balcarras for another outstanding year – the teachers, the teaching assistants, the catering team, the site team, the support staff, the leadership team and everyone else involved. Operating a school like Balcarras is a big team effort and every part of that team is vital. I hope that all of you have a great summer.

Philip Collie, Chair of Governors

Be Nice Bus visit

On Tuesday 27th June 7F2 went on the Be Nice Bus for an hour. The bus was all about educating young people about cyberbullying and how to prevent it.

When we got on the bus we were welcomed in and sat down. The man then proceeded to talk to us about cyberbullying. This is something that I felt was important to be aware of as lots of young people use social media and have mobile phones. We discussed how many people it affects, different examples of what it is and how it can make people feel. We watched videos from the victim, bystander and the perpetrator's perspective. It was a very interesting experience and we learnt a lot.

After the talk we took photos and signed a pledge saying that we knew what to do in instances where we saw cyberbullying and how we would deal with it. It was really fun and I'm sure everybody else enjoyed it too!

Maddie Lovemore 7F2

Trip to Birmingham's Queen Elizabeth hospital

A small group of us travelled down to Birmingham University hospital to experience work for nurses, medical scientists and doctors who work there. We had a brief tour of various wards, including critical care and the cathlab where we witnessed a stent being put in to widen the coronary arteries and prevent heart attack. After that two medical scientists spoke to us about their careers, this was especially valuable as few of us were aware of medical jobs outside of being a doctor or nurse. This was followed up by a visit to the clinical labs where we found out a bit about the studies going on at the hospital and made some useful contacts.

Jess Shields 12D

Bonjour la France!

40 Year 7 pupils accompanied by 5 members of staff went to France during activities week last week.

The first day was spent travelling to Normandy where their hotel was located. For some pupils it was their first time abroad but accompanied by their friends they were not at all worried. On the way we stopped at the Nausicáa Sea Life Centre, a huge aquarium where the pupils were able to see some tropical fish and even some baby sharks. We stopped to have dinner and the pupils ordered their meal in French which we were all impressed with. After quite a long journey we were all glad to have a nice bed to sleep in.

The first full day in Normandy pupils spent practising their French; they were able to walk around a market and sample some of the delicacies on offer and talk with local people. After a picnic break the pupils had a short visit to a French supermarket. The rest of the day was spent baking bread and making pancakes. Having eaten one of the pancakes prepared by the pupils I can certify that they were very good. Evening entertainment took the form of a disco and many pupils had a go at performing the Macarena.

The second day was spent around Mont Saint Michel. First the pupils visited the Alligator Bay Centre where they were able to see a lot, A LOT of tortoises and also alligators. The afternoon was spent at the UNESCO Mont Saint Michel site where students were able to see the Abbaye after walking up the steep narrow streets. The sun was shining and the students were able to walk around the site and do a bit of souvenir shopping. Back at the accommodation some pupils felt brave enough to try the karaoke but teachers firmly declined to take part even if Mrs Pearson was tempted.

The last day was spent going back towards the UK with a stopover at the Bagatelle theme park where students were able to enjoy many rides and had a fun-packed afternoon before boarding the Shuttle to make their way back to Cheltenham.

It was a really great trip which enabled pupils to use the French they have studied and to learn more about French culture.

We are planning next year's trip and details will be given to the new Year 7 within the first few weeks in September.

Freddy Seguin, MFL Department

Balcarras Catering

Balcarras has managed to keep the price of the two course school dinner the same for the past 6 years. Unfortunately, due to the current economic climate with the cost of food rising significantly, together with increases in wages, we have little option but to increase the combined main course & dessert price from £2 to £2.20 from September. This still represents good value for money with the cost significantly lower than other schools in the area.

We will still be sourcing all the products served in the dining room from well-respected local suppliers, which continues to allow us to buy the highest quality ingredients at a low cost, while still supporting the local community.

If you have any questions regarding the catering at Balcarras or your child's nutritional needs then please contact Ian Cole the Catering Manager on 01242 545115 or email kitchen@balcarras.gloucs.sch.uk

Library Books

Please can you check with your son/daughter over the summer for any library books they may have, either overdue or not and encourage them to return them the first week of September. It would be lovely to start the new year with a full compliment of stock. Thank you. Happy reading.

Alison Springer School Librarian

School Photographs

The school photographer will be in school on **Wednesday September 20th**. As in previous years there will be the opportunity to purchase an individual photograph for Years 7-13, plus Year 7, 11 and Sixth Form group photographs. In addition, a family photograph will be available.

Darren Leatherbarrow

PTFA update

Many thanks for all your support for the PTFA this year. We have been able to give the school a much needed boost of £10,000. We are now helping the school raise money to furnish the new music block. Our next fund raiser is the Ball being held at Double Trees by Hilton (Cheltenham Park), on Friday October 13th, tickets only £45 each, the theme this year is Casino Royale. If you are interested in the ball, please email bexroberts60@hotmail.com we only have 2 tables, and a few spaces on other tables left.

All meetings are held in the staff room from 7pm, we welcome all. Please find the list of PTFA upcoming events below:

<i>Event</i>	<i>Date for the Diary</i>	
PTFA Meeting	13 th September 2017	7pm
Icebreaker Disco (Year 7's & Parents)	15 th September 2017	7-8.30pm
PTFA Meeting	27 th September 2017	7pm
Balcarras Ball	13 th October 2017	
PTFA Meeting	22 nd November 2017	7pm
PTFA Meeting	10 th January 2018	7pm
Quiz Night	26 th January 2018	
PTFA Meeting	28 th February 2018	7pm
Comedy Night	9 th March 2018	
PTFA Meeting	25 th April 2018	7pm
PTFA Meeting	6 th June 2018	7pm
Midsummer Music	22 nd June 2018	

Have a good summer; we look forward to seeing you all at our PTFA events.

End of term

This week we had house matches and the cinema trip yesterday for all the pupils with 100% attendance and then today we have the final whole assembly before we finish at 12.30pm

Exam results

A2 and AS results are on Thursday August 17th. A2 results are at 9am and AS results are at 12pm.

GCSE results are on Thursday August 24th at 9am.

If a pupil is unable to collect their results, please write to Mrs Paris-Johnstone (exams officer) at the school authorising a named person to collect the results on their behalf. Please ask the nominated person to bring some ID with them.

Start of year in September

Tuesday September 5th will be the first day for Year 7 and Year 12.

Wednesday September 6th will be the first day for the rest of the school.

Friday September 8th – we will close at 12.15pm for a staff INSET afternoon.

Balcarras is on Facebook!

Alongside our @Balcarras Twitter you may also now follow [Facebook.com/BalcarrasSchool](https://www.facebook.com/BalcarrasSchool) for updates and news about school life and events.



Have a happy, restful holiday and we look forward to seeing you in September.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Dominic Burt', with a horizontal line underneath.

Headteacher