

Update from the Head

It's been another busy week at Balcarras. We are now five weeks in and I've got to say there is a really lovely atmosphere in the school. I walk around a lot, chatting to pupils and staff. It is a highlight of my job to be able to chat to people and ask how they are getting on.

Meeting with House Captains

On Monday I had my first meeting of the year with the House Captains. We met in my office, had a cookie and discussed the year ahead. They are a great group and have already made such a positive impact. We talked about the upcoming prizegiving and their role within it. I look forward to hearing their report on the year.

Tour for Glenfall parents

On Tuesday morning we hosted Glenfall parents and pupils who couldn't attend open week because of a year 6 residential. I am hosting a further tour next Tuesday morning at 9.30. I actually really enjoy showing people around the school—it is always a nice way to spend an hour.

Raising Money for Sue Ryder

Our fundraising effort for Sue Ryder has now exceeded £15,000!! This is a combination of the money raised by the staff runners and the proceeds from the school's sponsored walk. I think we should all take great pride in this.

Ruby's Return

On Wednesday Ruby Costello Buckingham, who was a pupil in the sixth form here from 2019 to 2021, returned to Balcarras. Ruby was a superb student and after her studies here she qualified for a Degree Apprenticeship at the Dyson Institute in Malmesbury. These apprenticeships are fiercely competitive and to this day Ruby remains the only Balcarras pupil to achieve it. Ruby graduated this summer and was chosen by the Institute to deliver the graduate speech at the graduation ceremony attended by Sir James Dyson and the staff of the institute. We were sent a video link—Ruby spoke brilliantly, and she mentioned the important influence of her teacher Mrs Swanepoel.

Ruby is about to set off for a year working in Dyson's production facility in Singapore. Before departing she popped into school to visit her old teachers and tell us about her experience at Dyson. It was lovely to see her and to hear about her success.

If you are the parent of a former Balcarras pupil please do encourage them to stay in touch. I always joke with them in the final Year 13 assembly that we would love them to come back and see us in years to come especially if they strike it rich!



Child Protection Training

On Wednesday evening the whole staff of Balcarras gathered in the main hall for Child Protection Training. This has to be arranged every three years and is in fact the only time that the entire staff—teachers, support staff, catering staff, cleaning staff and exam invigilators—meet together. Its quite a lot of people when we do all gather. It provided an opportunity for me to thank everyone who works here for their contribution to Balcarras and its young people. I am grateful to those governors who came along as well.

The training was delivered by Joanna Nicolas who is a former social worker and an expert in child protection and safeguarding. I am grateful to Becky Atkin for arranging this.

Catering Committee

Parents might not be aware but we have always had a Catering Committee at Balcarras—ever since we took the service in house in 2011. The committee meets 6 times per year and we had our first meeting on Thursday morning. It consists of me, Ian Cole (Catering Manager) Pak Wai Hung (governor) Ian Davidson (Assistant Head), Mark Constance (Assistant Head) and Cath Saunders (Head of DT Food). The committee exists to ensure that our catering service is good value and high quality. At our first meeting we discussed cost pressures resulting from government decisions on national insurance, food cost inflation, our offer for the autumn term and the special events coming up—November 5th and Christmas Dinners. It's a meeting I always enjoy.

Macmillan Cake Sale

Another fine Balcarras tradition occurred on Thursday this week. For over 20 years we have been holding a Macmillan coffee morning in the main staff room. The staff room is always a busy place at break and lunch but it was particularly chocker on Thursday. I've been trying to be very good since the start of the academic year but because it was for charity I weakened and had a slice of Victoria Sponge. I just love Victoria Sponge.



Brazilian and Japanese Pupils Visiting Balcarras

This term we have 4 pupils from Brazil and two from Japan visiting our sixth form. On Thursday breaktime Mr Leatherbarrow hosted a meeting with them in the sixth form meeting room. They have all settled in well into life in Cheltenham. It was fascinating to hear about their schools and home towns—we even used the interactive board to look at where they lived. The Balcarras sixth form is proud to be a diverse and welcoming community and we are delighted that these six pupils will learn with us this term.



Careers Fair



We had a superb Careers Fair at Balcarras on Thursday evening. There were over 70 visiting companies or institutions ranging from BAE Systems to Mesiter Stone Masonry to Saint James' Place to the University of Leeds. I personally greeted the chap from Leeds and was tempted to burst into a rendition of Marching on Together!

As well as wondering around the stands pupils and parents had the option to attend three talks. The first was on the UCAS process and was delivered by the University of Exeter. The second was on T levels and was presented by Cirencester College. There was also a session on psychology delivered by four experts in the field.

I was delighted to see such a broad range of companies and institutions represented and I am very grateful to colleagues from these different places who gave their time to visit the school. Finally, thanks to Mrs Lewis, Mrs Towers and Mrs Atkinson for their superb organisation.

Year 7 Logo competition

Today I handed out the prizes to the winning pupils in the Year 7 logo competition. The competition was to design a logo for the relaunch of the Balcarras Gift Aid scheme which we are going to call the Balcarras \$ Plan. See a photo of the winning pupils below. The overall winner was Keziah Maclannan (7O1) with Evie Gilbride (7S1) and Ollie Hawkins (7O2) in joint second place.



Parental Giving

Now that we have a new logo I will shortly write to you re-launching the Balcarras gift aid scheme. Watch this space!

Latest Music Video

I now look forward to 6pm on a Friday even more than I used to do because that is the time when the music department launch their latest video. I can't wait to see it tonight. Follow this link:

<https://www.balcarras.gloucs.sch.uk/news/?pid=3&nid=1&storyid=1312>

To view all of the videos so far go to the Balcarras Music Channel here:

<https://www.youtube.com/@balcarrasmusic495>

Last week's video has over 8,700 views!

Attendance

Our attendance figures have got off to a good start. I am hoping that we can achieve higher attendance than we did last year which was 95%. That's very good by national standards but it still means that on average every pupil missed almost two weeks of school. That's a lot. Please do everything you can to prioritise attendance.

Right, it's time for the weekend. I have my annual golf trip tomorrow. I'm going to the Forest of Arden to play golf alongside colleagues from my previous school, Prince Henry's. Unfortunately, we are teeing off at one o'clock so I'm going to miss watching Leeds v Spurs on telly. I'll be rooting for Leeds as I hack around the Forest of Arden. I hope you all have a nice weekend.

Dominic Burke

