

Update from the Head

It has been a whirlwind week at Balcarras...so much has been going on!

School named in the top 10% of schools nationally for progress at GCSE

On Monday morning we received a very nice email from ALPS telling us that our GCSE results were in the top 10% of all schools last year for progress. The same email also said that our performance at A level was in the top 25% of all schools nationally for progress.

On Friday the Department for Education released the league tables for GCSE results. Balcarras was listed as the highest performing comprehensive school at GCSE in Gloucestershire. Nice to see!

Geography Department in Dorset



Over last weekend and during Monday and Tuesday the A level geographers were in Dorset completing their mandatory field work. I understand from Miss Searle that the visit went very well.

Other visits this week

There have been a number of other visits this week. Yesterday 28 Year 7 pupils went to attend a talk with the author Jennifer Killick at the Cheltenham Literature Festival. Later today Mr Niblett and Mr Boughton are taking 10 Year 11 pupils on a golf tour of North Devon. They are playing Saunton East and Royal North Devon—both really lovely courses. I wish I was good enough to go with them.

Display Champions

This week I went to the MFL Department to crown them Display Champions 2025. Every autumn the school runs a display competition and, as part of that, we select the best looking department in terms of display. MFL are worthy champions. We have always prized the environment and we believe that display is an important part of that.



Visit of Lift Schools



We regularly host colleagues from other schools who are interested in the work of Balcarras. On Wednesday we hosted two colleagues from Lift Schools which is a Multi Academy Trust consisting of some 56 schools nationally. Karl Sampson who is Regional Director Southwest and Chris Taylor who is one of the Lift Principals were on a seeking best practice visit. They were joined by Roy Blatchford CBE who is Chair of the Gloucestershire Education Forum and also does some school improvement work with Balcarras. It was Roy who recommended Balcarras as a good place to visit.

We spent an hour and a half touring the school and talking about education generally and the school more specifically. They were very impressed by the ethos and atmosphere at Balcarras. It is always a pleasure to show people around the school.

UCAS Early Entry

The process of supporting Year 13 around next steps is well underway. Whether they are applying to UCAS, for apprenticeships, or for jobs we will support them to the very best of our ability. Those pupils who are applying for Oxford, Cambridge or for medicine, veterinary or dentistry courses have to apply through UCAS Early Entry. The deadline for this was Wednesday this week. The school supported 24 applications (22 from the current Year 13 and 2 from last year's Year 13). My thanks to everyone in the sixth form but particularly Mr Boughton who runs the UCAS process.

Last Year's Destinations

News that we are already well underway with the UCAS process prompted me to ask Mr Leatherbarrow where we finished with last Year's Year 13. 189 pupils have started university courses. 5 of these were on early entry courses (3 Oxbridge and 2 Medicine), whilst 111 were at Russel Group Universities.

Most popular University Destinations:

- Exeter (23)
- Birmingham (15)
- Cardiff (10)
- Leeds (10)
- Swansea (9)
- Manchester (8)
- Liverpool (5)
- Sheffield (5)

- Warwick (5)
- York (5)
- Bristol (4)
- Southampton (4)

Nice to see Leeds is so popular!

It wasn't just traditional degrees that our pupils went on to. We also had a number of pupils secure Degree Apprenticeships and Higher Apprenticeships

Apprenticeship Destinations:

Degree Apprenticeships

- Crowe (Accountancy)
- GE Aviation (Engineering)
- Merchant Navy (Engineering)

Higher Apprenticeships

- Britannia Row (Audio Engineering)
- Hazelwoods (Accountancy)
- HCR LAw (Solicitor Apprenticeship)
- Heidelberg Materials (Construction)
- Ontic (Finance & Accountancy)
- Safran (Engineering)
- Thales (Digital Business Analysis)

We have an apprenticeship workshop running on 19th November, and 2 alumni, Jake Blackler and Ruby Newman represented Spirax-Sarco at our recent Careers Fair. Jake followed this up by leading a Y12 Speaker sessions and hosting a Y13 Q&A session re: apprenticeship routes post-18.

School Development Plan Review

Balcarras operates a three-year development plan. We are currently at the end of the first year of the 2025-28 cycle. On Thursday members of the school's governing board and the senior staff met to review the first year of the current plan. It was a useful meeting. The review document that we have put together will now go forward to the full governors and will be published in early December. I am very pleased with the progress we are making. If you would like to see the school development plan it is available here:

<https://www.balcarras.gloucs.sch.uk/page/?title=School+Development+Plan&pid=15>

Funeral of Dr Joe Sharp

On Thursday about 30 colleagues and ex colleagues attended the funeral of Dr Joe Sharp. It was a very sad occasion although we did all share happy memories of Joe. I presented his wife with a book of condolence which contained so many messages from staff, parents, pupils and ex pupils. I am sure it is some comfort to his wife and children that he was so well liked here at Balcarras.

District Cross Country

The Balcarras runners will be out in force as we tackle the District Cross Country held at Ashley Manor School this afternoon. It's a competition we have a very strong record in. I'll update you on how we did next week.

PTFA event

My thanks to the Balcarras PTFA for organising their latest event tonight...the Clothes Swap. I am afraid I won't be able to go because I'm going away but I hope it goes well.

CLOTHES SWAP

Friday 17th October 2025 7pm - 9pm
Balcarras Academy Gym

What can I donate?

Ladies and secondary school age girls clothing including jewellery, accessories, shoes and bags.

Please ensure donated items are clean and in good condition, with no holes etc.

You can drop donations into school reception from Monday 13th October or bring on the night.

If you have clothes you want to donate earlier than 13th, contact Wendy on 07909 221330 and we will arrange to collect.

Don't worry if you have nothing to donate - that's ok too!



Tickets

£10 in advance - Buy on [Eventbrite](#)
£12 on Door
£5 - Under 18

There will be a bar with drinks and snacks available to buy
All proceeds go to the PTFA to support the school

Bring a bag - there is no limit on how many clothes you can take home with you!

Latest Music Video

The latest music video will be released at 6pm tonight. Here is the link

<https://www.youtube.com/@baccarrasmusic495>

They have now been viewed over 58,000 times!

Buddy the Dog's Appraisal Meeting

We are in the thick of appraisal season at Balcarras. This week Buddy the Dog had his annual appraisal with his line manager Mr Constance and myself. We reviewed last year's targets and set some new ones for the year ahead. He is doing very well although I am afraid I did turn down his request for a pay rise!



Right that's it. I am going to York this weekend. I am meeting my old university pals. It is 30 years since we started! Where did the time go? Have a nice weekend.

Dominic Burke