

Update from the Head



It has been another fun packed week at Balcarras! I would like to start this latest update by thanking those parents who have joined the *Balcarras\$ Plan*. We have had several people sign up in the last couple of weeks. If you haven't already I would ask that you look at the scheme and please support it if you can. The link is here:

<https://www.balcarras.gloucs.sch.uk/page/?title=Fundraising&pid=24>

Chess Tournament

Chess continues to be a runaway success at Balcarras. We regularly have up to 30 players at lunchtime chess club. On Monday Balcarras competed in the Regional Chess Championships at Bristol Grammar School. We had a very young team with many of our players coming from Year 7 and 8. Despite this we did very well. Here are the results for the A team:

Final Ranking after 4 Rounds

Rk.	SNo	Team	Games	+	=	-	TB1	TB2
1	1	QEH A	4	4	0	0	8	19,5
2	2	BGS A	4	3	0	1	6	19
3	4	Redland Green A	4	3	0	1	6	17,5
4	3	BGS B	4	3	0	1	6	14
5	12	Clevedon A	4	2	1	1	5	12
6	10	Clifton College	4	2	0	2	4	12
7	6	Sir Thomas Rich	4	2	0	2	4	11,5
	13	King's Bruton A	4	2	0	2	4	11,5
9	7	BGS C	4	2	0	2	4	10
10	5	Balcarras A	4	1	1	2	3	10,5
11	8	Denmark Road A	4	1	0	3	2	9
	14	Cotham A	4	1	0	3	2	9
13	11	Clifton High A	4	1	0	3	2	7,5
14	9	QEH C	4	0	0	4	0	5

And here are the results for the B team

Final Ranking after 4 Rounds

Rk.	SNo	Team	Games	+	=	-	TB1	TB2
1	9	Redland Green B	4	4	0	0	8	20
2	3	Clevedon B	4	3	0	1	6	15,5
	4	Clifton High B	4	3	0	1	6	15,5
4	8	Marling	4	3	0	1	6	14
5	2	City Academy	4	2	1	1	5	14,5
6	1	Balcarras B	4	2	0	2	4	13
7	6	Denmark Road B	4	2	0	2	4	10
8	5	Cotham B	4	1	1	2	3	12,5
9	7	King's Bruton B	4	1	1	2	3	11
10	12	Stroud High	4	1	1	2	3	10
11	10	Redmaids A	4	0	0	4	0	4,5
12	11	Redmaids B	4	0	0	4	0	3,5

Annotation:

Tie Break1: Matchpoints (2 for wins, 1 for Draws, 0 for Losses)
Tie Break2: points (game-points)

My thanks to Mr Godfrey and Mr Rothwell for taking our twelve players.

Remembrance



On Tuesday the whole Balcarras community gathered to remember those people who have given their lives during war. Here is an article on the school website:

<https://www.balcarras.gloucs.sch.uk/news/?pid=3&nid=1&storyid=1342>

The pupils were incredibly respectful of the occasion. I would like to say a particular thank you to Ben Carroll (Year 13) who performed the Last Post and the Reveille. Ben has performed this important function many times and Tuesday was his final performance. He played it beautifully.

Year 8 Natural History Museum Trip

On Tuesday 90 pupils went to the Natural History Museum. The geography department organised this trip and they will shortly place an article on the website.

Meeting with Parents at Richard Pates School

On Tuesday evening I was invited to Richard Pates School to meet parents of pupils in Year 3, 4 and 5 about transfer to secondary schools. Many of the other Cheltenham secondary schools were represented as well.

Work with Charlton Kings Parish Council

On Tuesday we welcomed councillor Lynda Johnson from Charlton Kings Parish Council in to meet with a group of female students. She was there to have a wide-ranging discussion on safe spaces for women in Charlton Kings and the wider Cheltenham community. This discussion followed on from a report that the local parish council commissioned on provision for young people in Charlton Kings. It was an excellent discussion and well attended by our Sixth Form students who gave honest and mature comments in response to Lynda's questions.

This kind of discussion around the safety and welfare of our students is so important, and it's great to continually develop our relationship with our local parish council. Lynda is a regular visitor to the school and we look forward to continuing this conversation and our work together.

Sixth Form Boost Programme

The last two weeks have been a busy period for the Sixth Form Boost programme. Boost, an initiative led superbly by Mr Niblett each year, aims amongst other things to encourage participating students to really explore their love of learning, to embrace 'super curricular' study, to raise their aspirations for their potential and aspirational post-18 pathways, and to work as collaboratively as possible. Each year we see as many as 60-70 students participate in each year group.

Last week, Wednesday and Thursday evenings saw Mr Niblett hosting 2 Year 13 Boost dinners at the Merryfellow in Charlton Kings, each attended by nearly 30 students and several members of Sixth Form staff. Both dinners, as has been the case with their predecessors, were lovely events. Each course of the meal was preceded by students giving addresses, the themes on this occasion being 'Looking Back', 'Strategies and Tactics for Success' and 'Looking Forward.' The talks offered by each of the students were fantastic - honest, reflective, inspirational, and a real

illustration of how far they have come in the last 18 months. These talks then prompted great conversations among the assembled staff and students, and the 2 hours flew by very enjoyably.

On Tuesday this week, Mr Niblett launch Boost with the current Year 12. The launch assembly was attended by over 70 students, and all were tasked with reading a book before the New Year which was 'super curricular' - related to the subject they were most likely to pursue post-18 and going beyond their taught curriculum. Students were also urged to look for opportunities to engage with university competitions and outreach opportunities. As Boost progresses in Year 12, students will look forward to their first Year 12 Boost dinners, a visit to the University of Oxford to meet Balcarras alumni and hear their advice on applying for and succeeding in post-18 education. Visits from university admissions teams will be hosted, some of our Year 12 Boost students will help Year 10 students engaging with the University of Oxford's Oxplore initiative, and those considering fast-track UCAS entries for Oxbridge and / or Medicine, Veterinary or Dentistry applications will have further support to help them prepare for their required university admissions tests.

Indeed, the next event on the horizon is an Early Entry University Interview Workshop for our 26 2025-26 Fast Track applicants (14 Oxford, 3 Cambridge, 6 Medicine, 2 Veterinary, 1 Dentistry) which will be held on Tuesday 25th November.

Key Stage 4 Boys Squash Team Through to Round 2 of the National Squash Championships

Mr Lane took 5 Key Stage 4 boys to Round 1 of the National Squash Championships at Wycliffe College. We beat Sir Thomas Rich School and lost narrowly to Wycliffe. But our performance was such that we have made it through to Round 2 of the National Squash Championships. Well done to the boys and to Mr Lane.

Former Pupil, Lieutenant Daniel Tierney, Performs Royal Navy 'Touchdown' at Balcarras

On Thursday one of our former pupils Lieutenant Daniel Tierney who is in the Royal Navy performed a touchdown on the Balcarras school field in his helicopter. We took Year 7 pupils out to watch. It was really exciting!

The training flight took them from RAF Shawbury in Shropshire to Portsmouth via Balcarras. Apparently they stopped off somewhere for lunch on the way to Portsmouth! I wonder whether there is a pub somewhere that has a helipad?



See a news article here:

<https://www.balcarras.gloucs.sch.uk/news/?pid=3&nid=1&storyid=1343>

Trust Training on OFSTED

On Wednesday evening I attended some training organised by the Balcarras Trust on the new OFSTED framework. It was delivered by Parin Gohil who is Headteacher of Winchcombe School and an OFSTED inspector. It was a very useful session. I'm not convinced that the new framework is a good idea but maybe it is wiser to just stay quiet! My thanks to Parin for delivering the training and to the Balcarras governors who were able to attend. This is a good example of where working inside a Trust is a big advantage.

PTFA

On Wednesday evening the Balcarras PTFA had their latest meeting. Mr Constance went along to represent the SMT. Part of the agenda was to discuss areas of the school that the PTFA are going to donate cash to. We are very grateful to have such a superb PTFA.

Year 13 Parents Eve

I always enjoy parents evening. It is lovely to just wonder around and chat to parents.

Right, that is it. I have to say I am ready for the weekend. I'm going to God's County. I'm watching Bob Dylan in Leeds and going into the Yorkshire Dales for a walk. I might even treat myself to a pint of Yorkshire Bitter! I hope you have a nice weekend.

Dominic Burke