

Update from the Head

It has been an action-packed week at Balcarras. I'm sending this update out early because tomorrow I will be the Balcarras Trust Teaching and Learning Conference taking place at the High School Leckhampton...more details below. Let's start this update by seeing how you did on Mr Niblett's astronomy quiz. I got 8 out of 10 which I wasn't too disappointed with.

Answers to the Astronomy Quiz

1. How many planets in our solar system do not have any moons? (2, mercury and Venus)
2. What is the real name of the North Star? (Polaris)
3. The Sun is composed primarily of which chemical element (hydrogen)
4. Vesta is the third largest what? (asteroid)
5. What is larger the Earth or Venus? (Earth)
6. Who was the first man to travel into space? (Yuri Gagarin)
7. What is the phenomenon 'aurora borealis' better known as? (northern lights)
8. In 1610, who discovered the four largest moons of Jupiter using a telescope? (Galileo)
9. Where would you find the great red spot? (Jupiter)
10. In astronomy, what does the terminator refer to? (the line separating light and dark)

Chamber Choir filming at St Peter's Leckhampton

On Monday the Balcarras Chamber Choir went to St Peter's Church in Leckhampton to film two pieces of Christmas music. The videos will be released shortly. I would like to thank St Peters for allowing us to use their beautiful church to film in.

Year 7 RE Talk

On Tuesday Year 7 enjoyed a fantastic talk on Christianity (their current religion of study) delivered by local Christian author, speaker, and missionary Kevin Elliott. During the session, Kevin shared his personal faith journey, offering thoughtful insights into what Christianity means to him and how it shapes his life and work. Pupils were fully engaged and had the opportunity to ask a wide range of questions, sparking meaningful discussion and deepening their understanding. It was an informative experience for everyone involved. The department organise a number of speakers from different religious backgrounds to come into the school through the course of the year.

English A level Trip to Stratford

On Tuesday the A level English students visited Stratford to attend a study day on Othello. The pupils enjoyed two sessions with a specialist on Othello and even managed a nice lunch in Stratford.

Value of Languages talk to Year 8

On Tuesday the whole of Year 8 attended a talk by Laura Kirk Francis on the value of studying languages and where it can take you. I popped in briefly and it was very interesting. See news article here:

<https://www.balcarras.gloucs.sch.uk/news/?pid=3&nid=1&storyid=1358>

Extended Service Consultation

On Tuesday evening we hosted the school nursing service. They gave a presentation to parents about the extended school nursing service and there was an opportunity to ask questions. The school will shortly send out a questionnaire to all parents as part of the consultation process.

School Council

On Tuesday I met with the school council. We talked about all sorts of things but spent most of our time talking about the site and ways we could improve it. The pupils felt that there was a need for extra covered areas and social space outdoors. We are looking into this. As ever the catch is money. If anyone wants to give us some we'd welcome it!

UCAS Fast Track Workshops

On Tuesday Richard Kemp came to Balcarras to run a workshop for our UCAS Early entry candidates and to do mock interviews. Richard is the former head of Pate's Grammar School and is a regular visitor to the school. I am very grateful to him for his support for Balcarras.

Year 11 Pupils Deliver Presentations to Year 7

As part of the Year 11 Health and social care students' GCSE coursework unit, pupils have been delivering presentations to Year 7 tutor groups on a given theme. The themes they could choose from were to do with the dangers of smoking or strategies to avoid the spread of flu and viruses. It is a great opportunity for the older pupils to deliver their GCSE work to a n audience, and it is great for the younger pupils to be able to interact with pupils in Year 11. My thanks to Miss Dodds and the Year 7 tutors for arranging this.

Year 9 First World War Re-Enactor Visit

On Wednesday we had a First World War re-enactor in to deliver talks to every pupil in Year 9. They attended in relatively small groups through the course of the morning and there was an opportunity for pupils to meet him at lunch. It was a great talk.



See news article here:

<https://www.balcarras.gloucs.sch.uk/news/?pid=3&nid=1&storyid=1359>

Movember Match

On Wednesday we held they annual Movember football match. A team of teachers with moustaches took on a team of teachers who were moustache less. I came out of football retirement to play in the game. It was a 0-0 nailbiter that was eventually settled in the No Mo's favour by sudden death penalties. Before you ask—yes I did score mine!



See news article here:

<https://www.balcarras.gloucs.sch.uk/news/?pid=3&nid=1&storyid=1360>

Year 10 Parents Evening

I attended the Year 10 Parents Evening on Wednesday as a parent. It is always interesting to be on the other side of the fence. Of course, I was on duty as well and it was lovely to catch up with so many parents. We are very fortunate to have such committed and supportive parents.

MFL Debating Competition

This evening 8 sixth formers will take part in the MFL debating competition held at Cheltenham College. We have two teams in French (Year 12 students: Lottie Pallister, Daisy Rocco-Devoy, Martha Vacher, Isla Kelly McLoad) and two teams in Spanish (Year 13 students: Jo Lobban, Maja Coomber, Tom Aplin, Sam Omoruyi). The school's taking part are Balcarras, Abingdon School, King's School Gloucester, Wellington College, Bradfield College, Pate's Grammar School, St Edward's Oxford, Marlborough College, Cheltenham Ladies College and Cheltenham College. My thanks to Mr Seguin for organising our teams.

Year 12 and 13 Psychology morning at St Edward's

Today the A level psychology students attended a psychology master class at Ste Edward's school.

NPQ Conference

Today well over 100 teachers attended a National Professional Qualification (NPQ) conference here at Balcarras. The teachers, from across the county, are starting an NPQ in a range of areas from senior school leadership, to leading teaching to headship. I popped in briefly. It was a great event.

Art and Craft Staff Event

Tonight, I am joining 35 members of staff for an art and craft evening organised by Mrs Leach. We run several staff wellbeing events through the year and this is the latest. Apparently, I'm going to get to design my own Christmas cards. Exciting!

Continuing Professional Development

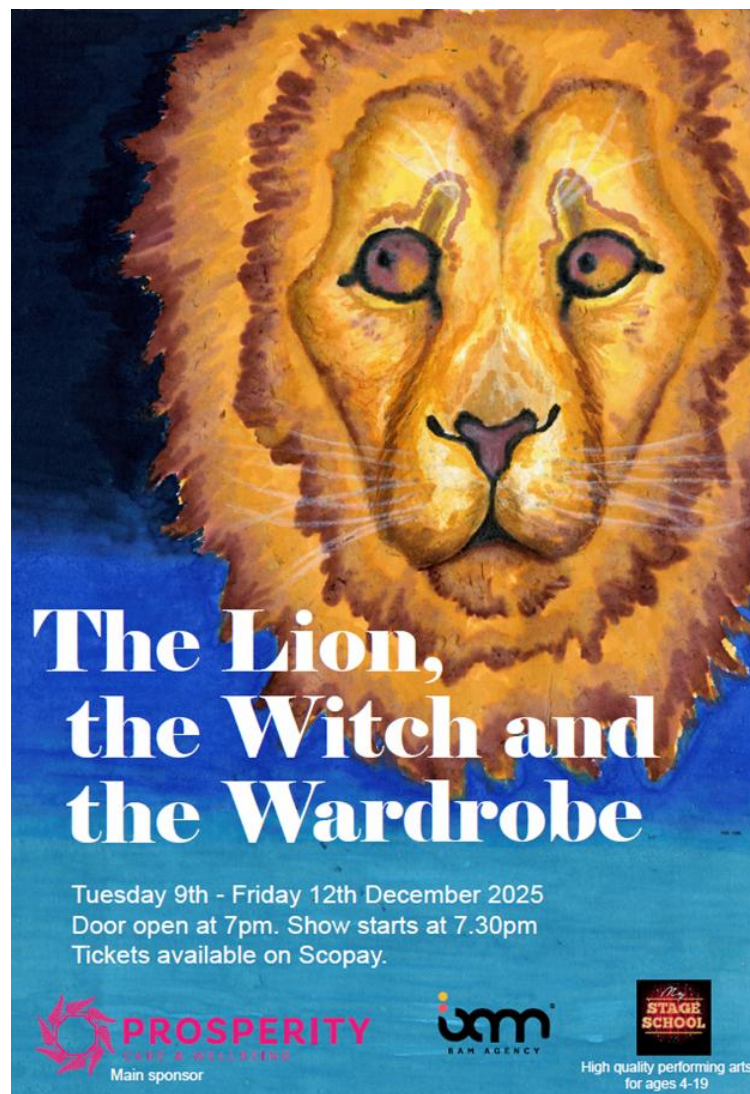
We take continuing professional development incredibly seriously at the school. Last Wednesday evening the entire teaching staff had INSET based around quality first teaching. After a presentation from Mrs Ebanja we were split into action research groups. Each group is researching a different area and suggesting a plan of action to be shared with the whole staff later in the year.

Tomorrow the entire staff will meet with our colleagues at Winchcombe and The High School Leckhampton for our annual teaching and learning conference. The keynote is being delivered by Laura Spence from the Gloucestershire Research School. Laura will explain to us what the latest research is suggesting as to how children learn best. After that there will be several workshops delivered by staff from across the Trust. I am really looking forward to it.

Events coming up at Balcarras

Next Wednesday (3rd December) we have the Annual Carol Concert at Holy Apostles Church. It starts at 7pm with mince pies and mulled wine served by the PTFA afterwards. You do not need a ticket for this event. There will be a retiring collection for the Cheltenham Open Door Charity.

The week after we have the school production of the Lion The, Witch and The Wardrobe. Tickets are selling like hotcakes!



The Budget on Wednesday

There was nothing for schools in Wednesday's budget and I am afraid it did irritate me to hear the chancellor insist that there was no return to austerity. She needs to know that we are making cuts in education at a faster rate than ever and that this time we are cutting at the bone. Austerity 2.0 is more dangerous because we simply have no more efficiencies to make. During the course of this parliament our income will increase by 0.9% per year but costs will be going up by 3%+. The only answer to that is to cut things and the only thing left to cut is more staffing. This failure to invest in education is one of the biggest mistakes our society could make.

Anyway, despite this I'm looking forward to the weekend. I'm going to have a nice rest and for once I won't be watching Leeds—not even on the telly. I'm looking forward to a break from school and from Leeds.! Have a nice weekend.

Dominic Burke