



BALCARRAS
From strength to strength

NEWSLETTER

Welcome from the Headteacher

Dear Parents,

Welcome to the final newsletter of 2025. It has been a great year at the school and one I shall look back on with great fondness. It started with us anticipating our first full inspection for a decade and I can vividly remember staring at the clock every Monday morning at 9.30 through the course of January and February until the call came in March. Having never taken a school through a full inspection, I was nervous but in the end it all went very well. The inspectors found a happy and safe school and commented particularly on our sense of community and belonging. As the year ends, I think both of these things have been high profile again. Three events come to mind.

Firstly, the Carol Concert on Wednesday 3rd December was a great community event. How to sum it up? It would be easy to talk about the quality of the music and performances and of course it was incredibly high standard. One could focus on the comprehensive nature of it—over 120 pupils involved from every corner of the school and from all backgrounds. Equally you could highlight the gender balance—great to see so many boys enjoying making music and singing with real confidence. What struck me most was the atmosphere—it was relaxed and calm. The teachers were smiling and positive—the pupils didn't look stressed. Everyone looked like they were having a great time. They had all rehearsed and practiced properly so that by the time the concert came they could just enjoy expressing themselves. It was a privilege to be there and I was ever so proud to deliver the vote of thanks at the end of the concert. My thanks to Mr Armstrong, Mrs Watts, Mr Howell and everyone in music.

Secondly the school production of *The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe* last week was an absolute triumph. I watched each performance and every night the cast aced it and the music was perfection. It was a hugely ambitious production—two casts involving around 180 pupils and accompanied by a 20-piece orchestra. Everyone involved should take enormous pride in the final spectacle.

Keep up to date on all our news:

WWW.BALCARRAS.GLOUCS.SCH.UK

It's impossible to calculate the real benefit of a production like this to the school and its pupils. In education we tend to reduce everything down to numbers but I'm afraid there isn't a number that could accurately calculate the value of this experience. The cast of 2025 had a wonderful camaraderie that crossed over year groups. So many times I saw older pupils congratulating or coaching younger cast members. A production like this is a huge team effort which is fuelled by incredible levels of engagement and supercharged by the togetherness and fellowship which comes from being part of something so special. None of this happens by accident. It is the result of countless hours of work and meticulous organisation and attention to detail. I would like to thank EVERYONE who was involved but particularly Ms Went, Miss Ball and Mrs Watts.

Finally, an event that hasn't happened yet. Today will see the Annual Variety Show. It will take place three times so that everyone in the school can see it. There will even be an extra one on Friday for the sixth formers. It will feature acts from across the school including some of the staff. Tradition has it that I perform although I've not rehearsed yet. I do think it is important not to be over-prepared! It's a lovely, fun way to end what has been a long but very successful term. On Friday we will have a final assembly before term finishes at 12.30 and another year draws to a close.

I would like to take this opportunity to formally thank two groups of people. The first is the Balcarras PTFA who volunteer hours of their time to support the school. This term they have organised the Year 7 Icebreaker, the Clothes Swap, several second hand uniform sales, the Carol Concert mince pies and mulled wine and the bar at the school production. They donate thousands of pounds to the school and the events they run help us to engage with parents and the wider community. We are very fortunate to have such a dedicated PTFA and I would like to thank everyone who has volunteered this term. Particular thanks to Kit and Sally Cox who lead it all brilliantly.

The second group to thank are the governors of Balcarras and the Trustees of the Balcarras Trust. Again, these people are committed volunteers and much of their hard work and effort can go un-noticed or stay hidden. I am very grateful to them for their support and for the way that they carefully and appropriately offer challenge to the school. I would particularly like to thank the Chair of Governors, Peter Mitchener, for his support and for the many hours he gives to Balcarras.

The Carol Concert finished with the Boys Cantabile and the Girls Chamber Choir singing Sweet Silent Night by Andy Beck. It was absolutely beautiful, so much so that Mr Armstrong and the department have recorded it as a Christmas treat. It will be released on the Balcarras Music Channel on Youtube on Christmas Eve at 6pm. It is well worth a listen. Here are the first few lines...

All is calm

All is bright

On this sweet silent night

Stars above shine their light

On this sweet silent night

On this sweet silent night

And the snow comes down

Floating to the ground

And without a sound

The world turns white

I doubt that Cheltenham will turn white this Christmas but whatever the weather I wish all our families a Peaceful and Happy Christmas.

Dominic Burke

PS. If you just can't wait that long for some Balcarras Christmas Music the Chamber Choir are releasing their recording of Beautiful December by Amy F Bernon this Friday at 6pm. I have literally just returned from the music department having had a sneak preview. It is stunning.

Supporting your Child's Education for a Dollar a week.



Background: As many of you will be aware, our school has been on a wonderful journey over the last few decades, helping so many young people to achieve their dreams. We have been recognised as 'The Sunday Times Southwest State School of the Decade' as well as an Ofsted 'Outstanding School'. We are proud to be a state comprehensive school and offer the widest possible opportunities to all. Nevertheless, state education funding alone does not enable us to provide all the benefits that we believe we should provide for your child.

The *Balcarra\$ Plan*: You doubtless receive many requests for money, however, we hope this one may be a little different. We would like you to consider whether you could contribute \$1 per day (that's about 75p), whilst your child is a member of our school. That equates to £3.75 a week and £15 per month (based on a five-day school week) – around the price of a posh cup of coffee a week! You may ask what possible difference that will make. Given the large number of families in our school community, if 500 families were willing to contribute a cup of coffee a week, that would raise £90,000 each year. Remarkable! We already receive donations from many families – we remain grateful for those donations, thank you.

What will the money be spent on? We want to make it clear that the money contributed will not be used to pay for basic school running costs. It will be used to provide advantages for your child beyond those which we could afford to provide using government funding alone. But as real terms government funding falls, we are finding it tough to keep up with things we used to take for granted. To give a few specific examples:

- In recent years we have spent money on the school grounds, making sure that they are beautiful, stimulating spaces which enhance the wellbeing of all who use them.
- We have also been able to upgrade classroom spaces, notably making a new DT room and kitting out our new music block.
- We continue to invest in our IT estate making sure that we are not using worn out computers
- We use the contributions to pay for the school minibuses

Providing such excellent facilities is a challenge in the current school funding environment and we would love to be able to keep improving. This plan will only work through scale. We appreciate that not all families can afford this, and we fully acknowledge and respect this; the scheme is of course purely voluntary. But if you do support it then we are confident your support will encourage others to see just what extra can be achieved for your children.

How do I sign up?

If you are keen to support us with our 'Balcarra\$ Plan', there are two ways that you can sign up:

1 – Set up a Standing Order yourself on your online banking

We think this will be the easiest method for most people. Simply set up a Standing Order using the following details:

School Bank: Lloyds Bank
Account Name: Balcarras Opportunities Account
Sort code: 30-91-87
Account number: 14471463
Payment amount: £15 (or any other amount you choose)
Frequency: Monthly
First payment date: *Preferred date in October 2025*
Quote reference: *Provide your full name*

2 – Complete this [Standing Order form](#) or see below. If you would like us to claim an additional 25% on your donations using the government's 'Gift Aid' scheme then please use this form. Send the form to the school reception desk or to a form tutor.

As soon as the first payment has been made, you will receive correspondence from the school to thank you for your support.

The information on this form will be **confidential**. Please return it via a form tutor/reception.

First Name:	Last Name:
Full Address:	
Name(s) of child/children at Balcarras	

Please treat all qualifying gifts of money as Gift Aid donations.

Amount	£15.00 <input type="checkbox"/>	£25.00 <input type="checkbox"/>	£50.00 <input type="checkbox"/>	£100.00 <input type="checkbox"/>	Other (Please specify amount) <input style="width: 80%;" type="text"/>
Timing	Monthly <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Starting from ___ / ___ / ___			To last _____ years

I would be interested in helping with a one off capital purchase please contact me

I am a UK taxpayer and understand that if I pay less Income Tax and/or Capital Gains Tax than the amount of gift aid claimed on all my donations in that tax year, it is my responsibility to pay the difference. I understand that other taxes such as VAT and Council Tax do not qualify. I understand the charity can reclaim 25p of tax on every £1 that I give on or after 6 April 2008.

I am / am not a taxpayer (please delete as applicable)	Signed
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Unless you prefer to pay by cheque or cash, could you please complete your bank details in the Standing Order form and return to Balcarras School – we will do all the rest.
MANY THANKS!

N.B. If you already contribute to the scheme, this new commitment will replace your previous one.

STANDING ORDER MANDATE

Please tick:	New Instruction <input type="checkbox"/>	Amend previous Standing Order <input type="checkbox"/>
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To (name of your bank)

Bank Sort Code:

Account No:

Account Name:

BENEFICIARY DETAILS

Lloyds Bank
 30-91-87
 14471463
 BALCARRAS OPPORTUNITIES ACCOUNT
 Beneficiary Ref:
 (to be completed by the School)

PAYMENT DETAILS

Amount of payment £	Date of first payment ___ / ___ / ___
Amount in words	Frequency of payment MONTHLY
Date of last payment ___ / ___ / ___ or continue until further notice (please tick) <input type="checkbox"/>	

Payer signature	Date
Payer contact telephone number (only in case of a query about this form)	

EASYFUNDRAISING

Balcarras School



Just letting you know that Balcarras School are now registered with easyfundraising, which means you can raise FREE donations for us every time you shop online. Over 7,000 brands will donate to us when you use easyfundraising to shop with them – at no extra cost to yourself! These donations really mount up and make a BIG difference to us, so we'd really appreciate it if you could take a moment to sign up and support us. It's completely FREE and only takes a moment. Scan the QR code to start fundraising!

Thank you so much!

ATTENTION, YEAR 11 MR & MRS SPRING WALLIS

The Yearbook pages are now live on the VLE. Please visit Resources > Student Zone > Yearbook and start uploading your photos; voting for awards; reminiscing about what life was like in year 9; and writing up all the 'teacherisms' that have plagued you since year 7.

Parents and guardians, there is a page for uploading baby photos and 'first-day-of-year-7' photos, so please get involved too!

As your tutor will have mentioned, we are looking for design ideas for the front (and back!) cover of the yearbook. Please submit your designs via email to the Spring Wallises.

We look forward to seeing what you come up with...

YEAR 11 PROM NEIL BAXTER, DEPUTY HEADTEACHER

The Year 11 Prom is an annual celebration at Balcarras and is always an enjoyable event for both pupils and staff.

This year it will be on **Friday 24th April 2026**.

It is intended as a celebration of the hard work the Year 11 pupils have put into their studies during the year, and as a way of saying thank-you and good luck to the Year 11 students just before they depart for study leave and to begin their GCSE examinations.

The event is **invite-only**. While we hope that **all** our Year 11 pupils will be invited to the Prom, pupils whose behaviour has been **below expectation** will **not** be invited to attend the celebrations.

Invites will be issued to all pupils who work hard in lessons, have good attendance and punctuality at school, complete homework to a good standard and follow the school rules. Pupils who need regular intervention for their behaviour, attendance, punctuality or effort will not receive an invite to the Year 11 Prom.

PTFA NEWS

Looking ahead, we are delighted that tickets are already on sale for the PTFA Comedy Night. For this bumper night of comedy, we bring you Jason Neale, Jules O'Brian, Michell Shaughnessy and headlined by Joey Page!

Friday 6th March 2026 - Balcarras Comedy Club, Balcarras School, Cheltenham - 8pm - Age 18+

<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/balcarras-comedy-club-fundraiser-fri-6th-march-2026-tickets-1977185158032?aff=ebdssbcategorybrowse>

PTFA Quiz....more information coming soon.....

SIXTH FORM NEWS

Sixth Form Open Evening

We are delighted to invite Y11 pupils and their families to our open evening for 2026 Sixth Form admissions. The open evening is taking place on Thursday 15th January from 6-8pm. There is no need to book a place. There will be talks from Mr Leatherbarrow, Head of Sixth Form, and Mr Burke, in the main school hall at 6.20pm, 7pm and 7.40pm. We do advise to please walk, cycle or car share where possible, the evening is typically very busy with many families from other schools and locations visiting.

**BALCARRAS
SIXTH FORM
OPEN EVENING
15.1.26
6-8PM**

Please join us on Thursday 15th January 2026 for our Sixth Form Open Evening.

During the evening, our Sixth Form student ambassadors will be on hand to take you to your chosen A level subject areas and meet the teachers along with students that study those subjects.

We also welcome you to join a talk from our Head of Sixth Form, Mr Leatherbarrow, along with our Headteacher, Mr Burke. Talks will be held at 6.20pm, 7pm and 7.40pm.

In the Sixth Form common room, you will find information on our extra curricular activities along with advice on our admissions criteria.

We look forward to seeing you!

Balcarras
From strength to strength

Staff Exhibition Debate

What a Christmas Cracker!



A huge thank you to Mr Harding, Miss Parry, Miss Jowett, Mr Towers and Mr Constance. All were fantastic sports, and the four debaters gave the students a masterclass in how to debate effectively. In response to the motion that the best Christmas films don't necessarily have to be about Christmas, our staff debaters offered up fantastic performances. We saw forensic dissection of the motion, wonderful humour, imagery and persuasion, and some of the most aggressive and relentless points of information seen in recent years! To give up time to

prepare at what is already a busy point of the year is incredibly generous, and greatly appreciated. Congratulations to Miss Parry and Mr Harding on their victory, and commiserations to Miss Jowett and Mr Towers who put up a valiant fight in opposition.

The student audience really enjoyed the exhibition - and it was the ideal prelude to what we hope will be another stellar season of debating in the New Year.



Sixth Form Taskmaster:

This half-term's Sixth Form Taskmaster challenge involves two competitions - to develop a new Christmas No.1 smash hit video and to develop creative Christmas decorations. At the time of going to press with the newsletter, it's looking like Mr Stoker's 12A Christmas Sleigh complete with their very own "Mariah Stoker" is going to be the winner! Final results of this and the Christmas No.1 smash hit will be announced in the January newsletter.

Y13 Leavers Hoodies:

Our Y13 leavers' hoodies arrived this week. The winter distribution of leavers' hoodies is a new tradition in Sixth Form and each year we now look forward to seeing the new selection of colours. Y13 students are now proudly wearing these around school and we think they look really lovely! This tradition is the

result of our keenness to listen to student voice and fine student leadership - the initiative coming from the 2024-25 student leadership team. A huge thank you must go to Miss Clements who has taken the lead on behalf of the Sixth Form team this year.



Y13 Fast Track UCAS Interviews:

For the last few weeks we have been busy supporting our Y13 students with early entry interviews, we have 11 students that have interviewed with Oxford or Cambridge and a further two that have had medicine interviews at other universities. We anticipate many more interviews to come in the new year, both for university applicants and for students who have applied for apprenticeships! Each year we aim support students with interview preparation with the help of external visitors. Furthermore, we look to ensure that any tech requirements (Teams / Zoom etc) are organised and we run regular practice interviews. The majority of these take place online so ensuring the students have the right technology, quiet space and support for each interview is imperative. We wish all of our students the best of luck.

UCAS Applications and other Post-18 pathways:

The UCAS season is in full swing! Mr Boughton has submitted a significant proportion of our anticipated 238 applications from the current Y13s. We also support our alumni students that have taken a gap year and are now applying for university. We offer a great deal of support throughout Sixth Form not just for UCAS but all post-18 options. Planning starts in Y12 when Mr Niblett launches the 'Boost' group for those interested in Oxbridge, Medicine, Russell Group and for those that are just interested in being part of the group which acts as a wonderful support network. Towards the end of Y12, we take the entire year group to the UCAS convention in the Birmingham NEC which offers a wealth of information on universities, apprenticeships and gap years. We also focus PSHE sessions on setting up a UCAS login in and starting to think about future options. When students return in Y13, personal statement workshops take place as we support the students through developing their own. The internal UCAS deadline is always set to early December to give the team enough time to submit all of the applications. Alongside UCAS, Mrs Lewis is continuously working with students both directly and in groups, offering support and interviews for apprenticeships including workshops and keeping the students up to date with the latest opportunities.

Y13 Prom:

We are delighted to announce that we have once again secured Manor By The Lake for this year's farewell prom for Y13. This will be held on Tuesday 30th June, 2026, after the final A-Level exams and the contingency date published by the exam boards. Tickets and further details will be released in the new year.



SCIENCE NEWS

LOUISE MCRITCHIE

It has been a busy start to the year in Science club - from making air cannons, to magnetic slime, shrunken heads for Halloween and coloured flames for Bonfire night. More recently we have been getting festive designing Christmas cards with saturated salt solutions and making light up Christmas cards - more fun and competitions to come in the New Year!

MUSIC NEWS

JANE WATTS & DAN ARMSTRONG

Gosh! Where to start this time...!

The Music Department is always busy at this time of year, but the 2025 Festive Season schedule has felt particularly full-to-bursting!

Carol Concert on December 3rd

This was a sumptuous collection of Christmas Music from no fewer than six different choirs, an Orchestra, a Guitar and Ukulele group, Balc Air & Reeds, String Group, a Cello Ensemble, Brass Group, plus smaller jazz ensembles – and excellent readings. Anya Hunter and Thomas Egelton (both Y10) stunned us with their beautiful solos and Posy Hudson (Y7) led a team of soloists for a beautiful version of the first verse of Once in Royal David's City. It was also really lovely that both Ben Skeet (Y9) and Issac Costa-Hall (Y12) were able to play the organ as the congregation were coming into the church. Big thanks to all of the Music Teachers involved: Mrs Hopkins, Mrs Vacher, Mrs Burge, Mr King, Mr Douglas – as well as Mr Howell, Mrs Watts and Mr Armstrong, who all had a very busy evening!

Once again, Rev. Ashley Collishaw made us all feel very welcome at Holy Apostles and we had the amazing support of many others: including Balcarras Site Team, Reprographics, the Food Tech Department and PTFA (no carol concert would be complete without the mulled wine and mince pies!), Mr Constance and our technical whizz, Caleb Horne (and amazingly professional student stage crew).

We're so grateful to this wonderful team of people, who made it possible and this year, the event was generously sponsored by Martin Burge & Co. (www.martinburgeandco.com).

A retiring collection was made, all the proceeds of which went to the Open Door Chrity for the homeless...

Thank you to everyone who supported the event – and to the students themselves (over 120 of them!) who made the evening such a delight!



School Production – The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe

This enchanting tale of epic proportions came to life during last week in a way that charmed everyone who saw it and all who were involved. Ms Went will write more about it in a future edition of this newsletter, but we want to thank absolutely everyone who contributed to its success...



Forthcoming Videos

As most of you will know, the Balcarras Music Channel (under the directorship of Mr Armstrong) has been producing a highly successful series of YouTube videos, which have really taken off, with massive numbers of views.

Earlier this week, Chamber Choir and Cantabile travelled to St John's Church in Burford to record a very special music video, which will be released on Christmas Eve (which happens to be Mrs Watts' birthday – Mr Armstrong's is the next day, so we really do love this time of year especially!). Incidentally, the minibus karaoke was excellent in both directions!

However, if you can't wait until December 24th, we're excited to announce that the first Chamber Choir video for the Balcarras Music Channel will be released on the last day of this term – this Friday (19th December)! We know you're going to love both of these!



Exam Successes

Congratulations to all of the following students and their teachers:

Mr Steve Browning - LCME Acoustic Guitar Exams

Aiden Wellfair (Y9) Grade 2 Distinction.
Jack Solomon (Y8) Grade 1 Merit

Trinity Rock and Pop Exams

Raph Henderson (Y9) Grade 1 Pass

Mrs Kate Skeet - MTB Violin Exams

Gabriella Soares (Y8)	Grade 4	Distinction
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Mrs Nicola Hopkins – ABRSM Flute Exams

Isabelle Sweetlove (Y9)	Grade 2	Merit
Fliss Hudson (Y8)	Grade 2	Distinction

Mrs Victoria Burge – Trinity Cello Exams

Wien Chiu (Y10)	Grade 8	Merit
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ABRSM Cello Exams

Imogen Cadogan (Y9)	Grade 5	Merit
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We wish you all a very Merry Christmas and a Happy, Healthy and Musical 2026!
Jane Watts, Dan Armstrong & Matt Howell and the Whole Balcarras Music Team

CHARITABLE GIVING

MARK CONSTANCE

We are delighted to welcome representatives from Sue Ryder in for our final assembly where we are presenting/presented a large cheque, both physically and figuratively, for over £15000. It's great to support such a wonderful cause, and the funds were raised from two sources: Firstly, over 30 staff ran the Cheltenham half marathon in honour and memory of our former colleague and friend Kevin Clancy. Secondly, our sponsored walk raised just over £6000 with the whole school engaging in a healthy 5km stroll across the hills surrounding the school. Thanks so much to everyone who supported these events. Charitable giving remains an important value for our school community.

The retiring collection from the Balcarras Carol Concert this year raised £676.91. All donations will be given to Cheltenham Open Door. Thanks to all who made a contribution.

BAUBLE COMPETITION
JEN SWANEPOEL



The
competition
was judged by
SMT and the
pastoral Team.

Highly commended!



...and the winners are!



YEAR 10 TRADITIONAL FRUIT CAKES

CATH SAUNDERS & ADRIENNE FORD

Over the past two weeks, our Year 10 students have been busy in lessons completing their traditional fruit cakes (about 80 cakes have been made in total!) They demonstrated excellent practical skills, organisation, and patience as they carefully prepared, baked, and finished their cakes. As part of the final stages, students successfully marzipanned their cakes before applying flat icing and finishing with royal icing using traditional techniques. They were then given the opportunity to decorate their cakes to their own designs, showing creativity and individuality alongside technical skill. The results were impressive, with a high standard of accuracy and presentation throughout. Well done to Year 10 for their hard work and commitment—many delicious cakes were proudly taken home to share,

Merry Christmas 🎄



SCHOOL PRODUCTION HANNAH WENT

The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe

The drama, tech and music departments have been hard at work all this term preparing for the whole school production of The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe, and last week we were finally able to share the show. After committing many, many hours to pulling all the various elements together, I think it's fair to say the show was a huge success.

The show was performed four nights last week, alternating between Team Winter and Team Spring on stage, accompanied by dancers, singers and musicians, and supported by a backstage team, bringing the total number of students involved to a whopping 180!

We really want to say a **huge thank you and well done** to everyone who has worked towards the final result, we really couldn't be any prouder. We are also extremely grateful for all the lovely messages from fellow staff, students and parents. We're so glad you enjoyed the show.



SPONSORSHIP

We would like to thank all the companies that have kindly sponsored events in the run up to Christmas.
Martin Burge & Co for sponsoring the Carol service:



Prosperity Care & Wellbeing for being the Main sponsor for the school production:



BAM agency and My Stage School for being partner sponsors for the school production:



We really value The Arts at Balcarras, and their support with these events enabled us to ensure that the technical support, staging and sound were all high quality, and the students had the best chance to show their skill and ability. Thank you - it made a real difference to the events.

YOUNG ENTERPRISE TRADE FAIR

JACK GODDARD

On Thursday 5th December, both Balcarras Young Enterprise teams travelled to the Swindon Designer Outlet to take part in the Young Enterprise Trade Fair. The event gave them an excellent opportunity to interact with the public, showcase their products, and gain valuable real-world business experience.

Both teams performed exceptionally well, with one team even selling out their entire stock! Their next challenge will be the regional finals in March.

If you're interested in purchasing items from the Young Enterprise teams, keep an eye out, their websites will be launching soon.



YEAR 7 TARGET INFORMATION

GARY TOWERS, DEPUTY HEADTEACHER

How was my target set?

- You sat KS2 assessments at the end of primary school.
- Most pupils across the country sit the same assessments each year.
- We use the results of this to see what grades pupils with the same results as you have got in the past when they sat exams in each subject.
- We only look at how pupils did in the top 5% of schools in the country.
- We use these results to set your targets.



Are my targets the highest grade I can achieve?

- **Absolutely not.** Your target is not a ceiling. It is a guide to let you, your parents and your teachers know how you are doing **compared to other pupils** with the same KS2 results as you.
- **You are an individual** and should always try to do the best you can regardless of your target.
- We review the targets at the end of Year 7 and if they are too low we will put them up.

My friends/class have higher targets than me should I give up?

- **Absolutely not.** Remember your target is letting you know how **other** people with the same KS2 results as you have done in the past. You are an **individual** and should always try to do the best you can regardless of your target.
- Think of your target as the first rung on a ladder. If you reach your target, set yourself the challenge of climbing to the next rung, before you know it you could be at the top of the ladder.



My targets are high I am worried I won't reach them.

- Your targets are supposed to be a challenge because we have only looked at how pupils in the top 5% of schools in the country with the same KS2 results as you did.
- Your targets are based on how **others** have done and are only a guide. You are an **individual** with your own skills and ideas. As long as you try your best you can be proud of what you achieve.

After the Christmas holiday pupils in year 7 will start to be issued their target grades.

Please see the information on how these targets have been set.

Tutors will talk to Year 7 about these target grades using the same information included in this newsletter.

If your child did not take Key Stage 2 assessments at the end of primary school, we will have used information gathered about them in their first term here at Balcarras to set the targets.

LIBRARY NEWS

MEGAN KELLY

I've been seeing so many book round ups on social media—when do these people have time to read over a 100 books?!? I'm very pleased I got through ten new books in the last 12 months.

The Year 7s will have their new Bookbuzz books to read over the winter break and I hope many will have a book or token under the tree as well, no matter their age. I am doing a magazine swap with a friend—I went to Magalleria, a fantastic magazine bookstore in Bath, to get her some design and fibre art magazines. She always finds the most interesting cooking and paper art magazines, so I'm keep a sharp eye out for her parcel.

As last year was such a success, I am again challenging all years to tell me a story. All years are encouraged to write a 500 word short story, with the prompt of *Winter*. Winter is being defined as December, January, and February. Students can write about the holiday wish that went horribly right, The Southern Hemispheres Longest Day, National Carrot Cake Day, which is February 3rd ... there are more prompts and details on the VLE. Students should email in their final submissions to Ms Kelly (MCK@) by January 16th.

Going on a car trip? Check out the public libraries audio book selection. Looking for something you can just read a few pages of? 'The Golden Thread' by Kassia St. Clair is all about the history and impact of fabric to the modern world with nice short and engaging chapters. I'm re-reading 'The Dark is Rising' by Susan Cooper. A spooky English fairy tale that never fails to keep me up late. It's also a good one for reading aloud.

This winter break, may you have time to enjoy a hot drink and an interesting book.
Happy reading!



NEWSLETTER



The newsletter will now be distributed by email and available to view on our VLE (Firefly) as well as on the school website.

It is incredibly easy and will save the school a lot of paper and the planet a lot of trees!

If you would still prefer a hard copy, please contact Karen Adkins
ksa@balcarras.gloucs.sch.uk

Follow us on X (formerly Twitter) @balcarras and Facebook, Facebook.com/BalcarrasSchool for updates and news about school life and events.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Dominic Burke".

Headteacher





From Balcarras to the Road: Meet Adam Newman!

Hello! My name is Adam Newman, and I'm a proud ex-Balcarras student. I'm now a fully qualified Approved Driving Instructor (ADI), running my own independent driving school, **Learn with Adam**, in Cheltenham and the surrounding areas.

I'm currently welcoming new learners! Each lesson is tailored to your progress in a calm and positive learning environment, helping you build confidence behind the wheel. 🚗

I also offer before-school lessons for those who want to fit driving practice around their busy schedule.

If your son or daughter is **17 and ready to start lessons**, or if you'd like me to **put them on a waiting list for when they turn 17**, get in touch!

I have limited spaces during the week, so feel free to call or text me on 07769 156037, and I'll do my best to fit lessons at convenient times.

Learn more about me and my approach here: www.learnwithadam.co.uk

Please pass this on to friends who might be interested.

Looking forward to helping you get on the road safely and confidently!

MOVE MORE
EVERY CHILD THRIVES

SEND SPORTS AND SOCIAL

EVERY SATURDAY
(DURING TERM TIME)

10-11.30AM: AGES 5 - 11
12.30-2PM: AGES 12 - 16

TEWKESBURY YOUTH SUPPORT CENTRE:
LINK RD, TEWKESBURY
GL20 5JQ

ES FOR THE WHOLE FAMILY!
PARENTS + CARERS MUST STAY

SCAN TO BOOK!

MOVE MORE
EVERY CHILD THRIVES

ACTIVITIES

FOOTBALL
BASKETBALL
VOLLEYBALL
BOCCIA
KURLING
and more!

FREE TEAS AND COFFEES AVAILABLE!

"It was really, really lovely to have somewhere to go on Saturday morning, with fun & engaging activities to do with my son. It was really nice for me to meet other parents and to have Move More staff there to lead the activities too. Thank you so much!"

FOR MORE INFO EMAIL:
rebekah@move-more.org

JOIN US AS A VOLUNTEER

“ My volunteer has helped me to come out of my shell and become more confident. They have taught me life skills which have helped me to feel calmer and more settled - I feel I'm a better mum ”



Do you want to make a difference by supporting a family experiencing tough times?

Do you have parenting experience?

Can you spare 2-3 hours a week to help a family with young children?

At Home-Start Cotswolds, our trained volunteers are carefully matched with a family that they visit once a week. They don't judge; they just offer a listening ear and practical support with everyday family life. It's simple, but we know it has a real impact.

If you would like to make a difference by supporting a local family, we'll be running our FREE 8-week volunteer training course on Thursday mornings, 9.30am - 1pm from 22nd January 2026 in Cirencester. As a Home-Start volunteer, you gain access to free, high-quality training, learn new skills and enhance your own wellbeing!



Further details and an application form can be found at:

www.home-start-cotswolds.org.uk

Or contact us for more information:
office@home-start-cotswolds.org.uk
01285 885391



Governor vacancy at Holy Trinity Primary School

My name is Debbie and I am chair of governors at Holy Trinity Primary School. I am hoping to recruit a supportive governor to add to our team.

PRIMARY SCHOOL GOVERNOR

We are a one form entry, multicultural and multifaith, Church of England Primary school in the heart of Cheltenham which Ofsted rated Good when we were inspected in June 2025: *“Pupils enjoy attending this inclusive and welcoming school. Warm relationships between staff, pupils and families are at the centre. The school has high ambitions for what pupils can achieve. Parents typically describe the school as being a ‘village school, within a town setting’. Pupils are polite, friendly and proud of their school... Governors have a strong understanding of the strategic role they play in driving school improvement and know the school’s areas of strength and development well.”*

We are looking for someone with a commitment to education, who is approachable and keen to be part of a dynamic team. While we would especially welcome someone who can enhance the diversity of our Board and/or can bring a good understanding of finance, we would be delighted to hear from anyone who will bring enthusiasm and commitment to our forward-looking team as we continue to strive to provide the best Primary education experience possible for the community we serve in furthering our vision, *“Aspiring for all to live life to the full.”*

Debbie Burston chair@holytrinity.gloucs.sch.uk

<https://www.holytrinity.gloucs.sch.uk/>