

Update from the Head



Gosh it was raining cats and dogs at the start of the week! Mercifully it has been a bit drier and brighter today. Despite the weather it has been another successful week at school. We are busy dealing with lots of applications for the Balcarras sixth form for 2026-27 entry. So far we have had over 300 applications. The deadline is Friday February 6th at midnight. If you are a parent of a pupil in Year 11 please do make a note of that deadline. More information here:

<https://www.balcarras.gloucs.sch.uk/page/?title=Admissions&pid=52>

Holocaust Memorial Day

Tuesday was Holocaust Memorial Day. I wrote a short assembly and delivered it via video. There is an article about it here.

<https://www.balcarras.gloucs.sch.uk/news/?pid=3&nid=1&storyid=1403>

I believe very strongly that schools should mark this date but also should educate carefully about the Holocaust. Pupils in Year 9 will study the Holocaust during their history lessons. The school also works closely with the Holocaust Educational Trust. Many students and staff have taken part in their 'Lessons from Auschwitz' programme. Last year 6 pupils went to Auschwitz as part of this programme and I know that several are going later this year.

Longborough Opera Visit



Also, on Tuesday we had a wonderful visit from Longborough Opera. 5 of their very talented musicians visited to run a workshop with our Year 10 GCSE musicians. I popped in briefly and it was superb. Mr Armstrong will put an article on the website shortly.

Year 10 Practice Interviews

This week year 10 students took a step toward their future careers by taking part in practice interviews with volunteers from various industries. The atmosphere was buzzing, and the feedback from both students and volunteers has been overwhelmingly positive

Feedback from the interviewers:

- *Love attending these interview days; the pupils are great they are well prepared, take feedback well and super polite too!*
- *I am always so impressed with the Balcarras students, amazing young people. Event well organised.*
- *Really enjoyed the experience and meeting the students*

Feedback from the students:

- *It has helped me to know what to expect in a real interview and how to prepare*
- *It has made me think about how to improve my communication skills*
- *It has boosted my confidence*
- *The interview helped me to speak to a new person and talk about myself*

My thanks to Mrs Lewis and Mrs Towers for organising this and to everyone who volunteered to interview.

Japanese Visitors



On Wednesday we had a visit from about 30 Japanese pupils from Koei Veritas School. They were hosted by a group of Year 10 pupils.

See news item here:

<https://www.balcarras.gloucs.sch.uk/news/?pid=3&nid=1&storyid=1406>

Cheltenham Education Partnership: Horizons Council

On Thursday six Balcarras students represented the school at the Cheltenham Education Partnership's Horizons Council. This event brings students from across the town together to discuss a big issue. This year's theme - diversity in the local community - was tackled with a real level of maturity by all of the schools involved. Each school is paired with a local expert to help guide the students in their thinking. Our partner was Richard Gibson (Head of Communities, Wellbeing and Partnerships at Cheltenham Borough Council). Specifically our pupils had to present on

the following: How can local policymakers make sure their decisions don't unintentionally disadvantage certain racial groups? Apparently they were brilliant. Well done to those who took part:

Confidence Izedonmwun [12D]

Evie Allen [12C]

Madz Breese [12B]

Rafferty Shannon [12A]

Amelie Wilson [12C]

Will Pearne [12A]



Logo Competition

On Thursday Mr Constance and I went down to DT to meet Mrs Swanepoel and some pupils who have been working up logo designs for our 40th Anniversary Celebration. We were hugely impressed by the work produced. The designs submitted will now go forward to be digitalised. We will share the final logo shortly. My thanks to all those pupils involved.



Year 9 Options Evening

My thanks to Mr Towers for organising Thursday's Options and Parents Evening for Year 9. It was a very successful event and I enjoyed talking to pupils about their choices for next year.

Gloucestershire Education Forum

On Thursday afternoon Balcarras hosted the Gloucestershire Education Forum. The Forum comprises educational leaders from across the county. We discussed initiatives to improve Early Years outcomes, particularly for disadvantaged pupils, and the rising problem of NEETs. In recent years the number of 16 to 24 year-olds who are not in education, training or employment has risen sharply. I did make the point to the Forum that just over 10 years ago politicians made the decision to drastically reduce funding for post 16 education. I just wonder whether these two things might be linked.

Borneo Expedition Talk

On Friday lunchtime the 22 pupils who are taking part in this summer's expedition to Borneo attended a teams talk with Race Across the World producer Tominiyi Onagoruwa. Tominiyi shared her experience of travel with the group. I popped in briefly and it was very interesting.

OFSTED inspection of GITEP

I thought I should inform you that the Gloucestershire Initial Education Teacher Partnership (GITEP) is being inspected by OFSTED next week. Balcarras is the lead school for GITEP and I Chair the Partnership which includes 40 schools in Gloucestershire. Together we train about 80 new teachers every year. 6 inspectors will be based at Balcarras from Monday to Thursday next week. It is not an inspection of Balcarras school and it won't affect our day-to-day operations. Nonetheless it's quite a big deal.

Right time for the weekend. I'm heading up to Leeds on Saturday to watch Leeds v Arsenal. I would just LOVE IT if we beat them...just *LOVE IT!!* We'll see.

Have a nice weekend.

Dominic Burke