

## Update from the Head

Happy May Day to you all—isn't it great that we have reached summer's gateway. It's been a good week at Balcarras with plenty going on. Alas it wasn't to be for Leeds in the FA Cup. Ah well life goes on!

### House Captain Thank you

On Monday I had tea and cookies with the Year 11 House Captains. I thanked them for the wonderful job they have done this year. They have been superb—as have the rest of the Year 11 leadership group.

### Lunch with Heather Eggelton

On Monday I invited Heather into Balcarras to thank her for the superb work she did advising us on our recent Giving Day initiative. Heather was instrumental in the school being able to raise over £40,000.

### Debate Final

It was an absolutely brilliant Debate Final on Tuesday. My thanks to Peter Mitchener, Chair of Governors, who joined the judging panel. Congratulations too to our winners Alex Williams and Jacob Austin of 13E. I have always loved the Sixth Form Debate Competition and I am so pleased to see it go from strength to strength. Please see article here:

<https://www.balcarras.gloucs.sch.uk/news/?pid=3&nid=1&storyid=1469>

### GCSE Art Exhibition

The 2026 GCSE Art Exhibition is a fine vintage. I really enjoyed looking around Wednesday evening. I arrived before the parents and spent 20 minutes having a good mooch. It was lovely to see the parents and kids arrive—the parents so proud of their children—the pupils rightly satisfied with a job well done. Every year I look at the work and wonder just how many hours hard graft are on display. It must be a lot!

### Thank you to the PTFA

On Tuesday evening Mr Constance hosted a very nice BBQ for the Balcarras PTFA. After I had been to the Art Exhibition I popped along. It was a lovely event and fitting that we were able to say thank you to the wonderful volunteers that do so much for Balcarras.

### Final Effort Challenge Assembly

On Wednesday afternoon the last of the year 11 Effort Challenge Assemblies took place. Mr Towers did another prize draw to recognise the amazing levels of effort that Year 11 are putting in. It was all good fun.

### Food Trip Departs



Late on Thursday evening the Year 10 GCSE Food Trip to Sorrento departed. Over 40 pupils and 5 staff are on a four-day visit sampling the food of Southern Italy. I am well jell! I just love Italian food.

They have arrived safely and the pizza eating has commenced.

## Year 11 Leavers Assembly and Shirt Signing

It was a lovely occasion today as we had the Year 11 Leavers Assembly with the traditional shirt signing going on a plenty. We also handed out the Yearbooks. My thanks to the Yearbook committee and for Mr and Mrs Spring Wallis for this year's edition. We must also thank **Tai-Jutsu-Kai Self Defence** for their kind sponsorship. The assembly itself was delivered by the House Heads. It managed the balance between humour and emotion pretty well. My thanks to them and my best wishes to Year 11 for the forthcoming exams.



## Sporting Highlights of the Week



Congratulations to all of the students who represented Balcarras at the District Swimming Gala held at Cheltenham Ladies College this week. The boys squad came joint first with Cotswold School overall with the year 10 and year 9 teams both winning their age group and the year 8 team coming joint first with HSL. The girls squad came third overall with the year 10 team finishing second and the year 7 and 8 teams finishing third in their age groups.

In other news the Year 7 and 8 Rounders teams both won their fixtures against the Cotswold School. I got a very nice email from Mrs Thomson this week filling me in on the latest from the Balcarras Croquet Club which now has 13 regular attendees. The

students are getting ready for the Balcarras Croquet Championships in June. Pupils should see Mrs Thomson if they are interested.

## EEF Report Published

This week the Education Endowment Fund produced a report about student groupings in mathematics. I mention it because Balcarras was one of the 89 schools that the EEF based their research on. In a nutshell the study found that pupils make better progress in maths if they are taught in groups based on prior attainment. If you are interested see article here:

<https://schoolsweek.co.uk/maths-pupils-make-slower-progress-in-mixed-ability-classes/>

If you are really interested here is a link to the research:

<https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/projects-and-evaluation/projects/student-grouping-study>

We very rarely turn down a request to be involved in research like this. We are firm believers in the need to continually research how best it is to enable pupils to learn.

## What to Eat Before Exams

About a week ago the BBC published this article on what best to eat before exams. I found it quite interesting and thought it might be of use if your son/daughter is taking exams this year. Follow the link:

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/food/articles/c937eg0ze3ko>

## Mobile Phones in Exams

I had my last normal assembly with Year 11 last Friday. I chose as my theme making mistakes and how to learn from them. I advised them to try always not to make mistakes that are easily avoidable. I finished by talking about a common mistake that pupils make up and down the country—taking a mobile phone into an exam. I told the pupils that JCQ rules around this are very strict and that anyone caught in possession of a phone WILL lose all of the credit available for that examination paper. This can have a big impact on entry to post 16 courses. Please do reinforce the message with your children—they MUST NOT take a phone into an exam. Our exams officer, Heather Harris, wrote to you this week reiterating this and informing you that we have decided to ban blazers from exams to guard against the chance of anyone taking a phone in.

## Good Luck to our Brilliant YE Team

Good luck to our Young Enterprise Team who are competing in the Southwest Regional YE Final in Taunton on Tuesday next week.

## **Midsummer Music—Save the Date**

Midsummer Music—our very own music festival—is set for the evening of Friday 19th June. If you only come to one school event make it this one.

## **Balcajazz tomorrow**

This Saturday Balcajazz are performing at the Cheltenham Jazz Festival at 1pm. Entry is free. Do come along if you can. I've popped into rehearsals this week—we are in for a real treat.

Well, that is all from me. I've got to dash soon because I am going to Leeds v Burney tonight at Elland Road. Hope to see some of you at the Jazz Festival tomorrow. Have a nice weekend.

**Dominic Burke**