

Update from the Head

Another week flies by. After the heat of half term, it has been a little cooler which is great news for those pupils sitting public exams. They continue to go well.

Science Trip



171 Year 9 pupils have been down to the Science Festival this week. They have had to try and dodge the very sharp showers as they walk to and from the festival. See article on the school website.

Year 8 Pupils Successful at DataFace Competition

On Monday 1st of June, Year 8 pupils Margot Holland and Fliss Hudson took part in this year's DataFace competition as part of the Cheltenham Science Festival. They did brilliantly well winning silver medal position. See article here:

<https://www.balcarras.gloucs.sch.uk/news/?pid=3&nid=1&storyid=1494>

Young Enterprise National Final

Alas it was not to be for our superb Year 12 YE team, Grounded Origin. They performed superbly well at the National Final but did not walk away with the crown. They finish the Year as Southwest Champions and should be very proud of their achievements. My thanks to Mr Goddard and Mr Tucker for supporting them.

Year 12 STEM ambassadors teach Year 6 Pupils

Our Year 12 STEM ambassadors delivered excellent lessons to 60 primary school students from Glenfall and Holy Apostles on Wednesday this week. The pupils rotated around three different activities. Fred Buckland, Hugo Li, Joe Lannon and Nate Micheal delivered an engineering lesson. Maya Chong, Harry Dewey, Alice Yates, Grace Kennelly, Cherise Chibanda and Bella Stickney prepared and delivered a lesson on chromatography. Lottie Pallister, Ella





Webster, Florence Richardson and Trudy Shirlaw taught pupils about DNA extraction. It was quite inspirational to watch our youngsters teach the Year 6 pupils. Well done to everyone involved.

We have 90 students from CKJS coming in on 17th with another different 20 Year 12 students also delivering lessons. They have been brilliant practising the lessons and taken it very seriously!

District Athletics

This week we had the first of the big District Athletics Meets at the Prince of Wales Stadium. Guess which school emerged as the Year 9 Cheltenham District Champions. You guessed correctly. **BALCARRAS** emerged victorious and took the District title. The girls finished in 1st place and the boys in second but our combined points score was unbeatable. Well done to everyone involved.

A level Art/Photography/Textiles Show

On Wednesday night we had the A level Art, Textiles and Photography exhibition. It was a fine vintage and a real pleasure to spend time looking around. The work is exquisite and is a real credit to the pupils and their teachers. It came hot on the heels of last term's GCSE exhibition which was also just superb. The work on display across all three disciplines was confident, individual and personal. These young artists have been encouraged to develop their own stories and influences. The art, textiles and photos produced therefore are authentic. It was genuinely a joy to behold.

A level Geographers out and about in Cheltenham

Year 12 geographers have been out and about around Cheltenham today exploring a wide variety of fieldwork methods in preparation for their NEA. The methods explored place perception, regeneration and microclimate theory to build on the coasts fieldwork they completed earlier in the academic year.



English Trip

On Thursday, 48 Y7 students went on an English department trip to Stratford to find out a few more things about Shakespeare's life and times. They began the day with a tour from the RSC who took them around the theatres and told them about the history of the theatres. This tour also included a visit to Holy Trinity church where Shakespeare

and his family are buried. They also went to both of Shakespeare's houses: the house that he grew up in and had lunch in the grounds of the house that he had built once he became rich and famous. They were also given a talk by the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust on Shakespeare's plays and how he became a playwright.



National Study into NEETs

There has been plenty in the press recently about the growing problem of young adults who are NEET—that is not in education, employment or training. The government have appointed Alan Milburn to conduct a review and he has quite rightly described this as a national emergency. There have been plenty of reasons put forward for this growing crisis. So far too little attention has been given to the drastic real terms reduction in education funding over the last decade. The cuts that have befallen education have been severe across the board but they have been particularly acute at post 16 level, where up to a third of funding has been cut in real terms. It seems strange that successive governments would spend ten years cutting the funding for education and training for post 16 and then decide to conduct a review into why there is a problem post 16. It seems obvious to me that if you reduce funding so drastically you should anticipate a fall in outcomes. While I realise that there are many other factors at play, ignoring the cuts to education funding seems like missing the elephant in the room.

Budgeting for next year

On a similar theme we are currently finalising next year's budget. It is not an easy task. We have received our funding statements for next year. Our income is rising by 1%. However, our costs are going up faster. It seems that teachers will get a pay rise of between 2 and 4% (although we still won't find out for some time), support staff are getting a pay rise of 3.2% and general inflation is somewhere around 3%. We have spent years making cuts and I am afraid the only solution to this problem is further reductions in our costs which means reducing staffing. I am well connected with other heads both locally and nationally. We are certainly not alone as the whole sector continues to grapple with

successive reductions in real terms funding. Currently it seems as though these issues are not attracting much national attention despite the fact that we have a record number of pupils who are choosing elective home education, a high needs system in crisis, the NEETs crisis mentioned above, and a mental health epidemic amongst young people. Again, one can't help but wonder whether these things are linked.

Careers Update from Mrs Lewis



On Thursday, I attended the Unifrog Conference in Birmingham, where I had the opportunity to learn about the latest tools and developments available on the Unifrog platform. The conference also provided valuable insights from university admissions teams, who shared what they are looking for in personal statements and discussed the growing role of AI in applications, including what is considered appropriate and acceptable use.

We also heard from employers offering degree apprenticeships. Their message was clear: success is not just about academic achievement. Employers are looking for ambition, enthusiasm, strong employability skills, and

relevant work experience.

The Careers Department is delighted to announce that every Year 10 student has now secured a work placement. This is a fantastic achievement and reflects the hard work of our students, staff, and employer partners. Next week, we will be preparing students before they head out into the "real world" of work experience, helping them make the most of this exciting opportunity.

We look forward to hearing about their experiences and the skills they develop during their placements.

Right, that is about it from me. I'm looking forward to the weekend...have a good one.

Dominic Burke

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