

Update from the Head

Dear Parents,

Thankfully it has been cooler this week. I have to say I prefer it in the mid-twenties than the mid-thirties. It has been a week of transition at Balcarras. On Tuesday evening we said a fond farewell to Year 13 whilst on Wednesday we welcomed our new Year 7 into the school for taster day. As one chapter closes so another opens.... nature abhors a vacuum. We also met our new Year 12 on Tuesday as well.

Activities Week * Important*

Parents should keep an eye on the link below which has all the information regarding Activities Week and will be kept up to date throughout the week.

<https://www.balcarras.gloucs.sch.uk/news/?pid=3&nid=1&storyid=1514>

House Dance Highlights

What an absolute treat it was to be in the hall at Balcarras on Monday evening. So many youngsters expressing themselves and having great fun—it was truly a joyful occasion. It was packed full of high-quality dancing, some of it incredibly moving, but it was also great fun and I particularly liked to see so many boys involved.

I would like to thank all those parents who came along on the evening—the hall was full and it was a great atmosphere.

PTFA Sale

Don't forget there is a second-hand uniform sale running this evening from 5-6.30pm in the Gym. All the information can be found here. I must thank all the volunteers on the PTFA who give up their time to run the sale.

<https://www.balcarras.gloucs.sch.uk/news/?pid=3&nid=1&storyid=1505>

The PTFA raised £450 at the second-hand uniform sale to Year 6 parents on Thursday night. Isn't that great?

Health & Social Care Trip to Uni of Glos

On Thursday 18th June, Year 12 Health and Social Care students visited the University of Gloucestershire Oxstalls Campus for an inspiring Health and Social Care Taster Day.

Students toured the University's outstanding facilities before exploring a variety of healthcare careers, including social work, nursing, occupational therapy, and operating department practice. The day also included an interactive practical session, where students had the opportunity to experience some of the equipment and skills used by operating department practitioners.

A fantastic day was had by all, providing valuable insight into future study and career opportunities in health and social care.



The annual house languages spelling bee competition

16 Year 7 linguists took part in the competition where they were tasked with spelling as many words as they could using the French alphabet in one minute. Congratulations to the following 16 pupils who took part and dedicated their time to the competition. Albie S, Alexandra J, Ben A, Lucy S, Alice C, Ollie F, Hattie F, Ibrahim, Sophie H, Harry J, John K, Zlata F, Keziah M, Rosie B, Petru T, Tabitha E.

The standard was outstanding this year which led us to an exceptional final between three pupils - Hattie F (Selvey), Ben (Graveney) and Sophie H (Foley) with Ben A winning the competition for Graveney, with a total of 19 words in one minute!

Trip to MINI

On Monday our Year 12 designers visited the MIN factory in Oxford. Apparently, it was a great trip.

PE Kit

The pupils have been wearing PE kit all week and it has been very successful. It means the pupils are comfortable in hot weather without losing the uniformity of being a Balcarras pupil. It looks like the forecast for next week and the week after is for more hot weather. And so pupils will be allowed to wear their PE kit for lessons until the end of term (17th July). If a pupil would prefer to wear their summer uniform, as some pupils have done this week, that is allowed.

Please can you support your child to keep to the official PE kit (it is acceptable to wear the House Polo Top with the PE kit). Please do not allow pupils to start wearing mufti, earrings, jewellery, make-up or other not permitted items.

For the activities during Activities week (Weds 8th, Thurs 9th, Fri 10th), each event will be different and Mrs Massey (Activities Week Organiser) will send out details but all the information can be found on the link mentioned above.

Computer Science visit



L3HARRIS
FAST. FORWARD.

On Thursday, a team from L3Harris visited our Year 12 Computer Science students to deliver an exciting Field Programmable Gate Array (FPGA) workshop.

FPGA engineers play a vital role in the innovative work carried out at L3Harris, designing and developing programmable hardware used in a wide range of cutting-edge technologies, including cybersecurity, autonomous vehicles and space systems. The workshop aimed to inspire the next generation of engineers by introducing

students to this fascinating and highly sought-after area of engineering.

During the session, students combined the theory of digital logic design with practical, hands-on activities using interactive tools. This gave them valuable insight into how FPGA technology is used in real-world engineering and provided a glimpse into the exciting career opportunities available in the industry.

The workshop was a fantastic opportunity for students to learn directly from industry professionals, helping to build confidence, develop new skills and reduce the barriers to entry for aspiring future engineers.



Year 13 Prom



Including staff, just over 250 attended Manor by the Lake on Tuesday evening for the Year 13 Prom. It was a lovely evening apart from a little rain at the start. We are still awaiting the official photos but here is a sneak preview. Year 13 have been such a wonderful year group—it really was a pleasure to celebrate with them. We wish them all the best for results day and life beyond Balcarras. Onwards...from strength to strength.

Year 12 Induction Day

On Tuesday we had Year 12 Induction Day. Around 350 pupils attended which is a new record! They sampled 4 lessons each, enjoyed a morning break with cake and a drink, and had two assemblies. We also had several amazing current Y12 ambassadors from our leadership team. I am grateful for their input on the day.

Sports Day

On Thursday we had the 39th Annual Balcarras School Sports Day. It was a great event and all played out under blue skies, 24 degrees heat and a gentle refreshing breeze. Selvey emerged as champions for the fifth year running. Congratulations to Rosie in Year 10 who won the Chris Healy Trophy which is given to the stand out performer on the day.



Year 6 Taster Day

On Wednesday we had our new intake in school for a 'taster day' They met their tutors and had lessons in DT, science, Art and French. They also got to sample the Balcarras canteen. They made a very positive impression and we can't wait to welcome them to the school in September.

Year 6 Parents Info Evening

Hot on the heels of the Taster Day we welcomed the new parents on Thursday evening. I wheeled out my usual jokes and anecdotes—I felt very sorry for one parent who has already sat through this talk 3 times! This is the 11th time I have welcomed in a new year group as Head. It is always a great responsibility and I genuinely feel excited at the prospect.

Year 9 Art Exhibition

In his 1948 book *Painting as a Pastime*, Winston Churchill wrote: "Happy are the painters, for they shall not be lonely. Light and colour, peace and hope, will keep them company to the end, or almost to the end, of the day." Looking at the exhibition on Thursday night it is clear that we have some wonderfully talented artists who are similarly transfixed by the allure of art. The pupils had to create a piece based on a person who they admire. Here is a nice photo of Buddy and I at the exhibition.

And here is another one of me trying to give Buddy a closer look...



Residential Trips out next week

Lots of residential trips are going out next week. Year 7 pupils are going to France, Year 8 pupils are doing the Battlefields Trip to Belgium and France, Year 9 pupils are going to camp, Year 12 are going to Berlin and we have two expedition teams heading out to Borneo. And of course, on top of all that we have activities week for Years 7 to 9 and work experience for Year 10.

Message From Debbie Innes Turnhill

Debbie Innes Turnhill is a safeguarding expert who has spent some time at Balcarras conducting research for a PhD. She recently reported to the school's governors. I thought it would be nice if Debbie wrote a brief report for the parents. So here it is...



You may remember being introduced to me last September as I began my PhD research in school. First of all, thank you to everyone who made me feel so welcome, a key feature of the school. This enabled me to see how safeguarding culture is lived out in practice. To all the staff and pupils who accepted me into Balcarras, talked to me about how it feels to be part of the school and let me look at how everyone interacts with each other I am grateful. While I am still analysing all the data that I collected, I have come up with some initial ideas for a model of safeguarding culture from what I have seen.

Balcarras is a school where students are cared for. There are deep mutual relationships of respect and trust. Students know that the staff are there to make sure their needs are met. This is supported by exemplary leadership, committed and caring staff, a calm and purposeful school environment and the ability to be playful alongside the learning. The canteen also contributes to the commitment to

care for every member of the community. All of this was all summed up by a number of students who talked about the kindness of the staff and the feeling that Balcarras really is a second family.

Debbie Innes Turnhill

Final Catering Committee Meeting of the Year

On Thursday morning the Balcarras School Catering Committee met for the final time this year. The committee thanked Mr Cole and his team for their sterling work this year. Once again they have provided a superb catering offer to the pupils which does not require any subsidy from the funding we get to educate our pupils. This is a great achievement. I was really pleased that Debbie Innes Turhill recognised the importance of our canteen in creating the right atmosphere and ethos in the school.

The Happiest Man on the Planet Leaves for the Weekend

At just after 3pm today Mr Towers (Deputy Head) will drive home. As he does so he might be amongst the happiest people on Planet Earth. Today he has signed off on next year's timetable. 1430 pupils are now timetabled across 3010 lessons across the two-week timetable, involving the deployment of some 100 teachers across 70 teaching spaces. I have given Mr Towers a bottle of Paulaner lager (my favourite) to celebrate!

Nice letter

I got a very nice letter today from the Gloucestershire Schools Athletics Association.

The county would like to congratulate Rosie Atkins u17 Inter Girls year 10/11 800m, Olivia Avery u17 Inter Girls year 10/11 1500m and George Iddon inter boy year 10/11 Discus on being selected to represent Gloucestershire in the English Schools' Track and Field National Championships, to take place on the 10th/11th July 2026.

Our congratulations to them as well and good luck for the event which is held at the Commonwealth Stadium in Birmingham.

Worrying developments in the teacher labour market

There was a report out this week from SchoolDash who have monitored the volume of job adverts posted by secondary schools over the last nine years. It shows secondary job adverts are down by 27 per cent on last year, and 49 per cent beneath pre-pandemic levels in 2018-19 – an “unprecedented” scale of decline.

The drop is consistent across all subjects, even traditionally hard-to-recruit ones like maths and science, where adverts are down 20 per cent and 28 per cent. Languages has seen the biggest drop since before the pandemic, at 58 per cent. Professor Becky Allen, co-founder of Teacher Tapp, said the labour market “has seized up” with schools not replacing staff, meaning fewer opportunities, and fewer teachers leaving.

I am afraid this news did not surprise me. Year after year of real terms reductions in funding have meant that schools simply cannot afford to replace people who are leaving. We are in a sort of strange doom loop. On the one hand we can't attract enough teachers into the profession—we have missed the government's targets in 9 of the last 10 years. On the other the teachers we have trained can't get jobs because an extreme austerity is being forced on schools by successive governments.

Good news?

Is this the week that this nonsensical policy finally changed? The government announced a 3.5% pay rise for teachers. In conjunction they agreed to offer schools a grant that covered 1.7% of that increase. Schools will have to fund 1.8% of it, even though our income is only rising by 1%. Still at least the government are not expecting schools to fund the whole lot. No news yet on the pension contribution rate. I will keep my eyes glued to this for news—it could be a real game changer.

Right, that is it from me. I'm going to Manchester for the weekend. Whatever you are doing I hope you have a nice one!

Dominic Burke