

Update from the Head

Dear Parents,

I can't tell you what a good feeling it is to reach the end of term. The school year is a little bit like a long voyage. We set sail in September with everything ship shape and Bristol fashion. Through the course of the voyage there are times of calm and times when storms tip the ship from stern to bow and even times when the rigging comes loose. There are times of laughter and happiness and times when people are sad and feel anxious. In the last couple of weeks we have been in relatively calm waters as we approach the shore. It is great now to reach the sanctuary of the harbour. With the ship safely moored alongside we can now take a break—both staff and pupils. As ever I would like to pay tribute to the pupils of Balcarras. They are a real credit to you and—dare I say it?—us as well. Together we make a great team. My thanks to our parents for your steadfast support for this school.

I would also like to place on record my thanks to two key groups of volunteers. Firstly, the school's governors. They work tirelessly for Balcarras and give up so much of their time as do the Trustees of the Balcarras Trust who I should also mention. Secondly a huge thankyou to the Balcarras PTFA. They support the school tremendously, organising numerous events and raising serious money for the school. We are hugely grateful to them all.

I'm going to spend some time near Swanage and then later in the holidays will go somewhere else although I don't know where—it's going to be a surprise! We will send out further updates in August when A level and GCSE results come in.

I genuinely hope you all have a lovely summer.

End of term bittersweet as we bid a fond farewell to valued colleagues at Balcarras

On Thursday after school the Balcarras staff gathered in the quad for our traditional end of year BBQ and meet up. It is a nice way to end the year although it is always tinged with sadness as we say farewell to colleagues who are leaving the school.

Ben Hawker (maths) and Ruth Carnie (English) have both been covering for colleagues on maternity this year—we thank them for their sterling work and wish them well for the future. Inger Bourne is also leaving after three years with us. Inger joined to run our wellbeing support programme but last year transferred to become the Deputy SENDCo. She has done brilliant work for Balcarras and we wish her all the best. Another valued member of the support staff is also leaving—Helen Atkinson has worked at Balcarras for 22 years managing all sorts of things from absence management to room booking and much else besides. She has been an absolute stalwart of this school and her attention to detail is the stuff of legend. Finally, Dave Sharkey is leaving after 22 years service to the school as Head of English. Dave has been a superb Head of Department and he will be hugely missed by everyone at Balcarras. We wish all these colleagues well for the future.

Mobile Phones

We sent out a letter this week about mobile phones next year. The government have put in place statutory guidance which states that schools must not allow pupils in Years 7 to 11 access to their smart phones during the school day. I am afraid that our current policy of having phones switched off and in bags no longer meets this new guidance.

From September pupils in Years 7 to 11 won't be allowed to bring their smart phone into school.

If for reasons of security, you would like your child to have a phone for the journey to and from school they will need to have an old fashioned 'brick' phone which does not have a camera. Guidance about this can be found in the school's behaviour policy (pages 29-32) at this link:

<https://www.balcarras.gloucs.sch.uk/attachments/download.asp?file=1325&type=pdf>

We will write to parents in September giving you the option to inform us as to whether your child will have a brick phone. The school will issue each child with a brick phone a pouch in which it can be kept in their bag.

I realise that some parents will disagree with this policy. I would politely point out that as a state school we are bound by the law and this guidance is statutory.

Lunch in honour of Richard Gilpin

On Monday I arranged a lunch in Honour of Richard Gilpin who is retiring after 16 years as Head of Pittville School. Several members of the senior staff joined me as we paid tribute to Richard for the superb job he has done leading the school. We wished him all the best for the future. Here is a photo of Richard and I with his gift. What do you get the man who has everything? Why a chopping board of course.



Trust Spelling Bee

On Monday languages students from all three Trust schools met for a special Trust Spelling Bee. I wasn't able to go but I understand it was good fun. See article here:

<https://www.balcarras.gloucs.sch.uk/news/?pid=3&nid=1&storyid=1527>



Balcarras Spelling Bee

On Wednesday lunchtime I went to the MFL department to hand out certificates in the Year 7 Balcarras Spelling Bee competition. Well done to everyone and in particular to Ben in 7G2 who emerged as the winner overall.

Latest from the Expeditions

Follow our expedition team at this link:

<https://borneo-blogs.base44.app/>

Here are a couple of photos:





Science vs Humanities Croquet Match



One of the extracurricular developments I really like has been the creation of the Balcarras Croquet team. On Wednesday members of the team became coaches to a group of staff beginners facilitated by the Cheltenham Croquet Club. We had a fun match between history and science. Science won but only just!

Year 7 Skipathon

I mentioned in my previous update about the Year 7 Skipathon, Year 7 raised £1,033 from their stalls and skipping. We are delighted this money will be donated to Young Carers and Winstons Wish.

Activities Week

It was quite a week last week as pupils and staff scattered across Gloucestershire, the UK, Europe and the World! Here are a few snaps of different activities.



Last GITEP Meeting of the Year

On Wednesday I chaired the last GITEP Board meeting of the year. If you are interested in our role leading teacher training see article here:

<https://www.balcarras.gloucs.sch.uk/news/?pid=3&nid=1&storyid=1517>

Similarly if you are interested in our role leading teacher professional development through the Balcarras Teaching School hub see article here:

<https://www.balcarras.gloucs.sch.uk/news/?pid=3&nid=1&storyid=1519>

House Matches

The House matches took place this week in tennis, cricket and rounders. Well done to everyone who took part.

The Today Programme

I had a phone call from the editorial team at Radio 4's Today programme on Tuesday afternoon. They told me that they had received an embargoed news release from the government about changes to social media for 16- and 17-year-olds. They asked if we had any sixth formers that would speak on Wednesday morning's Today programme. We swung into action and contacted some pupils. In the end Phoebe and Confidence from Year 12 went on the radio live. They were both very articulate. See article here:

<https://www.balcarras.gloucs.sch.uk/news/?pid=3&nid=1&storyid=1530>

Cinema Trip

My thanks to Mr Davidson for organising another whole school cinema trip. It's quite a thing taking 700+ people to the cinema. Thanks to all of the staff as well.

P and Q Band

Year 8

As pupils move into Year 8 and so are more familiar with the school, they are mixed with others from across the year group for their teaching classes. In order to do this, pupils are placed randomly on the P or Q half of the year. This placement is checked by the Heads of House and the individual learning department to make sure it is appropriate. This means pupils will not be in their tutor groups for lessons. We do this to allow pupils to develop their social skills (working and interacting with new people) in a controlled classroom environment. Pupils remain in their tutor groups for tutor time and personal development lessons.

Year 9

As pupils move from Year 8 into Year 9 they stay in the same band (P or Q). Within this band the mix of pupils within each class will change based on the learning needs identified by each subject area.

Year 10

For option subjects pupils will be taught in classes made up of pupils from across the Year group based on the options they have selected.

In core subjects, pupils will be mixed with others from the same band they are in (P or Q). Pupils are placed randomly on the P or Q half of the year. This placement is checked by the Heads of House and the individual learning department to make sure it is appropriate. The band they are in this year may be different from last year and this mixing is intentional. This is to allow pupils to develop their social skills (working and interacting with new people) in a controlled classroom environment. Pupils remain in their tutor groups for tutor time and personal development lessons.

We would encourage parents to talk about this with their children over the summer. For most pupils the opportunity to work with a new group of people is exciting but some can be a little nervous.

First Week Back

Here are the arrangements for the first week back:

Mon 31st Aug	Summer Holidays
Tues 1st Sept	INSET for all staff. Pupils are not in school
Weds 2nd Sept	Year 7 and Year 12 pupils only in school
Thurs 3rd Sept	All pupils in school
Fri 4th Sept	School finishes early for all pupils at 12:20pm

Further information will be communicated to parents towards the end of the summer holidays.

Lowering of the England Flag

It was a sad moment on Thursday morning when I sent an instruction to the site team to lower the England flag after our defeat to Argentina in Atlanta. Oh well—there is always next time!

And so to the summer holidays. It stretches before us ripe with promise. In the *Great Gatsby* the character Nick Carraway feels that, as summer beckons, his life is about to start again.

“And so with the sunshine and the great bursts of leaves growing on the trees, just as things grow fast in movies, I had that familiar conviction that life was beginning over again with summer.”

I feel the same! I hope you all have a lovely summer.

Dominic Burke