

Update from the Head

We've soon got to the end of week two—once these weeks start they fly by in something of a flash. There are quite a few pupils who are Chelsea fans at the school—one or two of them deliberately sought me out Thursday to discuss Wednesday night's match. The next time Leeds get thrashed I might have a meeting to go to the next day.

I know I am sometimes like a broken record, but I wanted to start this week's update by referencing the following article which I read in Schoolsweek on Thursday:

<https://schoolsweek.co.uk/schools-lost-4-5-billion-to-real-terms-cuts-in-16-years-report-warns/>

The SchoolCuts campaign exists to highlight just how far school funding has fallen over the last 15 years. It is supported by a variety of organisations including the union I am a member of—the Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL). The campaign released a report this week which aimed to explain the scale of the problem. It is available here:

https://actionnetwork.org/user_files/user_files/000/148/084/original/school-funding-report-2026-digital.pdf

The team at SchoolCuts has worked out that Balcarras' funding has fallen by £994 per pupil. If you multiply that by the current school population it comes to over £1.4 million.

These calculations do not surprise me. I have led the school through ten years of reducing income. The report makes clear that this is a sector wide problem, although it is felt more acutely in local authorities who are funded badly for historical reasons. Balcarras is not alone but in a way that is scant consolation.

What has happened to school funding should be a national scandal. Maybe one day it will become one.

Anyway on to more positive matters.....

Well done to Otto

A big well done to Otto in Year 8 won the gold at The Youth Development League Nationals in Liverpool where he won 1500 meters in the under 14 category. His time of 4 minutes 29 seconds is impressive.

Balcarras Gift Aid Scheme: Donate a Dollar

We have always run a very successful Gift Aid Scheme at Balcarras. We use it pay for the two school minibuses and to fund other nice to have things. If you can afford a monthly contribution then please do join the scheme. See the website here:

<https://www.balcarras.gloucs.sch.uk/page/?title=Fundraising&pid=24>

Longborough Opera Visit

On Tuesday our GCSE and A level musicians attended a wonderful talk given by musicians from the Longborough Opera. The talk was about how to pursue a career in music. It is too late for me but I found it interesting nonetheless.



Photographs in school

My thanks to Miss McCarthy who once again organised two days of school photos. 1437 pupils had their photos taken. We also did Year 7, Year 11 and the two sixth form years groups as well as taking many family shots. The staff also gathered for our first whole staff photo in many years. I chose my shirt and tie especially for the occasion. I might keep a copy as a memento!

Each pupil has been issued with their own QR code. This will allow parents to register online on the DSP website and then parents can opt in for a notification email when the photos go live. Please note that the images may take 15 working days to be available.

Twilight INSET

On Wednesday the staff gathered for our first twilight INSET of the year. Our theme was Artificial Intelligence and our training was led by some of our staff experts including Mr Stoker, Mr Cooper and Miss Dodds. We discussed the school's approach to teaching pupils about ways to use AI and also ways in which we as educators can use it to reduce workload. I'm something of a Luddite but even I found it interesting.

Year 11 info Evening

My thanks to those parents who came along to the Year 11 Information Evening on Thursday—it was very well attended. If you weren't able to make it Mr Towers has recorded a version of the presentation here:

<https://www.balcarras.gloucs.sch.uk/page/?title=Year+11+GCSE+Information+Evening&pid=104>

Year 13 Higher Education Evening

My thanks to Mr Leatherbarrow and the sixth form team for hosting a refresher evening for Year 13 parents on Tuesday about the UCAS/Apprenticeship and next steps process. It was well attended.

Schools Forum

For my sins I am an elected representative on the Gloucestershire Schools Forum representing Academy Schools. Each County has a Schools Forum which is defined as a statutory decision-making and advisory body that brings together local education representatives to discuss and consult on school funding and financial management.

We had our first meeting this week. In a way it was a little bit pointless because the government have still not released the funding decisions for 2027-28 which they should have done in July. These have been postponed until after the Chancellor's budget in October. It makes it almost impossible to plan for the future if we have no idea what funding will look like. The Forum agreed to postpone its next meeting until December in the hope that there will be some information by then. I just don't understand why the system is so poor.

Open Week next week / Open Evening

It is open week next week. This means school will close early on Thursday 17th September at 1.20 pm so staff and pupils can prepare for the evening. I would like to thank all of those who give up their time.

Policies

As we start a new academic year, it seems a good time to remind parents of the school policies. These can be found on the school website:

Our School

Policies

The school policies are designed to give parents an understanding of how the school operates and the expectations the school has for all the pupils. In particular the policies on

Behaviour	Drugs
Bullying	Child Protection/Safeguarding
Attendance	Single Equalities

might be of interest for parents to read. Some parents might find the other policies useful to read and understand.

We hope that all our expectations are by-and-large common sense: work hard, act nicely to other people and behave well and you will find your time at Balcarras enjoyable and successful.

Year 11 Prom

The Year 11 Prom is an annual celebration at Balcarras, and is always an enjoyable event for both pupils and staff.

This year it will be on **Friday 23rd April 2027**.

It is intended as a celebration of the hard work the Year 11 pupils have put into their studies during the year, and as a way of saying thank-you and good luck to the Year 11 students just before they depart for study leave and to begin their GCSE examinations.

The event is **invite-only**. While we hope that **all** our Year 11 pupils will be invited to the Prom, pupils whose behaviour has been **below expectation** will **not** be invited to attend the celebrations.

Invites will be issued to all pupils who work hard in lessons, have good attendance and punctuality at school, complete homework to a good standard and follow the school rules. Pupils who need regular intervention for their behaviour, attendance, punctuality or effort will not receive an invite to the Year 11 Prom.

Launch of the School Production – Guys and Dolls



We had the usual huge turnout of students for the launch on Thursday lunchtime and auditions have already begun, with KS3 attending their first workshop on Friday afternoon. I just love the school production and I am really looking forward to going into rehearsals.

Welcome to Student Teachers

On Friday I met with our latest GITEP trainee teachers. We have six joining the school. It was lovely to meet them and share a cup of Yorkshire Tea.

Sponsored Walk

The annual sponsored walk this year is on Friday 18th September. All pupils in years 7-11 will be walking approximately 5km with the aim of raising money for the Sue Ryder. It is a non-uniform on the Friday, so please can students wear appropriate shoes and clothes for the weather. All students should collect sponsorship for their walk. Details will be given out by tutors. There is also the opportunity to order an ice cream via scopay.

This is always a very enjoyable event. Pupils will be allowed to go home when they have finished the walk, which may be a little earlier than normal time for some students.



Interesting article on the BBC

I thought this article was worth a read. It is about how best to support children on the return to school.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c8rnp5m85jlo>

Right that's it. Time for the weekend. I'm going to stay in Cheltenham. I might just treat my wife to dinner out somewhere tonight. Have a nice weekend.

Dominic Burke