

Update from the Head

Dear Parents,

Another week flies by. We are now at the end of week 4 which means that we are over 1/10th of the way through the school year. It has almost felt like summer this week—I think some of the plants on the site have been a bit confused. I am as well. I'd normally be digging out my vests by now but instead they remain in the drawer.

You should have received proofs of your child's school photograph taken last week. We received this nice photograph of Buddy that we thought we would share with you.



Cheltenham Half

My congratulations to the 15 staff who ran the Cheltenham Half Marathon last weekend in aid of Sue Ryder. See article here:

<https://www.balcarras.gloucs.sch.uk/news/?pid=3&nid=1&storyid=1547>



GITEP Board Meeting

On Tuesday morning I chaired the first meeting of the Gloucestershire Initial Teacher Education Partnership (GITEP). GITEP is a school centred teacher training course providing teacher education courses for both primary and secondary. There are 99 GITEP trainees this year and they have made a great start across the 50 placement schools that GITEP uses. This is my fourth year Chairing the Partnership—it is a privilege to play a part in leading the education of the next generation of teachers.



Gold D of E Presentations

In the summer 24 Year 12 pupils completed their Gold Duke of Edinburgh Assessed Expedition in the Brecon Beacons. As part of the award they have to give a short presentation on the expedition and what they learnt from it. I went to listen along with several other members of staff. Each presentation had a slightly different focus although the heat wave condition of July featured in each. I wish all 24 pupils well for the remainder of the award.



Teaching School Conferences

On Wednesday and Thursday Balcarras hosted 180 newly qualified teachers to Balcarras as part of their induction to the profession. Balcarras is a Teaching School Hub so we are responsible alongside the Odyssey Teaching School Hub for the induction of all Early Career Teachers in Gloucestershire. If you are interested see article here:

<https://www.balcarras.gloucs.sch.uk/news/?pid=3&nid=1&storyid=1549>

House Cross Country

On Wednesday we had the first House Competition of 2026-27—House Cross Country. Hundreds of pupils competed across three different races: Year 7, Year 8 and 9 and Year 10.

Here is a photo of the Year 8 and 9 race setting off under grey skies.



First Residential Trip of the Year Departs

On Thursday the Year 13 A level Environmental Scientists set off on their three day residential to South Wales. It is the first of many such residential trips this year.

Balcarras Pupils Shine at CEP Events

Although we are only a few weeks into term, the Cheltenham Educational Partnership events are already up and running, and this year Balcarras are getting involved in more projects than ever.



This week we have already seen the Balcarras team of Y8s and Y10s (ably supported this year by Mr Lane) taking part in the first workshop, hosted by Cheltenham Ladies College, of the 2026/27 Changemakers project which challenges schools to consider ways in which they could make their school environment more sustainable. As with most CEP projects, there will be a number of workshops throughout the winter and spring, which will then culminate in the students launching their projects at an event at the Wilson Gallery next summer.

Then on Thursday Bournside hosted the final Great Debate of 2026. Originally scheduled to take place in July, but postponed because of the heat(!), the questions were all based around the very 'hot' topic of AI. The event was supported by the Cheltenham Festivals who had also arranged for two AI experts, one of whom works for Severn Trent and the other for Amazon Web Services, to come along and talk to the students about their roles and how AI is adding real benefit to their businesses. They then also formed part of the judging panel.

The Balcarras Y11 team were up against Pate's Grammar School, debating a question around AI and creativity (This house believes that AI will enhance our creativity in ways we cannot even imagine) and our Y12 team, some of whom have just joined in the Sixth Form, were up against the hosts Bournside, with their topic looking at AI and personal relationships (This house believes that AI scamming will increase as people can't tell who is AI or real). As ever, the debates were highly entertaining and really well researched, and the feedback from the judges was particularly positive. However, with the 2027 Great Debate program about to start afresh with an event in November, it was also pleasing that the judges awarded both debates to Balcarras!

GASSL

Today I represented Balcarras at the Gloucestershire Association of Secondary School Leaders. This association brings together the headteachers of all 41 state secondary schools in Gloucestershire. It was a good meeting.

Trust Networks

This week the Balcarras Trust's wider leadership networks have met. We have three working parties on inclusion, staff development and engagement and enrichment. I chair the group looking into ways to boost engagement and enrichment across the Trust. It is very interesting work. Having access to these networks is just another example of what an advantage it is to be part of a Trust.

Funding

If any parent is interested in what I have been writing about school funding this article is worth a read:

<https://schoolsweek.co.uk/is-the-fully-funded-teacher-pay-award-just-an-illusion/>

PTFA News

This week the Balcarras PTFA had their AGM. Mr Constance represented the school. We are very fortunate to have such an excellent PTFA.

Could You Be Our Next PTFA Treasurer?

We are seeking a volunteer Treasurer to join our PTFA team. This important role involves managing finances, preparing simple reports, and helping ensure funds raised directly benefit our pupils. A great opportunity to support the school and become part of a friendly, dedicated team. Handover provided. There is no requirement to attend all the meetings. Please email ptfa@balcarras.gloucs.sch.uk

Year 7 Parent and Pupil Icebreaker

We are delighted to announce that there will be an icebreaker event after the Year 7 Tutor Evening on Thursday 8th October. This will take place at Dunkertons. More information to follow. There will be a DJ for the pupils and it will be a great opportunity for the pupils and parents to get to know each other.

Please do have a look at the events taking place this year.

PTFA Clothes Swap Evening	16 th October 2026	7-9.30 pm
PTFA Meeting	11 th November 2026	7 pm
Carol Concert	2 nd December 2026	7 pm
PTFA Meeting	20 th January 2027	7 pm
PTFA Second hand uniform sale	21 st January 2027	5-6.45pm Yr 11 parents eve
Quiz Night	29 th January 2027	7-10 pm
PTFA Meeting	3 rd February 2027	7pm
PTFA Comedy Night	5 th March 2027	8pm -10.30 pm*
PTFA Second hand uniform sale	22 nd April 2027	5-6.45 pm Yr 7 parents eve
PTFA Meeting	9 th June 2027	7 pm
Midsummer Music	18 th June 2027	6pm onwards

Clothes Swap Event

CLOTHES SWAP
Friday 16th October 2026 7pm - 9pm
Balcarras School Gym

What can I donate?
Ladies and secondary school age girls clothing including jewellery, accessories, shoes and bags.
Please ensure donated items are clean and in good condition, with no holes etc.
You can drop donations into school reception from Monday 12th October or bring on the night.
If you have clothes you want to donate earlier than 12th, contact Wendy on 07909 221330 and we will arrange to collect.

Don't worry if you have nothing to donate - that's ok too!



Tickets
£10 in advance
£12 on Door
£5 - Under 18
[Eventbrite Link](#)

There will be a bar with drinks and snacks available to buy
All proceeds go to the PTFA to support the school

Bring a bag - there is no limit on how many clothes you can take home with you!

We are delighted that tickets are on sale for the Clothes Swap Event and can be bought from Eventbrite on the following link:

<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/clothes-swap-2026-tickets-2001697216258>

GCSE and A-Level Certificates

If you know someone who completed their GCSE's or A Levels between 2023 and 2025, we still have a number of certificates that remain uncollected.

If you are unable to collect your certificates yourself and would like someone to collect on your behalf please email exams@balcarras.gloucs.sch.uk

Please note: Students who sat examinations in the summer of 2026 will be notified towards the end of this year when certificates have been received in school and are ready for collection.

Sponsored Walk

We are delighted that sponsorship and ice cream sales totalled £6,543 – there is still time to make a donation to the cause via scopay. All proceeds are going to Sue Ryder.

So, it is now time for another weekend. It's not quite the same without the Premier League. I suppose we'll just have to make do with England! Have a nice weekend.

Dominic Burke