



**BALCARRAS**  
From strength to strength

# NEWSLETTER

## Welcome from the Headteacher

Dear Parents,

Welcome to the first school newsletter of 2026. This first half term of the year only has 30 school days, so it is not a marathon, but it has seemed very fast paced and energy sapping. After the February break we have another 'sprint term'—just 24 school days to Easter. If the Autumn term is the engine room of the school year, this one is crucial in adding the finishing coat of paint, particularly for those year groups preparing for public examinations. We are genuinely delighted with how Year 11 and Year 13 are getting on. Both have been engaged in 'mock' exams this past term and they have gone very well.

There has just been too much going on in the school these past 30 days to put everything in this newsletter. If you are interested then please do look at my weekly update to parents which can be found on the school website. The edition this week includes a sneak preview of our new logo, designed by students, to celebrate 40 years of Balcarras.

I hope all of our pupils and families have a lovely break. I'm joining 48 pupils and 8 staff skiing in Myrkdalen in Norway. 5 says skiing in one of the plushiest resorts in Norway—it's a tough job but someone has to do it.

My best wishes to you all.

Dominic Burke

## EASYFUNDRAISING

Balcarras School



Just letting you know that Balcarras School are now registered with easyfundraising, which means you can raise FREE donations for us every time you shop online. Over 7,000 brands will donate to us when you use easyfundraising to shop with them – at no extra cost to yourself! These donations really mount up and make a BIG difference to us, so we'd really appreciate it if you could take a moment to sign up and support us. It's completely FREE and only takes a moment. Scan the QR code to start fundraising!

Thank you so much!

## ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCE TRIP

LAURA THOMSON, HEAD OF ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCE



At the start of the term, Year 12 Environmental Science students visited the energy from waste facility in Stonehouse. The students initially visited their classroom where they learnt about the need of energy from waste facilities to reduce the number of landfill sites around the UK. They looked at emissions produced by this type of energy generation and were surprised to learn about the hydrogen chlorides, VOC's and nitrous oxides (to name a few) emitted by the facility.

They were then treated to a 'behind the scenes' tour of the facility, where they saw a bunker hall filled with waste. They heard stories of lost kittens and how they train to spot a disposed body in the rubbish. After this they saw the rubbish being incinerated, how emissions are treated to remove large particulate matter and how electricity is generated.

A great time was had by all! Next half term we will be visiting a sewage works to see how our other source of waste is treated!

## AI

### MIKE STOKER

At Balcarras, we are continually developing how we prepare students for life in the 21st century. A key part of this is helping students understand how to use Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools safely, responsibly and effectively to support their learning.

AI is a rapidly developing technology, and this guidance will evolve as both the technology and our understanding of its best educational use develops.

Our core principle is simple:

**AI can support your learning – but it must never replace your thinking.**

Students should always rely first on the teaching, resources and guidance provided by Balcarras staff.

**AI can be a helpful tool to:**

- explain ideas in different ways
- quiz knowledge
- help plan revision
- check understanding

**However**, AI must not be used to complete work that is intended to demonstrate a student's own knowledge, understanding and thinking.

**Age-appropriate and safe use of AI tools**

Students must only use AI tools that are appropriate for their age and comply with the terms of service of the platform. Many AI tools have minimum age requirements (often 13+ or 18+).

Students should not create personal accounts on AI platforms without parental awareness and must never share personal information when using AI tools.

Balcarras will only recommend or use AI tools that meet appropriate safeguarding and data-protection expectations.

**Over time, we will provide further guidance across subjects on:**

- appropriate uses of AI
- the limitations and pitfalls of AI tools
- how to benefit from AI without becoming dependent on it

**The guides and resources below are a starting point for students and parents.**

If you have any questions or concerns about AI use in learning, please contact the school or Mr M Stoker, Head of History & Politics, who is coordinating the development of AI guidance at Balcarras.

## Balcarras Students & AI

AI can support learning — but it must never replace your thinking.

✓ **AI can be used when a task is:**

- **Low-stakes practice**, such as skills or research
- **Skill-building**, like planning, questioning or testing your knowledge from lessons
- **Revision or explanation** used carefully and honestly
- **Creative or exploratory** with no marks attached
- This includes some homework tasks **only when your teacher has said AI is allowed**



⚠ **You may use AI only if:**

- The task is **for learning**, not assessment
- Your teacher has been **clear about what AI can and cannot do**
- You are using AI as **guidance**, not copying answers
- You can **explain your work** without AI
- This applies to **homework** as well as classwork



⊖ **Do NOT use AI when:** ⊖

- Your teacher has told you AI is not allowed
- The task is formally assessed or counts towards a grade
- The work is used to show your own ability
- The task is exam practice or done in exam-style conditions
- To create deepfakes, impersonate others, or mislead people
- You complete homework unless your teacher has clearly said AI is permitted

NEAs– Non-Negotiable ⊖

- **NEA & Coursework – Non-negotiable**
- Do not use AI to **write, edit, paraphrase or proofread**
- Do not use AI for **plans, structures or exemplars of NEA pieces**

Do not upload your work to **public AI tools**  
(Exam board rules apply even if you did not mean to cheat)

AI should help you learn — it cannot do the learning for you. If you are unsure, ask your teacher before using AI.

[Click here to see all this information including a short video on the school website.](#)

### BIKES

NEIL BAXTER, DEPUTY HEADTEACHER

If your child rides their bike to school, please can you remind them that it is really important that they lock their bike with a secure lock - ideally a U-Lock.

The school insurance does not cover pupils' bikes, and so it would be good to check that your house insurance provides sufficient cover.

## LYDIA – YEAR 7 PRINCESS TRUST

Congratulations to Lydia in Year 7 who cut her beautiful long hair for the Princess Trust.

[Click here to find out more about the Little Princess Trust.](#)



## CHESS

### PAUL GODFREY, TEACHER OF SCIENCE



On Monday 9th February we took 12 pupils to Bristol in the evening for a Year 7/8 chess qualifier. Half of these pupils also took part in a similar competition in November where they faced pupils much older than them.

We had 3 teams of 4 pupils each. Each team played four rounds against some stiff competition.

Balcarras A won their first round 4-0, but due to the way the draw works it meant they faced the favourites in the next round,

limiting their chances to gain more points.

To get to the next round you had to finish as one of the top two teams!

In the end Balcarras B finished 6th with 9 points (out of a possible 16), Balcarras A (14th) with 8 points and Balcarras C came 12th in a parallel competition with 7 points.

It's great to see that we have such a large pool of chess talent in the school and I'm looking forward to them competing in more competitions in 2026/7.

Chess club runs every Tuesday lunchtime in 4A5. All abilities welcome from learners, to casual play, to competitive chess.

## CAREERS

## JILL LEWIS, CAREERS LEAD



At the end of January, Year 10 students took a step toward their future careers by taking part in practice interviews with volunteers from various industries. The atmosphere was buzzing, and the feedback from both students and volunteers has been overwhelmingly positive

**Feedback from the interviewers:**

- *Love attending these interview days; the pupils are great they are well prepared, take feedback well and super polite too!*
- *I am always so impressed with the Balcarras students, amazing young people. Event well organised.*

- *Really enjoyed the experience and meeting the students*

**and students:**

- *It has helped me to know what to expect in a real interview and how to prepare*
- *It has made me think about how to improve my communication skills*
- *It has boosted my confidence*
- *The interview helped me to speak to a new person and talk about myself*

## REGIONAL CROSS COUNTRY

## PE DEPT



Following on from our amazing success in the Schools District Cross Country Championships and County Cross Country Championships, 12 Balcarras students were selected for the Regional Championships representing Gloucestershire. This event is contested between the other six regions in the South West with the best runners being selected to go to the National Finals in Liverpool later this year. Having 12 students from one school is an amazing achievement, well done to all of those students selected!!

It was a very tough event this year with the mud being almost calf high at some points on the course but a special mention goes to some amazing personal performances.

In the Year 7 boys race Gloucestershire won the competition with Otto Davenport-Jones winning the event and is now Regional Cross Country

Champion. He was closely followed by Joe Bradshaw in second place and Charlie Neale who finished fourth out of over 60 runners, well done boys!!

In the Inter Girls race Olivia Avery came 6<sup>th</sup> and in the Inter boys race Patrick Paul finished 4<sup>th</sup>.

Good luck to all students moving on to the National Round.

## ACTIVITIES WEEK Ms MASSEY

Over half term you will receive a list of the activities happening in July.

All of the information and instructions will be in this information sheet which will be emailed to you.

There are no hard copies.

If your child is on one of the theatre trips going to London, please do enter that so I can cross match the information.

If your child is on a residential, please enter: Residential/Camp/France etc.,

So just to reiterate, there is no further information going out until the end of half term.

Any queries, please email: [ljm@balcarras.gloucs.sch.uk](mailto:ljm@balcarras.gloucs.sch.uk)

## PTFA NEWS

Looking ahead, we are delighted that tickets are already on sale for the PTFA Comedy Night. For this bumper night of comedy, we bring you Jason Neale, Jules O'Brian, Michell Shaughnessy and headlined by Joey Page!

**Friday 6th March 2026 - Balcarras Comedy Club, Balcarras School, Cheltenham - 8pm - Age 18+**

Click below to buy tickets:

<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/balcarras-comedy-club-fundraiser-fri-6th-march-2026-tickets-1977185158032?aff=ebdssbcategorybrowse>

**Thank you to all who attended the Quiz night.**

Calendar change for the Second Hand Uniform sales.

PTFA Second hand uniform sale	6 <sup>th</sup> March 2026	4.30-6pm *now cancelled*
	*changed to below	
PTFA Second hand uniform sale	23 <sup>rd</sup> April 2026	5-6.45 pm *new date*

## LANGUAGE LEADERS TRIO

### BETH FALZON, LANGUAGES

Our Year 9 language leaders took part in an exciting trip on Friday to teach French, Spanish and Russian to children in Year 3, 4, 5 & 6 at Parton Manor Primary School on Friday, showcasing their fantastic linguistic and cultural knowledge and teaching skills!

Pupils were able to plan and lead 30-minute sessions with the pupils where they taught them about cultural aspects of each language such as Day of the Dead, French Carnival and the significance of the typical Russian hats, as well as allowed pupils to make their own skulls, masks and hats. Pupils also taught pupils in the languages, delivering sessions on French animals and family members as well as Russian greetings.

It was a fantastic experience for both our students to gain confidence linguistically and in a leadership role, as well for the primary school pupils to immerse themselves into languages and raise the profile of languages in primary school.



## SCIENCE DEPARTMENT

### LOUISE MCRITCHIE, 2<sup>ND</sup> IN SCIENCE



It has been a busy start to the year in Science club - from making air cannons, to magnetic slime, shrunken heads for Halloween and coloured flames for Bonfire night. More recently we have been getting festive designing Christmas cards with saturated salt solutions and making light up Christmas cards - more fun and competitions to come this Year!

## LIBRARY NEWS

MEGAN KELLY, LIBRARIAN

Just when you think January will never end, February arrives and time seems to speed up. I've seen snowdrops and crocus already coming through and the shops have their Easter treats out already. With the weather predicted to be soggy for the next few weeks, I am finding refuge in the Charlton Kings public library, exploring their new layout and trying to play it cool whilst scouting the reservation shelf for one of my 10 requested books.

The National Literacy Trust are celebrating 2026 as the Year of Reading with the theme of 'Go All In'. I like this idea – the encouragement, almost permission, to rabbit hole down all the winding avenues of a topic that interests me, if even vaguely. I am interested in needlecraft (my mother worked on the kneelers for a church in Seattle) and I live near the locations in the book *Single Thread* by Tracey Chevalier. It ticks a lot of boxes as well as being written by a master storyteller. As a result, I have *The Subversive Stitch* waiting for me next. I'm excited to see where this reading journey will take me!

Year 7s have had another round of library lessons as they wrap up *Treasure Island* and gear up for *The Tempest*. This is one of my favourite lessons as I get to talk about pirates. So, if your Year 7 has not enjoyed Stevenson's work, just remind them that without *Treasure Island* we wouldn't have Captain Jack Sparrow! I also get to make the implausible but credible connect between *Treasure Island* and *Stranger Things* (ask your Year 7!) which leads to a great discussion about the panic that came with young people sitting and reading subversive novels. Always nice to remind students that they are rebels without even realizing it.

Wherever you find yourself this half term, I strongly encourage you to have a book on hand. Soggy days are made better with a book – stack of comics; an audio book of the latest dragon lead fantasy; a biography of your favourite mathematician. Read what inspires you, about who inspires you. Read to fill in the gaps of how that footballer got to the championship league, how that hero saved the day, how that artist created your favourite painting. Read all the things!

## BIG CANCER APPEAL

## IN MEMORY OF ZAC



One of our parents has set up a just giving page in memory of his son Zac (former pupil of Balcarras) and is planning a fund raising long hike of up to 600 miles for the hospital Big Space Cancer Appeal. Some of the hike will be with Alfie (his son and Balcarras pupil) - Cape Wrath Trail North to South for 2 weeks during the school easter holidays.

The final day will be Sat 9th May 2026 from the radio masts at Cleeve Hill via Cotswolds Way past Dunkertons to Leckhampton Hill to descend to Cheltenham General Hospital. If anyone would like to join them, all are welcome.

[Click here for the just giving page and to make a donation](#)

## NEWSLETTER



The newsletter will now be distributed by email and available to view on our VLE (Firefly) as well as on the school website.

It is incredibly easy and will save the school a lot of paper and the planet a lot of trees!

If you would still prefer a hard copy, please contact Karen Adkins  
[ksa@balcarras.gloucs.sch.uk](mailto:ksa@balcarras.gloucs.sch.uk)

Follow us on X (formerly Twitter) @balcarras and Facebook, Facebook.com/BalcarrasSchool for updates and news about school life and events.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Dominic Burke".

Headteacher



**FEBRUARY HALF-TERM CAMPS!**

**16TH - 20TH FEBRUARY**

[MOVE-MORE.ORG/CAMPS](http://MOVE-MORE.ORG/CAMPS)

**BALCARRAS SCHOOL (6-12YRS)**



**SCAN TO BOOK!**



**MOVE MORE**  
EVERY CHILD THRIVES

**FEBRUARY HALF-TERM CAMPS!**

**16TH - 20TH FEBRUARY**

- Huge Range Of Activities
- No Screens Policy
- Run By School PE Specialists
- 10% Sibling Discount
- Childcare Vouchers & TFC Accepted
- Early Drop-Off & Late Collection Options
- Income Reinvested Into The Charity



**100%** of parents surveyed would recommend our camps to a friend

**SUPPORT MOVE MORE!**



**MOVE MORE'S CHARITY GOLF DAY**  
Friday 3rd July 2026



**RUN CHELTENHAM CHARITY SPOTS**  
September 2026





**The Air We Breathe**

A free drop-in event exploring everyday pollution, the real health impacts, and what we can do about it

**Saturday 7 March**  
2 - 4pm  
Stanton Hall  
Charlton Kings

**PLUS**  
Free bike repairs  
Hear from local schools  
Talk to experts & council reps



**EXPLORE**  
Air pollution data • How local action can help • How it affects us  
Small changes we can make • Available support

**FREE**

# THE BIG TEA PARTY

WITH MUSICAL ENTERTAINMENT, TEA, COFFEE & CAKES BY  
BALCARRAS ACADEMY STUDENTS FOR OUR LOCAL SENIOR CITIZENS

**25 MARCH 2026**  
AFTERNOON - TIME TBC

**BALCARRAS**  
SCHOOL

AVAILABLE FOR COLLECTION FROM  
WEDNESDAY 18 FEBRUARY  
AT CKPC OFFICE (MON-FRI 10AM-2PM)

Church Piece, next to the CK library /  
opposite coop

 **Balcarras**  
From strength to strength

 **Charlton Kings**  
Parish Council