

## Update from the Head



It's a very special day today—Buddy the Dog is three years old! Here is a nice photo of him in his birthday outfit. Doesn't he look handsome?

There have been plenty of other outfits displayed in the school today as we enjoyed our annual Sixth Form Dress Up Day. It's great fun and I am always struck by the creativity on display. My thanks to Mr Leatherbarrow and his team for organising it. The photo below shows the sixth form gathering for their annual photo. Zeus (Mr Leatherbarrow) is in the foreground.



### Birthday BBQ

Linked to Buddy's birthday Mr Constance organised a BBQ to raise funds for 2 Wish, a bereavement charity who work with people who are impacted by the sudden death of a young person. Mr Constance and his team sold well over 500 Hot Dogs!



### Enrichment Day

Thursday was a very different day at Balcarras—everyone was engaged in different activities. The whole of Year 7 went on the Castles Trip visiting Berkeley and Chepstow Castles. I went along with them and I have to say I enjoyed it enormously. I learned that Berkeley is one of a handful of English Castles that has been continuously inhabited by the same family for the past 900 years. I also found out that a young John F Kennedy swam in the pool at the Castle sometime in the late 1930s whilst his father, Joseph P Kennedy, was Ambassador to the Court of St James. I just love little snippets of history like this.



Year 8 went either on the Art Trip to Oxford or the Places of Worship Visit to Birmingham. It now means that the year group have completed both curriculum-based visits. Year 9 were on the Geography visit to the Cotswold Wildlife Park whilst Year 10 stayed in school. They had two activities, the first being a psychology based session on criminology. The second was a business-related activity. Year 11 completed activities related to preparing for their forthcoming examinations. Less fun but timely.



Collapsing the whole timetable for a day meant that we could organise a series of trips that every pupil could go on without the need to cover lessons back at base. This meant that the vast majority of pupils were able to go out for the day or at least do something different. My thanks to the staff who made this possible and particularly to Mrs Cullis who masterminded the whole thing.

### **YE Pitch Off**

On Monday lunchtime our two Young Enterprise Teams 'pitched off' against each other as a way of practicing for the YE Finals which are coming up shortly. We have two teams. Cuppa is a business specialising in herbal tea with a strong

Update from the Headteacher Dominic Burke Friday 13th March 2026

focus on aiding mental health. Grounded is a company making decompostable plant pots made from coffee chaff. I popped into the event and it was brilliant. I couldn't stay for the result but I understand that Grounded were victorious.

### Trust Department Meetings

On Monday evening all of the subject departments from the Balcarras Trust met to share ideas and to network. It is a real strength of working inside a Trust that you get access to such networks.

### Geography Year 10 Field Trip

On Tuesday over 100 Year 10 Geographers travelled to the Forest of Dean to carry out some Geography fieldwork. As part of their GCSE they have to be able to carry out some local fieldwork and look at the stages of an enquiry. This day was focused on whether humans have had an impact on the Blackpool Brook.

See article here:

<https://www.balcarras.gloucs.sch.uk/news/?pid=3&nid=1&storyid=1438>



## UK Maths Challenge



Congratulations to Daniel Longley who won the Balcarras UK Intermediate Maths Challenge. Over 120 pupils took part. See article here:

<https://www.balcarras.gloucs.sch.uk/news/?pid=3&nid=1&storyid=1435>

## Balcajazz—save the date

Our time slot has been confirmed for Cheltenham Jazz Festival - Saturday 2nd May, 1pm—save the date.

## 40th Anniversary Celebrations

Plans for our 40th birthday bash are well advanced. An email was sent to you earlier and there is an article on the website detailing the latest:

<https://www.balcarras.gloucs.sch.uk/news/?pid=3&nid=1&storyid=1440>

## Sporting Highlight of the Week

On Thursday the Year 7 Girls Hockey Team competed in the Southwest Regional Finals held at Millfield School. Of the 11 schools who qualified in the region we were the only state comprehensive school. We didn't make it through to the National Finals but apparently the girls did brilliantly.

What a great season for the Girls! They finish as District Champions and Silver Medal Holders at County level.



## Sixth Form Funding

This week the DfE published the base level for sixth form funding for 2026-27. Per pupil funding for sixth formers will rise from £5105 to £5133. This is an increase of £28 per pupil or 0.5%. This is **NOT** what the government promised only last year. The collapse in funding for post 16 education has been a disaster and it shows no signs of ending. See article here:

<https://schoolsweek.co.uk/sixth-forms-face-real-terms-funding-cut-next-year-leaders-warn/>

According to the Institute for Fiscal Studies per pupil funding for school based sixth forms fell by 28% in real terms between 2011 and 2019. This erosion in our funding has continued into this decade. An increase of 0.5% for next year is in fact a significant reduction in our funding when one considers that the CPI rate of inflation is 3%. Wage inflation looks likely to be something similar.

For 15 years we have starved schools of funding for post 16 pupils. I have consistently argued that this decision will have an impact. We have seen a significant rise in the number of young adults not in education, employment or training recently. There are many factors driving this, but I do genuinely believe that real terms reductions to school funding generally and post 16 specifically are crucial factors.

The other key impact that these funding reductions are having is on the rest of the school. It used to be that schools were given significantly more per pupil post 16. This was because everyone knows that it is more expensive to provide specialist sixth form provision. For example, I don't know of a single private school that doesn't charge more for a sixth form place than a lower school place. But as a state school we are given significantly less for a sixth form place and this continues to erode year on year. For schools with sixth forms like Balcarras this just makes life more difficult.

All of this will impact the UK's ability to compete economically in the decades ahead. Why we are actively deciding to make ourselves poorer I will never know.

Anyway, I've been going on about this for years (as have countless other heads and educators) and so far no-one has paid any attention, so I might as well just cheer up because it is the weekend. No football for me but I am heading to my hometown of Leeds nonetheless. I hope you all have a nice weekend.

**Dominic Burke**

