

## Update from the Head

It looks like we will have lovely weather for Midsummer Music this evening—hurray! Please do come along and join us...a reminder that you can pay on the door. Next week we have Sports Day—Thursday from 1.15. Parents are very welcome to come along. I might even scrounge you an ice cream! It is going to be very hot next week. Today we sent out a communication to all parents saying that we will permit pupils to wear their PE kit next week. Please check your email for the details.

### The Die is Cast...

For our pupils in Year 11 and Year 13 there is nothing more they can do—yesterday the exam season ended with the final exam being A level Maths. In Julius Casear's famous phrase, on crossing the Rubicon in January 49 BC, the 'die is cast'. Time now to relax and enjoy the break before receiving their results in the summer. I would like to place on record my thanks to Heather Harris, Sam McLaughlin and everyone in the exams team. Collectively they have done a great job.

### Lifting the Siege?

As a history teacher I have always been fascinated by examples of sieges and how they have been used in warfare from medieval ones to more modern examples. Running a school these past ten years has felt like being under siege as funding relentlessly evaporates before your eyes. Not long ago I remarked to one of my colleagues that it seemed like many years since we received any good news. I was working in my office in the early evening of Tuesday, once again working on next year's budget. I have to say I was in despondent mood. I decided to head home to take the dog for a walk instead. Before I did so I thought I would just check Schoolsweek, which is an educational news website, to see if there was any interesting education news. I clicked on the following article drawn in by its headline:

<https://schoolsweek.co.uk/schools-contributions-to-teachers-pensions-very-likely-to-reduce-minister/>

In 2019 schools paid a contribution of 16.48% towards a teacher's pension. The government increased this to 28.6%. They initially gave schools a grant which covered just over half the cost and then one year later 'rolled' this grant into the funding formula which in effect removed the grant. According to this article the government's actuaries are now saying that this contribution should reduce 'significantly'. Reading the article I quickly calculated that we were talking about a lot of money. I asked the Trust's CFO on Wednesday to work out the exact figure. If we reverted to the contribution rate of 2019 (16.48%) we would have an extra £582,000 income next year. Across the whole education sector we would be talking about £12 billion per year. I can't tell you what a difference this would make—it would lift the siege.

During the Second World War the American 101st Airborne Division were surrounded at a town called Bastogne. The Germans had launched a surprise winter offensive which would become known as the Battle of the Bulge. The German commander presented an ultimatum demanding the "honourable surrender" of the encircled U.S. troops in Bastogne, giving the Americans two hours to comply. The American commander, Brigadier General McAuliffe's, memorable reply was: "To the German Commander: NUTS!" In the end General Patton's Third Army lifted the Siege and the American force protecting Bastogne was rescued.

If sensible heads prevail reducing pension contributions would lift the financial siege that schools are under. If the government decide otherwise, I already know my reply.

## Year 7 Trip



On Monday I joined the Geography Department on the Year 7 Trip to Cheddar Gorge. It was a lovely day out and I found it all genuinely very interesting. There is an article on the school website here:

<https://www.balcarras.gloucs.sch.uk/news/?pid=3&nid=1&storyid=1502>

## Geography Quiz

On Tuesday afternoon we hosted the Inaugural Balcarras Trust Geography Quiz. Teams of keen geographers from across the Trust competed. In the end a team from The High School Leckhampton walked away with the trophy winning on a tie break. The tie break question was: to the nearest kilometre what is the length of the River Nile? Answer below. It was all good fun. See article here:

<https://www.balcarras.gloucs.sch.uk/news/?pid=3&nid=1&storyid=1501>

## Assembly at Berkhamstead School

On Wednesday morning I was invited to Berkhamstead School to give an assembly to their Year 3, 4, 5 and 6. I go every year and I very much enjoy it. I chose reading as my theme and told the story of one of my favourite books, Longitude by Dava Sobel. The book tells the story of John Harrison

## Year 6 Science Classes

On Wednesday afternoon the whole of Year 6 at CKJS came across for some science lessons led by our Year 12 STEM ambassadors. Our students led the learning and there was a very good atmosphere throughout. My thanks to the Year 12s and the Balcarras Science Department.

## Sporting Highlights of the week



On Wednesday it was the turn of the Year 7 and 8 Girls to attend their District Athletics Competition at the Prince of Wales Stadium. Year 7 were joint winners, Year 8 came second and we came second overall. It has been a great Athletics season for Balcarras.

On Wednesday our Year 7 Cricket Team beat THSL by one wicket. Well done to them.

This week our croquet team had their final training session for the academic year. They focused on skills in preparation for Croquet England School Tournament this weekend. Students will be playing against schools from all over the country. Good luck!

## Congratulations to Kiki and Ella

Kiki and Ella, two of our star Year 9 netballers, played at the English Institute of Sport last weekend in Sheffield at the National U14 Netball finals. This is the top 18 teams in the country who have come top two in their regional leagues. The girls and their team came 13th overall and were unbeaten on the second day of competition. Well done to them!



## Congratulations to Jasmine!



Congratulations to Jasmine in Year 12, who studies Music, Drama and English, on an outstanding achievement in the National Youth Monologue Competition.

The national competition is made up of three sections – Classical, Contemporary and Screen – with Jasmine entering the Screen category. She delivered a powerful performance as Jennifer from Law and Order in a demanding and highly emotive scene.

Competing against over 4,000 entrants nationwide, Jasmine progressed to the final, where eight regional finalists performed at the Trafalgar Theatre in London. We are delighted to share that Jasmine was awarded National Winner for the Screen category, a prestigious and highly competitive accolade. Alongside this success, Jasmine has also undertaken a range of period drama short film roles over the past academic year, further demonstrating her commitment and talent in performance.

A fantastic achievement – well done, Jasmine!

## The Balcarras Trust

The Headteachers of the Balcarras Trust meet regularly with our latest meeting taking place at Balcarras on Thursday morning. It is great to meet with colleague heads and swap notes. In the evening I went to a training session for trustees and governors on school improvement. It was a very useful session.

## Bring Your Parent to School Day

Today about 20 parents came to Balcarras to sample life in the school. They had 4 lessons, a tutor time, lunch in the canteen and an assembly with me. It went very well. My thanks to Mr Niblett and Mr Constance for organising it and to those teachers who delivered lessons.



And so to Midsummer Music. I am really looking forward to it—drinking a cold beer in the sunshine, listening to the most wonderful music and socialising with the pupils, staff and parents of Balcarras—what's not to like?

Have a nice weekend.

### Dominic Burke

PS. I almost forgot to tell you the answer to the tiebreaker—the Nile is 6650km long (4,132 miles). If you are a clever clogs and want to tell me that the true source of the Nile is disputed...I am afraid the Head of Geography's answer is FINAL!