Update from the Head

Dear Parents,

There is a stretch of the M62 heading west from Leeds where the motorway rises steeply as it tackles the Pennine hills on its way to the summit at Windy Hill. My first car was a 1990 Citroen AX (Special Edition 'Night Life'). It was woefully underpowered and handled rather like a shopping trolley. No matter what sort of run up you attempted the car lost speed, so that by the time you approached the summit, you were being overtaken by lorries. I have to admit I've felt a bit like that car this week, losing momentum as we approach the summit—in our case not Windy Hill but the sanctuary of October half term. I sense that many of our pupils and staff feel the same. This first half term is the engine room of the school year where so much of the heavy lifting is done. Now everyone deserves a few days rest.

Prizegiving

It was a lovely evening on Thursday as we celebrated with our pupils and parents at the 2026 Balcarras School Prizegiving. My congratulations once again to everyone who won a prize. I'd also like to thank those pupils who spoke. The House Captains' school report delivered by Katie, Alex, Freya, Thomas, Amy, Edward, James and Anya was engaging and humorous. Arwa and Alex in Year 12 did a wonderful job of introducing our Guest of Honour, Dr Carys Brown, and the musical interlude delivered by Ben and Theo was sublime.



It was lovely to see Carys Brown again. She was a pupil here from 2002 to 2009 and was in the very first A level group I taught at Balcarras in 2007. Carys went on to study history at Cambridge and completed her PhD there as well. She now lectures in history as well-being Head of Academic, Personal, and Professional Development at Trinity

College. Dr Brown spent the afternoon in the school meeting with pupils who are applying to Oxbridge and delivering a lecture on 19th Century British history to the A level historians. It was very interesting.

What a lovely way to finish the term.

Thank you from the PTFA



Thank you to everyone who came along to our PTFA Clothes Swap evening on 16th October, and thanks also to anyone who donated clothes before the event itself. We had a fantastic band of helpers early on to set up the event; putting together clothing rails, preparing the bar area/signage and sorting and hanging up the pre-donated clothes.

Then we welcomed lots of enthusiastic 'customers' who spent a happy few hours trying on clothes, searching out new looks and catching up with friends over a drink. Everyone who attended left with some new garments – some just a few choice items, others carrying as many full bags as possible!

The ticket and bar sales raised over £500 which will be added to the PTFA funds for school. Big thanks to our team of helpers, we couldn't do it without you! Wendy & Esther.



Remember My Name



We're delighted to be supporting Sue Ryder with the release of a very special music video this Friday 23rd (today) at 6pm, featuring some of our incredibly talented students.

It'll be available on our YouTube channel:
https://youtu.be/HXV_pL9hMUo

We're hoping to raise as much money as possible for the charity's invaluable work providing palliative care and bereavement support and have set up a JustGiving page for donations:
https://www.justgiving.com/page/balcarrasmusic

I'd be incredibly grateful if you could **watch, share and help spread the word** amongst friends, family and beyond. The more people we reach, the greater the difference we can make!

Thank you so much for your support.

Year 13 Environmental Science Trip

At the start of term year 13 Environmental Science students went on their first residential of the year to Margam Field Studies Centre, Wales. Here they carried out the field work component of their course. They studied sand dune management in Swansea, studied zonation and habitat preference on the rocky shore in the Mumbles and looked at carbon sequestration of different types of woodlands in Port Talbot. They also captured, identified and released different species of moths and detected bats in the area. This year we also managed to squeeze in a meal and a game of bowling into the packed timetable of fieldwork. Turn out Mrs Thomson cannot bowl!





Year Y Football - Girls



Year 7 girls played a match against Cleeve School on Wednesday. It was a close match against a very skilled Cleeve team. At FT the score was 2-2 and went to penalties. Balcarras dominated the penalties and our keeper was superb, making some outstanding saves! Final score 3-2 to Balcarras!

Green Group

On Monday I went to the first Green Group Committee of the year. We discussed all sorts of things including a student project to raise funds for a food waste composter.

HSL Careers Event

On Monday evening I joined the sixth form team and some of our pupils at a Careers Event for Year 11 pupils at the High School Leckhampton. We were there to answer any questions about the Balcarras sixth form. I am delighted that so many HSL pupils joined our sixth form in September and I am hopeful that the same will happen next September.

Our own pupils will start to be involved in discussions about options for next year and of course we will have the open evening in January.

Year 11 Pupil Pursuit

On Thursday I conducted my latest pupil pursuit. I followed the timetable of two pupils in Year 11 for the day. I enjoyed it enormously, but I have to say by the end of it I was tired. The lessons were so focussed and pacey—there is no doubt that Year 11 are working ever so hard. In my assembly with them I said that they will want to spend some time revising for the mocks over half term but I also stressed the need for some rest and recuperation.

Year 13 History and Politics Parliament Trip



On October 21st, Balcarras History and Politics department took a group of 30 Year 13s for a day at Parliament, including a tour of the Palace of Westminster and a workshop in the afternoon.

We were treated to a near perfect Parliamentary experience; the day itself was Prime Minister's Questions and also coincided with the state visit of the Sultan of Oman (unfortunately, he insisted on taking all the tickets to PMQs...). As a result, Parliament was alive with activity, and we were privileged enough during our tour to have the chance to watch the Speaker's Procession into the House of Commons, even receiving a wink and a nod from Sir Lindsey himself.

Having concluded our guided tour, we then undertook a workshop that had the students creating their own political campaign, allowing the Year 13s to showcase their excellent political knowledge and (wildly varying!) perspectives. As the prospective campaigners were concluding their pitches, we were joined by our sitting MP, Max Wilkinson, who I doubt has had a tougher grilling whilst in the Palace of Westminster.

Questions to Max ranged from his relationship with outgoing Cheltenham MP, Alex Chalk; verbal jostling with Conservative defector Robert Jenrick; and how he balances expertise, conscience and personal opinion when voting on a range of issues in Parliament.

A quick lunch down Whitehall concluded our visit, and not even the torrential rain could put the dampeners on what had been a brilliant day in the historic seat of British democracy.



Community Notices

Old Pats want to encourage more girls into rugby, so they offer free rugby sessions for girls in Yr7-Yr9 on Sundays from 1-2pm.

They want more girls to find out about it and get to a point where they can start to play competitively.

https://www.oldpats.co.uk/girls-rugby/

Estonia

My best wishes to the Russian Department as they head to Estonia for their annual Russian languages trip this half term.

Right, that is it. I'm looking forward October half term. Leeds head to Sunderland this weekend. I'm not going but will watch it on telly instead. Whatever you are doing I hope you have a nice time.

Dominic Burke