

RETURNING TO SCHOOL

Believe it or not (Yes, I was a kid once too!), When I was only 5 years old at Captain Cook's Primary School in Middlesbrough, I had to have a very long period in hospital. I was months and months away from school.

It had been a new school for me anyway. I had moved from somewhere else. I had not been there long before my hospitalisation.

As I got better, though still in hospital, I began to worry whether new-found friends had forgotten me or moved on with another crowd. I worried that when I returned to school, everyone would notice me for the wrong reasons. I wondered whether I could fit in again. Had I forgotten some of the school rules and would I get told off? Would the work be too hard for me? Would everyone else be better than me and much more confident? It felt like the world had moved on ahead of me. All the things I liked about school were clouded by doubts, concerns and questions.

Does this ring a bell with you? I know it does. You did successfully manage transition from Year 6 to Year 7 after some of these doubts and concerns plaguing your head. After induction day, seeing your new form class, your future mates, some of your old primary school friends, seeing some of the teachers including your new form tutor and after seeing the school building again – you felt a bit more sorted. Some of your concerns were now smaller. Some of your worries went. Some issues continued but you learned to manage them. Such is life.

The night before, I remember vividly the negative thoughts and fear of the unknown, even though I had been in my Year 1 Primary school class at Captain Cook's School before. Once I walked through the school gates and had to prise myself away from the safe bubble of my parents' car, the teachers appeared, my friends appeared in the playground. The teachers were the same, for good and bad. Some jokes, some caring, some shouting. It was all the same as before. My friends were lovely. They recognised me. They smiled at me. We got on with some daft "tigs off ground" game. I was back in the crowd. I was back in the school. School carried on as if nothing had happened – as if I had never been away. The work was not too hard. The teachers were fine. My friends were still my friends. We got on.

Most of you return in the next week or so. I know from phone calls and teams emails that the Mr Noble five year old and the eleven/twelve year old you is experiencing similar emotions and thoughts. But just as my return after months away, your transition from primary to secondary school – and just as after this lockdown period, we will get back to normal. Form tutors will be there, I will be there, teachers will be there, the classrooms still look like classrooms, work will be there, your friends will be there.

When the Year 12 and 10 students returned, it was noticeable that they were quieter and more reserved at the beginning, as they walked into school. The way they treated the walk around the outside of the building into the English corridor reminded me of the dreaded walk on Cilla Black's "Moment Of Truth" years ago on ITV. Google it! But the teachers welcomed them. There were a few jokes. Mr Weaver was still Mr Weaver! I think seeing 2 metre marks in yellow on the pavement made the school appear a bit different, the red and white tape to show the queueing away at the front gates was not there before, the 2 metre markings on the corridor floor were a new addition, the hand sanitisers everywhere seemed to be a welcome invite to do something, there was a rash of teachers directing everyone and the classrooms were filled with fewer desks and therefore fewer colleagues. After the talks started, the discussions began to flow – you could see the Year 12 and 10 students visibly start to relax. It was back to normal. School was just the same. Apart from a few markings and sanitisers, it was still us.

So now it is your turn. It will be fine. It will be lovely to see you again. Let's own the moment. Mr Noble