



SOLIHULL

July 10 2020

Dear Junior School,

I've never before found myself writing to a building but I trust you'll forgive me on this occasion. Protracted isolation, too much screen time and a lockdown mullet, I've discovered, does things to a man.

I should stop insisting I haven't been affected by the global pandemic and straighten myself out.

It's just that I don't want to let this moment pass with no more than an elbow bump and a 'see you around'. Presumptive perhaps, but I'm sure I'm not alone here. Over the years so very many of us have spent a sizeable chunk of our lives in your company and we've watched you mould and mature from a wee slip of a thing into a fully-fledged, confident, stand up force for good.

There was a time when you housed no more than a wheelie bin full of boys, in a handful of rooms and the Masters would sell their own children before they'd refer to your pupils by their first names. A time too, I'm reliably informed, when a previous Head of the Junior School used to have his dog in his office, and a time when he'd take his dog for a swim each day... in the school swimming pool! I can only apologise to those alumni who were timetabled for swimming just after, or maybe even at the same time. As hardy as they were, I doubt they mustered up the courage to object.

In your infancy the Art Room and adjacent classrooms used to be an assembly hall, there was no Thompson Library and the boys' changing room was a classroom. And it's not all that long since there was even a need for a girls' changing room. It was Wednesday 7 September 2005 when co-education was rolled out through the younger years and, oh my, what a stir that caused! The loss-of-tradition doom mongers soon lost their footing and those who prophesied that all would change, and change utterly, were right - but not in a way they thought they would be. The arrival of girls enhanced the Junior School, immeasurably, and you never looked back.

Not long afterwards you had a growth spurt. You burst out of your too-short trousers (the ones you'd now wear with lurid socks – or, heaven forbid, no socks - if you wanted to look trendy in The City) and you grew a foot taller over the summer. Your limbs grew gangly before they grew strong and you stretched your reach along C corridor all the way to the Head's Wing. Cue and hail the arrival of more children, more teachers and even more joy, love and laughter.

And all the while, the community within you grew and strengthened as you flung your arms wide open to the world. And look at us now – a harmonious vision of what we hope our future world will be, a kaleidoscope of cultural heritage that flourishes and thrives in its diversity. No child is born a bigot and shame on those who would ever teach a child that they are any better or any worse than anyone else.

So what next for you then? We hear you are having a makeover that would make Trinny and Susannah come over all giddy. A *reconfiguring* no less; I could do with one of those myself.



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A couple of snazzy Science labs and, in time, a new Dance Studio too – a hipster with swagger, ahead of the game. You're even having a new name; The Mark Hopton Building. How very fitting. Mark has been an exceptional asset to Solihull School and a very great friend to many. Peas from the same pod.

And what next for the Junior School community? Well we're off to Saint Martin's to begin the next chapter of its very proud history. If it's good enough for Constable to paint, how lucky are we to have the lure and charm of its canvas as a backdrop to develop our school and ourselves even further? We have always agreed that standing still in education is tantamount to going backwards, so our restless will to constantly improve wouldn't have altered one jot whether we had taken the short hop across the Warwick Road or not.

So you needn't worry about us, any more than we need worry about you. As you know as well as any, it's people that make a place and we are blessed to have a wonderful community who couldn't try harder than it does to give young children the very best start in life.

If there is one thing this Covid-induced societal hiatus has reminded us, it's that those who fight change tend to get very big headaches. Eckhart Tolle never tires of telling us that non-resistance is one of the greatest powers in the universe, and I hope he never does. Change is the only constant in life, so making sure it works out for the better is where our energies will remain. So here's to a new and exciting future for all of us and to the charging of our glasses in tribute to you.

You have been a loyal and trusted friend to successive generations of Junior School communities, all of whom revelled in your company. You had a gift for making people feel comfortable, an effortless magnetism that would make you blush if you allowed yourself to believe it was true. But those of us who were fortunate to know you, knew that wasn't your style. Your unassuming confidence in knowing what you were about saw you grow comfortably in your own skin, whilst allowing us to do the same. We are all the better, and stronger, for it and we will carry that grounding with us wherever we go.

And wherever we do find ourselves, we will speak nothing but warmly of you and reminisce of the truly great times we had in your rooms, corridors and playing fields. We are forever grateful to you and we part with a precious treasure trove of memories to draw on, whatever the weather. It will remain our intention to do you proud and you have our word that, as ever, we'll give it all we've got.

On behalf of everyone who has had the good fortune to pass through your doors and to know you as we have, thank you dear friend.

Slán go fóill,

Mark (& Junior School communities, past and present)

