



How Wood pupils Evie Russell, Jack Hine, Poppy Page, Lottie Barrow-Winn and Oscar Leigh have shared their thoughts on the changes introduced since they returned to school following lockdown. Picture: STACEY TURNER

The resilience of youth - how children are coping with changes at school

Despite change and some wobbles, the resilience of our children really shines through with an emphasis on strength in numbers. Just maybe, we can use their example as we reflect and adapt in how we move forward.

The children agreed that while they felt nervous, confused and unsure what to expect, the teachers make them feel safe and happy. They mentioned how the bubbles and face shields felt a little weird at first yet they are now getting used to them. Chatting with their friends and making each other feel happy is definitely the most important thing throughout the uncertainty.

The children offered hope to other youngsters who might be sad and said that hope is mostly about making a big wish, a wish that everyone is OK!

Evie Russell, 10, said: "Try not to be afraid, focus on what's normal and not the outside world."

With the return to school well underway, **Stacey Turner**, founder of the It's OK To Say mental health awareness campaign, takes a look at what is going on around us through the eyes of children at How Wood School

Six-year-old Jack Hine added: "Try not to be worried, being with friends makes you feel better. Everyone has been helpful."

Poppy Page, eight, told me: "I know it will be fine, we're all back together, so it will be fun."

Lottie Barrow-Winn, also eight, said: "Try and focus on something you like, that's fun and exciting."

And finally, eight-year-old Oscar Leigh said: "We're at school with friends and learning through fun."

Teacher Freya Loftus explained how they have been putting the children's emotional and mental well-being at the forefront of every activity since the return to school.

"We have talked about what is 'new' and what remains 'normal' designing activities that gently follow on from their observations and experiences. We have ensured children have regular breaks to aid concentration and interest.

"We have followed specific texts that deal with bigger issues of grief, loss, value, hope and unity through a fun and engaging narrative. Most importantly, we have created 'happiness boxes' that the children have filled with personal items from home. These boxes were decorated by the children and remain visible in our classroom to remind them that their happiness is important to us.

"It has been fantastic to see their personalities shine through their

individual choices. In a world that is ever changing, we have strived to deliver consistency yet model adaptability to our children in school."

Headteacher Cynthia Rowe said: "It has been wonderful welcoming our children back to school. We have structured our school day and our curriculum in a way that supports the children's mental health and wellbeing.

"Most of children are being taught by their last known teacher which has proved very successful, and our children appear happy and excited to be back with their friends, teachers and support staff. There have been a few wobbles and my dedicated team have skilfully managed this providing support and comfort to those children who have needed it."

It is wonderful to see how teachers are leading the way in uncertain times and coping together in a positive light provides every child with essential life skills and understanding the

concept that life is not without cracks, what matters is how we cope with those cracks. That it is OK to wobble and help is available.

I know first-hand teachers are calling children first thing to help ease anxieties and get them into school because they know once they are in and surrounded by their friends, the intensity of the situation changes. Children are free to focus on what is happening throughout the school day.

To the children, being in school makes the world's problem of coronavirus seem smaller and more manageable. It is their everyday, their routine, their little world and they want to go through it together.

The It's OK To Say campaign will be using the coming months to launch various new initiatives focusing on different aspects of mental health support. You can find a wealth of information for any age group on the website at: <http://www.itsoktosay.org.uk/im-concerned/>