

Thomas helps...

A year 6 boy on the autistic spectrum had been with us in school since Reception. He had 1:1 support for most of his time with us and, at one point, had been part of a group who were educated separately each morning as they could not cope with being in the classroom for numeracy and literacy. He had had ELSA earlier in his school career however, during Year 6, he was part of a small nurture-style group of children who met weekly under the supervision of two adults.

During his last term, his anxiety levels began to rise and he was able to articulate that he did not want to leave our school and move on to secondary school. We discussed the party that we would be having for him at the last session of the group and he was taken for extra visits to his new secondary school. At one session, he asked if we could read a "Thomas the Tank Engine story" at his leaving party within the group (these were his favourite stories). I decided that I would write a Thomas story especially for him to try to help him with transition and so "Thomas helps (child's name)" was born.

Over the next few weeks, I photographed every member of staff in school and acquired photographs of ex-colleagues who had supported him throughout his school journey. I engaged him in casual conversation regarding his memories of each class, school trip, learning group and nurture group and weaved them all into the story. It was Thomas who was initially sad that his friend was moving on to secondary school and Thomas who shared his memories throughout the story and helped him to see that secondary school was a new chapter, but his primary school memories would not be lost. I read the story aloud at the last meeting of the nurture-style group (with some surprise guests from his time at school) and there was not a dry eye in the house! I gave him a copy to take home and his mum later told us that he read it regularly through the six-week holiday after which he happily went off to secondary school and has settled in well. I have created an anonymous version to help you with your own creations.

Chris Webb (a former Hampshire ELSA)

Thomas helps Kenny

It was early in the morning at the beginning of September. Thomas the Tank Engine was feeling sad.



“What’s wrong, Thomas?” asked James the Red Engine.

“My friend Kenny is going to his new school today.” Thomas sniffed “I shan’t see him in the morning any more. He used to wave to me every morning on his way to KS village school.”

Oh dear, Thomas,” James said sympathetically. “Maybe you will still see him sometimes.”

“I don’t think so,” answered Thomas sadly.

Thomas and his driver set off to work.

“Cheer up, Thomas!” his driver said when he saw his sad face.

“I can’t cheer up!” Thomas sounded grumpy. “My friend Kenny is going to secondary school today and I shan’t see him on his way to primary school anymore!”

“Well, we have work to do, Thomas.” the driver told him “So just you focus on that and forget all about Kenny.”

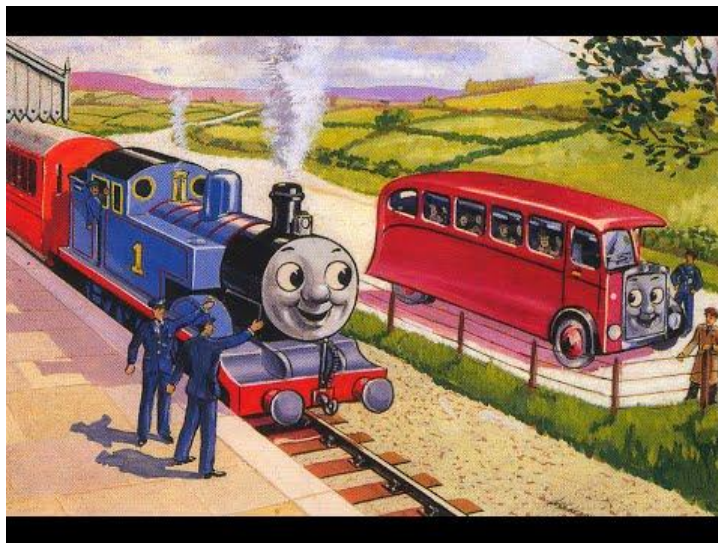
“I can’t forget about him!” grumbled Thomas under his breath “He’s my friend.”

Thomas picked up Annie and Clarabel and they set off for the big town where the secondary school is.

“Thomas is in a grumpy mood!” Annie told Clarabel.

“He is missing his friend Kenny,” Clarabel whispered. “It’s his first day at secondary school today and Thomas thinks he won’t see him anymore.”

As they passed the level crossing just before the station, Thomas saw Bertie Bus. He had broken down.



“Hello, Bertie!” shouted Thomas. “What’s happened?”

“I was taking the children for their first day at secondary school,” called Bertie, “and I have broken down. They will be late for their first day!”

As Thomas was wondering if his driver would let him help, he saw his friend Kenny standing next to the bus.

Photo of K

“Oh no!” said Kenny angrily “This is a really BAD THING! I am going to be late for my first day at secondary school!”

“Peep, peep, peeeeeep!” cried Thomas excitedly. “Hello Kenny! I am so glad to see you!”

“I am glad to see you too, Thomas,” called Kenny. “Can you help me to get to school on time?”

“I think I can!” called Thomas as his driver nodded to agree.

Thomas stopped in the station and waited happily while Kenny and his friends climbed on board Annie and Claramel. Thomas cheered up immediately. He was happy to be helping his friend Kenny and sharing his journey to TV School on his first day.

“Off we go! Off we go!” sang Thomas as he pulled out of the station.

Kenny settled back into his seat and looked out of the window.

“The really bad thing has turned into a good thing!” he said to himself. “I didn’t think that I’d be seeing Thomas on my way to school but here he is taking me to my very first day at secondary

school. I am so happy! (No offence, Bertie).” He muttered these last three words under his breath.

Photo of Mrs Grant waving

Kenny enjoyed looking out of the window especially when he saw a lady in her garden watching Thomas and waving to Kenny.

“Hi Kenny!” she called “Have fun at your new school!”

Kenny waved back. It was Mrs Grant! He remembered being in the Phoenix Group with Mrs Grant. What fun they had!

No sooner had he stopped waving to Mrs Grant than he saw someone else waving to Thomas.

Photo of Mrs Wilson waving

“Good luck, Kenny!” a voice shouted.

Kenny waved back and, to his surprise, he saw that it was Mrs Wilson waving to him this time.

Mrs Wilson had left his primary school before Kenny and moved to Scotland. What a coincidence that she was visiting the village on the very day that Kenny started at secondary school. Mrs Wilson had taught Kenny in the Phoenix Group as well.

“Peep, peep!” Thomas said happily, “How exciting to see Mrs Grant and Mrs Wilson! Are you OK back there, Kenny?”

“Sure am, Thomas.” Kenny smiled as they continued on their journey.

“I used to be in the Phoenix Group with Mrs Wilson and Mrs Grant and some of my friends. I remember one Christmas we wrote a Christmas list and I asked for a foam Minecraft diamond sword and a

Thomas Take and Play train shed with a turntable. What do you think of that, Thomas?"

"Peep, peep!" chuckled Thomas "I think the real me is better!"

Kenny kept on looking through the window and saw that they were getting nearer to the village where his old primary school was. He hoped they would go past the village school. His excitement at seeing Mrs Grant and Mrs Wilson faded a little and he felt sad. He had wanted to stay at the little village school that he had attended since just before he was five. He had lots of happy memories there.

As the village school came into sight, Kenny had another surprise!

Photo of Mrs Brown and Mrs Carter waving.

Mrs Brown and Mrs Carter were waving as Thomas came round the bend.

"Have a fab time at your new school, Kenny!" shouted Mrs Brown. "Go, Thomas!"

"Enjoy yourself!" called Mrs Carter. "Have lots of fun!"

And just past Mrs Brown and Mrs Carter were Jack, Davy, Susie, Ben and Kim. All his friends from Busy Bees (his old nurture group) were there to wish him luck on his first day at secondary school.

"1, 2, 3!" shouted Jack and they all joined together to yell,

Photo of group of children all waving or thumbs up

"You'll be in the Busy Bees hall of fame, Kenny!"

Kenny laughed and waved both hands at the Busy Bees gang.

“Busy Bees hall of fame!” he chuckled to himself “I made that up when I was in Busy Bees and Toby and Mrs Pinks left. I don’t really like it though when people leave, and now I’ve left Busy Bees too.”

Kenny remembered what he had liked best about being in Busy Bees - being able to talk about things that worried him and sharing his excitement when his baby brother was born!

As they passed the school field, Thomas had to slow down because the signal was on red.

Kenny was happy that Thomas had slowed down because he could have a good look at his old school before moving on to his new one.



He could see quite a few people in the field and they were all waving at Thomas and Kenny (not forgetting Annie and Clarabel).

Photo of Mrs Elly, Mrs Downs and Mrs Pavey waving

The first people he saw were Mrs Elly, Mrs Downs and Mrs Pavey. They all waved and grinned happily at Kenny.

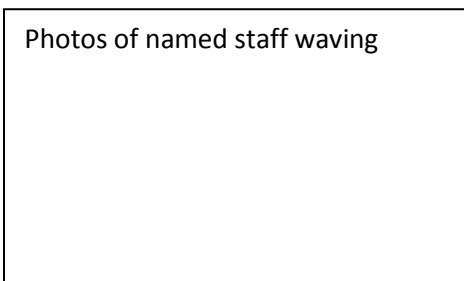
“Work hard at your new school, Kenny!” exclaimed Mrs Elly.

“Enjoy the Science!” called Mrs Downs.

“I’ll miss you!” smiled Mrs Pavey.

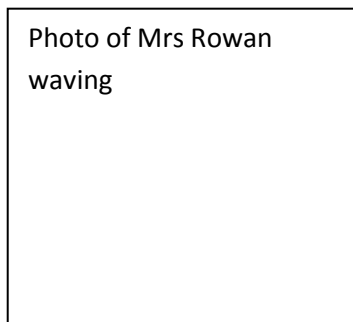
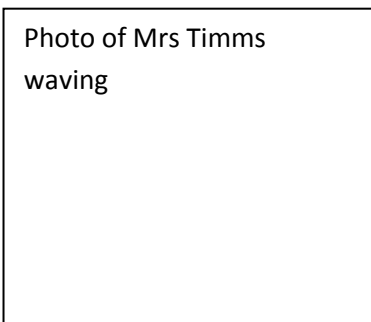
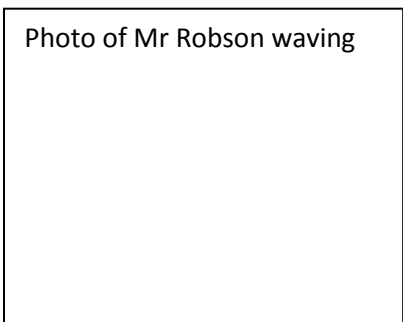
Kenny waved back and felt sappy. This was a word that they had used in Busy Bees when they felt sad and happy. He was very happy

to see everyone, but he was sad that he wouldn't be at school with them today. He had gone on a residential trip to Minstead when he first started in Eagles class and it had helped him to face his fears because he was afraid of the dark, but he had known that he wouldn't be able to have a light on as it would keep the other boys in his room awake. He remembered reading Project X with Mrs Pavey and practising touch-typing on the Dance Mat program. He had enjoyed Project X because there were lots of clues and mysteries to solve before the team could get the Code key.



He continued to watch through the window and there were Ms Biggles, Mrs Quick and Mrs Newsome.

“Good luck, Kenny!” they shouted in unison. “Have a good time today!”

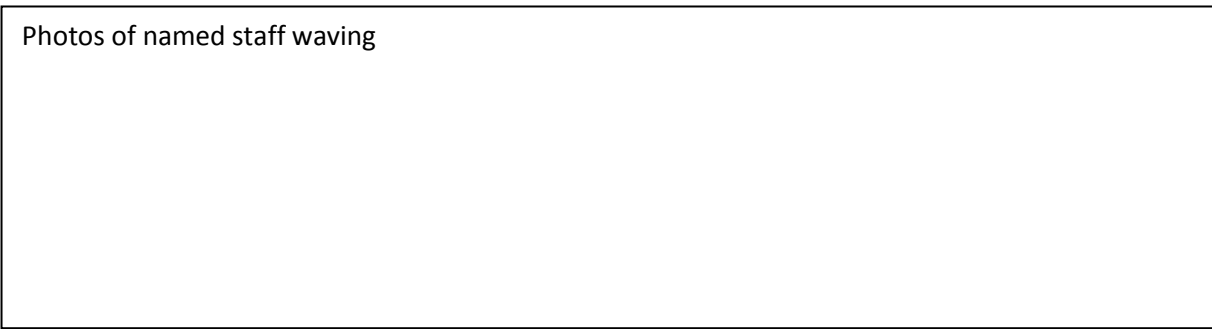


Mr Robson, Mrs Timms and Mrs Rowan were all waving. They had been Kenny's teachers when he was in Years 3, 4 and 5. When Mr Robson and Mrs Timms were his teachers he had got better at remembering things and he had also started to play his trombone.

“When I was in Mrs Rowan's class, Thomas,” he told the tank engine “we went to the Watercress Line and I hoped I'd see you but you had gone on holiday to somewhere else.”

“Oh, that’s a shame, Kenny!” called back Thomas “Still, I’m here now.”

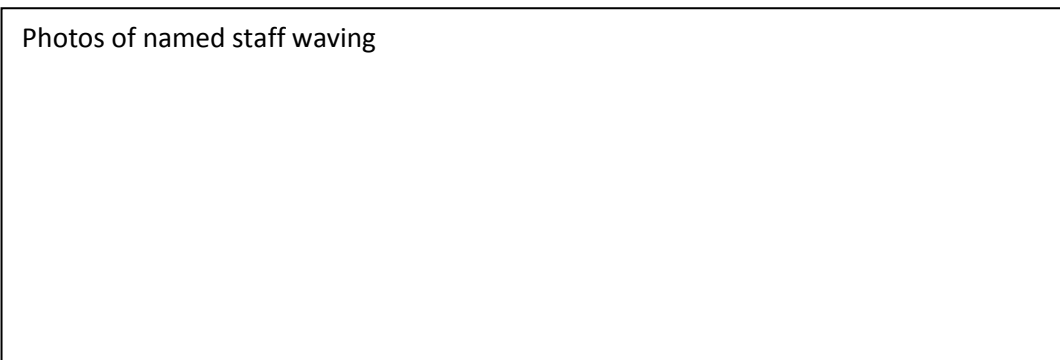
Next were Mrs James, Mrs Kite, Mrs Lang and Mrs Street. Kenny had been in Mrs James’s class when he first started at primary school and Mrs Kite had been Kenny’s helper in most of his classes.



It was strange to think that he had once been a much younger boy starting school for the first time. He had cried on his first day at school but Mrs Flint had taught him how to be sensible and how to sit with his legs crossed.

When he had moved into Miss Hunt’s class, he had been nervous at first, but he remembered that he used to play on the car mat in the corner of her classroom.

Mrs Smith and Mrs Isles had both taken time away from preparing the school dinners to wave as he went past and to wish him good luck on his first day at secondary school and next to them were Mrs Mount and Mrs Crane. It felt like Kenny had known all these people



for all
of his
life!

The signal turned green and Thomas chuffed on his way.

“Do you know, Thomas, the thing that I liked best about primary school was that everyone was different but nobody minded. I think that I was the biggest train fan and Thomas expert in the whole school!”

“Peep, peeeppppp!” called out Thomas happily.

After a little while, Kenny could see his new school through the window of the carriage.

Photo of secondary school

“Not long now, Kenny!” said Thomas “We will soon be at the station nearest to your new school.”



Kenny was feeling very nervous now. Thomas stopped in the station and

Kenny reluctantly got out of the carriage onto the platform.

He stood next to Thomas and Thomas could see that his friend Kenny wasn't very happy.

"You have lots of amazing memories from your time at your old school, Kenny," Thomas told him.

"I know!" wailed Kenny, "But now they've all gone!"

"Sssshhhh!" Thomas let off steam loudly "Of course they haven't all gone, Kenny! Memories are like watching a DVD of me! You can watch your memories in your mind as often as you like and wherever you like - you will never lose all those memories that you have now!"

Kenny looked amazed!

"I hadn't thought of that, Thomas!" he exclaimed "You're right! I will always have my memories of my old school no matter where I go or how much time passes."

"Exactly!" Thomas said with satisfaction "And now it's time to go and make some more memories at your new school. Have a brilliant day,

Kenny, and, if Bertie isn't mended this afternoon, I'll be back to take you home again."

"Thanks, Thomas!" waved Kenny as he began to walk towards his new school. "My career at primary school has come to an end and it's time to start a new career at secondary school."

"It certainly is!" called Thomas as he pulled Annie and Clarabel out of the station. "Peep! Peep! Come on, girls! We made a memory today - the day that Thomas helped Kenny!"