Samuel Starts School After Battle with Cancer

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A little boy who over the last 18 months has battled eye cancer is getting ready to walk through the school gates for the first time.

At just two and a half years old, Samuel Burgess was diagnosed with a rare form of childhood eye cancer called retinoblastoma. For the last 18 months, the brave youngster from Huntingdon has undergone rigorous treatment at The Royal London Hospital – 80 miles away from home – in an attempt to cure the cancer. The first attempt was unsuccessful as more tumours on Samuel's retina appeared. The second attempt, which was much more intense, thankfully halted the tumours.

Throughout his treatment, Samuel's family - Mum Hannah, Dad James and older sister Emelia - were there to support the four year old as they were given free 'Home from Home' accommodation at the hospital run by The Sick Children's Trust. . **Mum Hannah, a Neonatal Intensive Care Nurse, says:**

"Everything happened very quickly. From the moment we spotted the unusual white in his pupil to the diagnosis it was just a couple of days. It was very scary and we were all very shocked.

"But throughout all his treatment Samuel has been a star. After the last type of chemotherapy, he had to stay still for four hours because of the increased risk of bleeding – this was no mean feat but he did it.

"Seeing the way he has coped in the last 18 months has proven he can cope with anything. So although I'm slightly apprehensive about Samuel starting school, I know he is going to be fine. And he is so excited to start school, especially as his big sister will be there to support him."

Although Samuel is well on the road to recovery, every three months he visits The Royal London for examinations which check he hasn't relapsed. Looking back on Samuel's treatment, Hannah says it has been much more manageable travelling to London because of The Sick Children's Trust's 'Home from Home' Stevenson House. **She says:**

"Throughout this journey The Sick Children's Trust has offered 'Home from Home' accommodation whenever we've needed it. Stevenson House was so homely and welcoming, and most importantly became a true 'Home from Home' – it was the place where we could all be together despite the circumstances.

"As we were so close to the hospital meant we could literally roll out of bed and be ready for Samuel's next appointment without having to worry whether we'd actually make it due to traffic.

"Stevenson House has been a very special place for our whole family where we have always felt at home, and we are very grateful for that"

The Sick Children's Trust runs ten 'Homes from Home' across the country supporting families with seriously ill children in hospital. Stevenson House is one of three 'Homes from Home' in London and has 16 family bedrooms with direct telephone lines to the hospital wards, along with communal living rooms, kitchens, bathrooms and laundry facilities.

Stevenson House Manager Alan Booth says: "We're so pleased to hear that Samuel is starting school this September. We know that he will impress all his teachers and classmates as much as he has impressed us at Stevenson House.

"Last year, Stevenson House helped over 500 families stay close to their loved ones – including Samuel's family. The Sick Children's Trust believes keeping families together significantly improves the recovery of seriously ill children. It costs the charity around £30 to support a family in one of its 'Homes from Home' for one night, and we are completely reliant on voluntary donations."

For further information on The Sick Children's Trust. Please visit: www.sickchildrenstrust.org

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