



DEBRETT'S EDUCATION

IN A CLASS OF OUR OWN

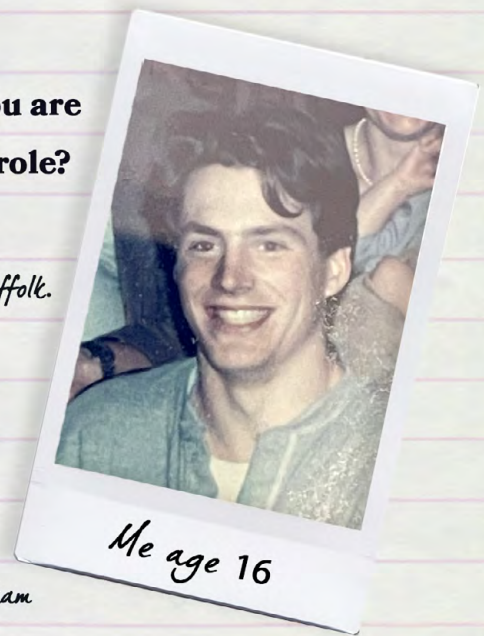




Short bio - Please tell us a little bit about yourself. Who you are and what do you do now? How long have you been in this role?

My name is Tom O'Sullivan and I'm the Head of Cheltenham College Prep School.

This is my 5th year here having previously been Head at Old Buckenham Hall in Suffolk.



1/ Where did you go to school? Junior / Senior?

I went to the local village primary school in Winchcombe, just outside Cheltenham.

My Mum was the Deputy Head so I got away with nothing! After a brief time in Singapore I then spent most of my senior years at Pate's Grammar School in Cheltenham



2/ Have you ever been back to your old schools - How did you feel?

Although my parents now live in Winchcombe once again I haven't visited the school - one for the future. I go back to Pate's occasionally and talk at their careers fairs. In the first few years after university it was fun going back and chatting to the staff who used to teach you. Sadly, they have all long retired by now but it still brings back happy memories when I visit. My Father taught there for a number of years (after I had left) so I kept a close connection and was in and out a lot watching his shows.

3/ Do you keep in touch with any of your school friends?

Four or five of us from school are still very close

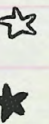
4/ Do you see them regularly?

All bar one still lives in Cheltenham and we see each other regularly - more often than not on the golf course or the occasional party. We grew up living so close to each other that we really did experience so much of our youths together, there's not much we don't know about each other - for better and for worse!

5/ What did you enjoy most about being at school, and what kind of pupil were you?

I was really lucky that I loved school and I'm sure a major part of doing the job I do now is a mixture of (a) trying to ensure every child gets that same amazing experience and really loves school and (b) getting a chance to relive a bit of it all myself year after year! Sport was my thing at school and that definitely dominated my thinking, but I would always be in every play or read in the Carol Service (not musically talented enough to play or sing!). I just loved being involved in everything.

The last year or two (and throughout university) it was huge fun helping to run the Duke of Edinburgh's scheme at the school. To be honest I enjoyed the helping out, looking after the younger participants more than I did actually doing it myself - early signs of teaching being in my DNA!



★

☆

6/ Who/which teacher/s made the most impact on you and why?

My Mum and Dad were both teachers and they really had the biggest impact on me. I was always (I think!) a really positive, fun and helpful child but I probably didn't have the best work ethic - too much of my attention focused on the next rugby, football or cricket match! So I suspect they were a bit long suffering in that sense - my brother worked much harder than I did! Fortunately, I always had a competitive edge so with lots of bright people around me I wasn't prepared to not be up there with them so I ended up doing ok.

★

☆

7/ How/ in what ways do you think your school shaped you?

At Pate's you were very much expected to drive yourself on which meant you had great independence in your development. Whilst I may not have pushed myself in the classroom as hard as I probably should have done looking back, I was able to use my initiative and run things that were way beyond the curriculum. As examples, I remember writing and directing a sequel to Tam O'Shanter which we took to a local primary school, and along with friends we initiated and organised Pate's first ever overseas sports tour. I suppose Pate's gave me the confidence to be bold, to dream big and if you really want to get something done - just get out and do it. I have no doubt that this approach stays with me on my current role - to think big and to challenge the perception of the norm.

★

8/ What did you do/Where did you go when you left school?

There isn't a single person I have ever met that didn't know I would become a teacher. So I proved them all wrong by going to Durham and doing a law degree! Whilst my years in Durham were fabulous, I didn't fall in love with the law and eventually (when I really couldn't justify being a student any longer) I ended up with a succession of business roles.

★

9/ Did you always want to work in Education? - If yes - what was it that helped make that decision? If no - what else did you want to do? ... and did you ever do it?

By the time I was 25 I was staring out of the window of a lovely flat overlooking Singapore harbour as (supposedly) a successful head-hunter in the banking sector - but I never enjoyed a single day of my life in commerce, it just wasn't for me. So, I flew home, spent a year in Cambridge doing my PGCE and, 10 seconds into teaching my first lesson, I knew I would never do anything else. I loved it - and I had proved everybody else right and me wrong! I wouldn't change my path because I think that "real world" experience brings so much to the classroom and to the children in your care - but I did take quite a lot of stick from friends and family for taking so long to realise what I should be doing!

★

10/ If you could go back to your 'school pupil self' at any age, what advice would you give yourself?

I have given this some thought and was really trying to come up with a deep and profound answer that will change people's lives forever. The reality is I loved being a child, loved all my schools and really wouldn't change much.

