

MATT GOODFELLOW

From the author
of the bestselling
THE FINAL YEAR

THE FIRST YEAR



THIS IS AN UNCORRECTED PROOF

Illustrated by Joe Todd-Stanton

Matt Goodfellow writes:

Hello – and welcome to *The First Year*.

It's been a beautiful thing to see how many people have taken Nate's story to heart and I can't wait for you to find out how the next part of his journey unfolds.

Nate is starting Year 7, a big scary time in the lives of a lot of young people, leaving behind the sanctuary of primary school and being thrown into a chaotic new world of experiences, anxieties and expectations. I wanted to explore how this affects Nate and the relationships with those around him. There are new characters he meets and familiar faces, some of whom Nate would rather he'd left behind.

This is a very different book to *The Final Year*. It has a different rhythm, a different feel, as Nate's focus begins to shift and change as he moves into a new chapter of life away from all he's ever known.

It's still Nate's story.

I hope you enjoy it. Thanks for reading.

Cheers,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Matt" followed by a stylized, cursive flourish.

REVIEWS FOR *THE FINAL YEAR*

“Well-written, authentic and very moving.”
David Almond

“A beautiful verse novel – it is heart-wrenching
and heart-warming and I loved it.”
Maz Evans

“Goodfellow’s writing is outstanding. Powerful,
compelling and heartwarming, I can’t recommend it
highly enough.”
Irish Independent

“If you give this book to someone, they’ll need
a big hanky with it. It’s one to read aloud to leavers
so they will never forget their final year.”
The Sunday Times – Children’s Book of the Week

“A profoundly moving verse novel for 9+ about
change, adaptation, the power of words and
the struggle to find your people.”
The Guardian

“This is an extraordinary book... Everyone should
read it ... 100% recommended.”
Suzanne Chinnock, *English 4–11*

“Believe the hype and the praise, this book is every
bit as good as everyone is saying.”
Books for Topics

“It will become a book that many people remember
as ‘that book’ that turned them on to reading and
the power of language.”
Just Imagine

“This book has changed me. It’s a story that will
change you.”
Book Bairn

“This book will steal your heart, rearrange it
and return it. Simply go buy it!”
Independent Book Reviews

“It plays with words so cleverly, so beautifully,
carrying all kinds of emotion and conflict between
its lines that linger long after you’ve finished.”
Book Clubs in Schools

“Highly accessible, lyrical and life affirming,
this is must-have novel that will authentically
resonate with so many under-represented children
and perfectly captures what this crucial transition
period feels like. As such, it is a must-read for
adults as well as the children who will devour it.”
Joy Court, *LoveReading4Kids* – Book of the Month

AWARDS FOR *THE FINAL YEAR*

Winner

CLiPPA Award for Children's Poetry, 2024
FCBG Children's Book Awards – Older Readers,
2024
Tower Hamlets Book Award, 2024
Redbridge Children's Book Award, 2024
Sheffield Children's Book Award – Shorter Novel
Category, 2024
Reading Rocks Award – UKS2 Choice
Spark! School Book Awards: Fiction For Readers
aged 9+, 2023
Books for Topics, Best Classroom Read-aloud
(Upper KS2), 2023

Shortlisted

The Week Junior Children's Book of the Year:
Poetry, 2024
Diverse Book Awards: Children's Books, 2024
Branford Boase Award, 2024
Juniper Book Awards, 2024
Indie Book Awards, 2024
Bolton Children's Fiction Award, 2025
Cheshire Schools' Book Award, 2025

Longlisted

UKLA Book Award 7-10, 2025, Longlisted
Little Rebels Award, 2024

Nominated

Carnegie Medal for Writing, 2025

Dedication to come – M.G.

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PART 1

END OF YEAR 6

We walk across the last few metres
of the playground
for the last time
together
me and PS and Caleb.

*Can't believe it, PS says.
Can't believe we're 'ere for the last time.*

Caleb goes: *I know, man, crazy, innit?*
Good times! I shout, *Good times!*

PS gives me a little push on the shoulder,
starts runnin ahead of me,
shouts, *For sure!*
Many more to come though, eh, Nate?
Let's go, man, let's go!

And I'm by his side Caleb catches up
out through the gates
into the big wide world
into summat strange and new.

And there's Jax and Auntie San
waitin outside the corner shop with freeze pops
smilin.

Then I hear him,
NAAAAATTTTTEEEEEYYYYY
I'M FLYYYYYYYING!

*I can touch the
SKYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYY!!!!!!
I'm SPIIIIIIIIIIIIIIDDDDEEEEEYYYYYYYYYY
MAAAAAAAAAAAAAAN!
NAAAAATTTTTEEEEEYYYYYY!*

High as a kite on the swings in the park,
Mum wavin from the bench
and he sees me God knows how but he does.

As we reach 'em Mum's on her feet
and we're gone both of us all of us
and now Dylan's 'ere and he's hot and sweaty
and loud and
Dylan's 'ere, man, Dylan's 'ere.

*Chinese tonight to celebrate, eh, Natey? Mum says.
Have whatever ya want,
we'll live on toast for a week if we have to.
We've got so much to celebrate.*

*All I want is number 27 and 53, Mum.
Food of the gods.*

She looks at me all confused
but still smilin anyway.

And she's just about to speak
when I think I hear someone shout my name
from far away across the park

and I look over

and there's a silhouette
of a man
and he's shoutin my name

and he's walkin towards us

and I stare

and I swear
as he steps outta the sun
the man looks

like

Jesus.

And just like that, he's gone

I blink hard as the rest of the school
swarm out onto the park
screamin and wailin
and kids are huggin and cheerin
and jumpin all over each other.

And on the far side
there's nothin but sun

and shadows

and a single swift
blazin a trail across the sky.

Y'aright, Natey?

Mum says
strokin my fringe.

Ya look like you've seen a ghost or summat?

She's starin deep into my eyes,
little wrinkles of concern on her face.

Yeah, Mum, I just...

I just thought... I... saw... summat.

Dun't matter...

was nothin... I s'pose...

Just me bein daft.

**HEY, NATEY! COME AN' PUSH
MEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEE!**

Comin, Dyl! Comin my brother!

And I turn back to check
again

Nothin.

I shake my head

like I'm shakin water out my hair,
like I'm shakin the mist
of a half-remembered dream away

and walk back towards my family.

