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# After 5-month ban, HIV+ boy returns to school

On Monday, as he passed by the familiar sights, only a single cameraman betrayed the traumatic events of the past few months.

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Written by **Aniruddha Ghosal** | Bishnupur | Published: November 24, 2015 12:20 am



The boy, his mother at their home in Bishnupur in South 24 Parganas. (Express Photo by: Subham Dutta)

WITH HIS schoolbag packed, his uniform neatly ironed and a big smile on his face, the 7-year-old boy from Bishnupur in South 24-Parganas on Monday started walking towards his school.

Just five months ago, he was banned from entering his school after news of him being HIV-positive spread and around hundred parents signed a petition to kick him out. His family was also shunned and his grandmother, who teaches Bengali in the same school, was forced to undergo an HIV test to prove she's not infected.

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On Monday, as he passed by the familiar sights, only a single cameraman betrayed the traumatic events of the past few months. But he doesn't care; he's just glad that the 'forced holiday' is over.

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The 7-year-old's mother had informed the school about his condition, soon after it was detected, to ensure that precautions were taken by the authorities to protect her son and other pupils. But, soon after, this confidential information got leaked, prompting parents to sign a petition. Though the school has claimed that they never 'formally' asked the boy to leave, he attended his last class on June 26.

Too young to understand what had transpired these past few months, the boy said on Monday, "I don't like missing school and being away from my friends. My grandmother and my mother were also very sad. I don't like that. I like studying and playing."

For the boy, walking back into the class signals the end of a long and tedious holiday away from a life he enjoyed, but for his family this was nothing short of a victory against all odds.

The boy's mother, who was also declared HIV+ in January this year, has been shunned in Bishnupur since her son was kicked out of school. "My main worry is whether the other children in the class will accept him. For five months, they have been hearing what their parents are saying and it won't change in a day. But I am glad that he is back in school. It is a victory for not just me, but also everyone else who is battling HIV," she said.

The mother, who began working with an NGO called SNP+ that engages in spreading awareness about HIV, added: "Earlier, other parents would talk to me and ask me how I was doing. But none of that happened today. It was like I was an outcast. I don't mind though. As long as my child is not treated in the same way."

The decision to allow the boy back into the school came after State Women and Child Development Minister Sashi Panja ordered the local administration to ensure that the boy returns to his studies. Consequently, officials held a meeting with the school authorities and parents on Saturday and most of them agreed to allow the child back in the school.

"The larger problem is awareness. This can only be solved through conversation and ensuring that people know about HIV," the minister said.

The school's headmaster, Sanjib Naskar, said: "We will ensure that his needs are taken care of and he doesn't face any issues. This is a day of great joy for us that he is back with us. He is a very bright pupil and the classroom wasn't the same without him."

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