Text 1.

Back to school

Just another twenty seconds, thought James. He stared out of the taxi window as it rounded the final corner, his eyes searching for the familiar grey building that towered above the trees. And there it was, unchanged and as ugly as he remembered it.

He relaxed slightly and in doing so he realised that he'd been holding his breath in anticipation of something different. Perhaps it had been repainted or modernised, or even knocked down and rebuilt. But he was comforted and relieved to find the place still standing, still full of character and also full of his treasured memories of life there.

The taxi drew up in front of the steps to the school entrance. James almost laughed out loud. How many times had the popular young James sat on those steps with his mates, although it was forbidden? And how many times had a teacher, usually Mr Wilson, who taught him maths, told them to move? It was Mr Wilson, too, who had caught him cheating in class and found him taking cakes from the school shop. He had ended up with more detentions from Mr Wilson than anyone else. James sighed. If he'd been more interested in what was being taught, he might not have got into so much trouble. He wondered whether the teacher would be there this evening.

Slowly James walked up the steps. It felt a little strange. In the past, this area would have been filled with noisy teenagers shouting, chatting, playing, flirting ... But this evening it was deserted. He made his way down the well-trodden corridors and passed newly painted signs to the science laboratories. It was brighter inside the school than he remembered and there were examples of the students' artistic creations on the walls – not all of them very good, unfortunately! He came to a stop outside the main school hall. He could hear people murmuring inside.

As he pushed open the familiar doors, touched by countless students over the years, he smiled to himself. What a comeback! James Goodyear, the bad boy of Year 12, now a successful Olympic athlete, returning to give a motivational speech to the students. Who would have thought?

1 As he approached the school, James was concerned that

A he wouldn't remember his life there.
B he would be depressed by going back.
C he wouldn't recognise the school.
D he would see the same ugly building again.

2 When James was a student at the school he

A stole things from Mr Wilson.
B had Mr Wilson as a teacher.
C didn't have a lot of friends.
D usually escaped punishments.

3 How did James feel before he entered the school hall?

A nervous about meeting Mr Wilson
B proud of his record at the school
C impressed by the interior decoration
D amused by the situation

2b Read the text to do with school. For each question choose the answer (A, B or C) which you think fits best according to the text.

IS BIG BETTER?

There is a big debate raging at the moment over educational policy. Should the government respond to psychologists' advice that students learn better in small groups of under twenty by reducing class sizes or would the money be better invested in improving teacher training? It is an interesting dilemma.

For many years parents have been voting with their feet by withdrawing their children from state education in favour of the smaller classes provided by the fee-paying independent schools. Apparently, the matter is not straightforward. Some experts now maintain that class size is less important than the abilities of individual teachers. If a teacher is talented, it doesn't matter whether there are 15 or 50 students in the class.

Some schools in the UK are actually opting for larger classes of 70 or above because there are real benefits to be had from this. These include the chance to subdivide groups according to ability and set different learning programmes. Obviously, this will only work if the teacher is supported by assistants and technology. However, it does make some sense in that in this way several learning styles, learning speeds and concentration spans can all be catered for – even if the main class teacher does have to address his class using a loudspeaker!

1 Which of the following is mentioned in the text as a fact, not an opinion?

A Students learn better in independent schools.
B Gifted teachers can teach very large groups.
C Dividing students into smaller groups in big classes is problematic.
D Classes with more than fifty students can be found in the UK.

2 From the texts in activity 2a and 2b we learn that

A not all teachers are capable of controlling very large classes.
B it is important to keep all students engaged in class.
C teachers need assistance in controlling their classes.
D students' ability to concentrate for long periods varies.

Fish for words

3 Complete the sentences with the correct prepositions.

1 The students put a lot of chairs out in the hall _____ **anticipation of** a large audience.
2 The car **drew** _____ in front of the hotel and two businessmen got out.
3 Sally was so naughty at school that she **ended** _____ being expelled.
4 All the traffic in the town centre **came** _____ **a stop** when the traffic lights failed.
5 Customers at the new supermarket are **voting** _____ **their feet** and this week they had fifty per cent fewer shoppers.
6 At the restaurant, I **opted** _____ something quite small as I wasn't very hungry.