



Community Social Care

Segregated schooling for sight impaired young people

V/o:

Choosing the right school for your child is always an important and complex decision. Its effect will stay with them for the rest of their lives, so it's hardly surprising that parents spend a long time thinking it over. For the parents of disabled children the decision is further complicated by an additional factor; the pros and cons of sending your child to a special school like this one, as an alternative to a mainstream, probably neighbourhood school. New College at Worcester is run by the RNIB.

Peter White:

Hornblower. Oh, The Thursday Kidnapping. It's a bit battered. I remember reading this to my kids. As a young boy I spent seven years here at Worcester in the fifties and sixties. My name's Peter White. I work for the BBC. As Disability Affairs Correspondent I've reported on a whole range of issues for TV and radio. Today I've come back to New College to see how things have changed since my day. Like me, Justin McCloud comes from Winchester. Now aged fifteen he's in his third year at Worcester. He feels quite at home at the place.

Justin:

It's really good. The teachers are very helpful and you can do a wide variety of subjects. I especially like English and the English department has a great deal of staff, and you do a lot of books, there's a lot of books you can use for a source of material if you're doing a project.

Peter:

You went to a mainstream primary school and then came here. Can you spell out for me what the main differences were?

Justin:

It's very much more isolated; there's you and there's the rest of the class. Here it's very much better, there's a lot more discussion that everyone joins in with, it's just everyone's a part of the class, and because they're smaller classes as well, that helps because everyone can get the attention they need.

Peter:

What I got from Worcester was a very good academic education which has enabled me to compete in an extremely competitive profession. This was made a whole lot easier by a library full of Braille books, equipment specially for my needs close at hand, and teachers who had a training in the needs of visually impaired children. What some people argue it lacked was relaxed integration in my own community with sighted children of my own age.

MUSIC CLASS

Peter:

In the fifties it was very much the policy to send children with special needs to special schools. But as attitudes to disability changed, the idea of any kind of segregation came under attack, pressure increased for disabled children to be educated alongside their peers, and the 1981 Education Act urged local authorities to do this wherever possible.