



Community Social Care

Mainstream schooling for sight impaired young people

Peter White:

Martin and Paul Sutton are pupils at Brownhills Comprehensive School at Walsall. They've studied here since age 11. Getting an education alongside six hundred sighted children has been the right decision for them.

Martin:

In a mainstream school you can do the things that you really want to do, that you feel confident in doing, you know like in a special school there wouldn't be half as many things as that you could do in a mainstream school.

You feel better in a mainstream school, you feel as if, like you can do it, without like specialist help.

CHEMISTRY CLASS:

Teacher:

The material side.

Martin:

Yeah we've got copper or brass, glass.

Teacher:

Absolutely right. There you go, can you feel the heat now?

Martin/paul:

You've coped with a normal environment with ordinary other sighted kids, you know, and it gives you a taste of what it's like, and being in a special school you don't get that.

Occasionally I bump into the odd person but it doesn't really bother me, but apart from that, there's not really much of a big problem.

When we get new things, like, they ask us all these questions like how far can we see and stuff, but the things that we've had since the beginning of school, they've got you sourced now, they're just treated as normal things.

Peter:

Mainstream schools vary in how well they cope with disability. Not all have had previous experience of working with disabled children. Some local authorities have sought a halfway house between mainstream and special schools. They've set up units for visually impaired children within selected mainstream schools in an attempt to get the best of both worlds.

ARCHERY CLASS:

Teacher:

Draw back, uncurl now, that's good.

Peter:

For many parents the need to send children away from home counts heavily against special education, but expert teaching and easily available equipment can still win out for pupils with particular educational needs. Education is all very well but there is more to life than 'A' levels and degrees, and the question is sometimes asked: how well does life spent amongst pupils

who are all visually impaired, and in a boarding setting, fit you for a world where almost everyone else you meet will be able to see?

Justin:

I think it prepares us very well for normal life in a better way than my mainstream school did anyway. It's nice to know that when you're in a place where everyone's in the same boat, it's a real experience for me. Some of the students here get to cook at home, but our kitchen's just so small it's impossible for me to do anything really and it's not very V.I. friendly, so here's it perfect 'cos you've got all the facilities to do whatever you want, and it's brilliant because it's a big step for me.