



Community Social Care

From mainstream to segregated

Peter White:

My own personal memories in the fifties is that integration did happen but though it has to be said on a pretty haphazard basis, with no formal mobility training, we were just handed a cane, not always even that, and told to get on with it. Somehow or other I managed to find my way to the odd youth club and coffee bar. One positive advantage was that as all my mates were blind, somehow I never felt regarded as special. For the first few years of secondary education, Stephanie Argyrakis attended mainstream school, but now she's come here to New College to do her 'A' levels.

CHEMISTRY LESSON:

Stephanie:

If I came here I knew I'd get enlarged textbooks and diagrams made bigger, accessible for me, and I wouldn't ever have to use a whiteboard. In mainstream I was never really able to do practical by myself, I was always in groups of three and I could never read measurements, I could never mix the chemicals, or handle flames or anything, and here you have to do all the experiments by ourselves, and I'm more confident in the work I do.

I had a lot more independence at my old school and in where I could go in the evenings, and going from school on the bus, and here I had to actually pass a mobility test, which I've only just done, to enable myself to go in on a bus to town, which was really annoying because I was used to going, just walking up the road and going to the shops myself at home, and going out later in the evenings. One thing I do not like here is the 11.30 curfew.

ARCHERY LESSON:

Teacher:

When we're approaching the target, you come in from the side, you come in from the side over here, Robin, Richard, and then if you have one hand flat against the target, and the other hand...

Peter:

It's impossible to make hard and fast rules about the education of disabled people, and their parents should be given the same degree of respect for their choices as any other parent.

ARCHERY LESSON:

Teacher:

There's some from the ground.

INDOOR BALL GAME

Peter:

Government has acknowledged that both systems still have a place. There's a tendency though increasingly to treat special schools as a resource and as centres of excellence, which mainstream schools can access when they need to.

SWIMMING

Teacher:

To me, to me, to me, excellent, OK.

Peter:

In a perfect world, where resources aren't a factor, I suspect most visually impaired children and their parents would prefer education to take place in a mainstream setting like this one. But let's face it, the world isn't perfect, and money is still a factor, and while some special schools are still offering top class education, if parental choice is to mean anything, it seems right that parents should be helped to make the appropriate decision in the appropriate circumstances.