

Integration: a great story of success



Pupils from Wheatley Park School working with pupils from the John Watson special school (l to r): Nicky Mancey from Wheatley Park, Corrine Barcoe and Samia Iqbal from John Watson, Mrs Kath Gibson a helper from the John Watson School and Matthew Duckmanton from Wheatley Park.

Integration is one of the many buzz-words of the education world.

It is also one of the great success stories of schooling in the last decade.

Integration, in its educational meaning, is the process of involving physically and mentally handicapped children in the timetable of ordinary schools, so relying less and less on special schools, of which there are 16 in Oxfordshire.

With the aid of dedicated teachers and the breakdown of barriers of suspicion between the different types of school, much has been achieved to improve the education of the handicapped.

Mainstream

One part of the county where integration is bearing ripe fruit is Wheatley, where co-operation now exists on a formal level between the John Watson special school and the two mainstream schools, Wheatley Primary and Wheatley Park Secondary and at Larkmead School in Abingdon, physically handicapped youngsters are being made to feel part of the secondary curriculum.

It has been since 1980 that youngsters from John Watson have been attending classes at Wheatley primary school and in September 1984 it was realised the scheme was so effective that a teacher from John Watson and a full-time assistant were permanently stationed there.

According to the head of Wheatley Primary School, Mr Clive Hallett, some of his guests from John Watson now feel the integration process is complete.

"Some of the kids, those who have been at the primary school all week and wear our uniform, regard themselves as part of the mainstream school," he said.

As the John Watson children who had been at the primary school moved up through the year groups it became clear they could benefit from spending at least some of their time at Wheatley Park alongside the friends made at Wheatley Primary.

"They need specialised education in very small groups, but if they can get that in the same school as their normal peers, there must be a tremendous social advantage both to them and the mainstream school and its pupils," said Diane Wilson, head of John Watson.

In 1984 two 11-year-olds studying at their much bigger neighbour (John Watson is almost in the grounds of Wheatley Park) and since then the number has grown.

This year, for the first time, there has been a classroom allocated to the special needs children and John Watson teacher Sally Cook and her nine charges use it as their full-time base.

Curriculum

They use the secondary school to varying degrees, but for 42 periods out of the timetable of 50 at least one mentally handicapped child is involved in the everyday curriculum. Classes in drama, home economics, P.E., sport, needlework, woodwork and art are all available to the handicapped children and they work at the same desks and tables as their classmates.