

Leavers' Programme At Killard School

Imagination, innovation, commitment and development are hallmarks of the fifth and sixth year programme of this Northern Ireland school. Killard House School received the prestigious Schools Curriculum Award in 1987. The object of the award is to identify and celebrate schools which have established a broad and balanced curriculum enriched from the local environment.

IVAN DAVIDSON is principal of Killard House School, Newtonards, Co. Down.

The Special Curriculum At Killard School, Newtonards, Co. Down.

Killard House is a special school which caters for pupils with learning difficulties and which, until recent legislation, would have been classified as in the E.S.N. (M) range. It has co-educational Nursery and Primary departments and an all girls Secondary department. Most of the pupils come from mainstream education where they found the curriculum too demanding and the catchment area for the school has an approximate radius of 20 miles, including rural, urban and schools from the Belfast fringe area.

The Secondary Department of Killard House School, Newtonards, caters for girls following a non-examination curriculum. This has enabled the staff to focus upon Key areas of Numeracy and Literacy and so concentrate on preparing the pupils for adult and working life. While it could be classified that the school follows a Secondary curriculum, modified to meet the needs of lower achievers, the schemes and teaching methods are specifically geared for a cross curricular approach and the progress of each pupil is individually monitored. The basic subjects are taught by Form Teachers who work in close conjunction with the subject specialists on all projects and assignments and the core curriculum is supplemented by Home Economics, Music, Recreational Education, Art & Craft, Social Studies, Health Education and Careers Education. In the final two years the curriculum is developed in a more modular structure so that essential Life Skills, Survival Skills, Community Education and Social Education can be fully developed.

Throughout the Secondary Department team teaching and active tutorial methods enable the staff to form close working relationships with the counselling service and a pastoral guidance system helps to keep the girls motivated and gives them a sense of purpose.

Work Experience

Work Experience has been a feature in Killard for over twenty years and the Careers Education and the Counselling Service have been necessary supplements during this period. In order to expand the range of placements available for Work Experience the school has organised Employers Lunches on a regular basis, when potential employers are entertained by the senior pupils and the opportunity is also used to give the employers some insight into the school's curriculum. Regular programmes of industrial visits and close liaison with the local Careers Officers have also helped to establish a most successful job sampling and work experience scheme which operates for two weeks each year.

Link Courses

A large percentage of pupils in their final two years also attend Link Courses at the local College of Further Education. Typing, Child Care, Hairdressing, Health and Beauty and Catering are some of the optional courses which are regularly followed, in addition to an Assessment Week Placement when the pupil's suitability for various Youth Training Schemes is carefully monitored. This scheme has been so useful that it has now been extended to two weeks.

The School and the Community

For many years the senior pupils have been involved with projects which enabled them to make a contribution to the Community, by way of helping the elderly or assisting in Play Groups - while at the same time developing their own social education. After reviewing this area of the curriculum it was decided that the Community should be used more as a resource to assist with projects within the school. This has resulted in a range of modules being made available for the senior pupils where the expertise is provided by outside agents working in conjunction with the teachers both inside and outside the school.

This has been proved particularly successful in subjects such as Health Education, Child Care, Community Education and Careers.



Deirdre Connolly and Elizabeth Jordan negotiating a loan to launch the Killard Knitwear Company with Mr. Cyril Gracey, Manager of ULSTER BANK, Newtonards.

Enterprise Education

Enterprise Education was introduced into the school curriculum in an attempt to develop a sense of economic awareness among the senior pupils. This resulted in a most successful Knitwear Company producing a range of competitively priced products of a very professional standard. The real bonus of this project however was not the substantial profit which it realised but the opportunities which it provided for planning, market researching, compiling and overseeing work schedules, organising shift-work, money management, teamwork and delegation of responsibility.

An equally successful project on Country Cooking has now established Enterprise Education as an essential module in the Senior School Curriculum.

Leavers' Handbook

Careers education, in conjunction with personal counselling, has been a core subject in Killard's curriculum for many years. The emphasis has always been on preparation for adult as well as working life during their final three years the senior pupils make a detailed study of the various agencies and procedures which they will expect when they leave school. Experience in dealing with former pupils however revealed that many girls after leaving often forgot some of this useful information when it was really required. This problem was resolved by the production of a School Leavers' Handbook, which was used as a text book during Careers Education and is presented to each leaver as a reference book on leaving school.

Independent Living Project

A most recent development which has proved extremely beneficial has been the project where two girls at a time are given the opportunity to live independently in a flat within the school grounds for one week. They are expected, with a set amount of money, to budget, shop, cook, entertain and organise their social and recreational programme in addition to completing assignments in cleaning and household management. This project constantly exposes any weakness in our preparation programme and is a most useful assessment procedure.

Records Of Achievement

Successful completion of the various methods of Work Experience, Social and Community Education, Link Courses, Recreational Projects such as Duke of Edinburgh Award, are recorded in individual Records of Achievement which also include a summative statement relating to the pupils social and academic development. The introduction of these records have greatly motivated the pupils to strive for higher standards while the necessary interaction between individual pupil and staff has greatly improved the quality of relationships within the school.

Curriculum Development

The curriculum is continuously under review and in an attempt to meet the various identified needs of the pupils a modular structure has been adopted in the final two years. Central to all of these modules is a core curriculum of English and Mathematics which in the final two years is specifically geared towards coping skills in adult and working life in selection modules but depending upon their interests and their needs each pupil is guided towards what could be euphemistically described as a negotiated curriculum.

With the support of the school's counselling and guidance programme to guide the pupils through this transitional period it is hoped that the pupils will leave school self-disciplined, self-assured and with a sense of fulfilment.