

# The Little-Heard thoughts of a Special Education Pupil

The author of this piece is the 1987 winner of the Christy Brown Award. He has won several awards for poetry in the past three years including the Spastic Society's Award and the Irish Schools Creative Writing Award. As Davoren cannot speak and has very limited physical movement he writes with the aid of a helper. Here he describes his transition from special school to his own local school.

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DAVOREN HANNA is 12 years old and is a student at St Patrick's Boy's N.S., Drumcondra, Dublin.

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Fact is sometimes stranger than fiction. The only point that needs to be made about this story is that it may seem to be a bit unusual. I have learnt the hard facts of 'special education'.

I liked my teachers in my special school but my days were far from happy. I was very lonely in my school, isolated from my own area. I did not blame the school but the system of education which segregated handicapped children. I had no friends at my school with whom I could play after coming home. The local children never said 'hello' to me. I was a strange and freakish boy in a wheelchair who could not call out to them - "Hi, I'm Davoren. I'm not going to bite you. I am just like you." How were they to know that this was true when they had never talked to a child like me before? How could they possibly know who I was, for I had never had the chance to talk to them on my typewriter? Little could they guess that I was not mentally handicapped because they had never been challenged to converse with me. I bled internally every time these children stared stonily at me, or worse, never even looked my way. Boys have not much time for small talk.

So the only friend I had was a little girl called Mary. She alone understood how I felt because she too was handicapped and lonely like me. However I needed to be part of the community of boys I saw running and playing about the streets.

Then I took my courage in my hands. I decided to write to Bertie Aherne, who also happens to be my local T.D. He was to prove to be my liberator. He made it possible for me to go to my local boys national school. There my life changed dramatically.

I no longer had anything to fear. These boys were just what I'd expected - friendly scamps who treated me like themselves and who were fun to be with. Warm sympathetic teachers helped me to settle in. I had as my assistant Sorcha, the best helpmate I could possibly find. Could I be happier? I think not. To commemorate my entry into my parish school, I wrote this poem:



## Saint Pat's - My Home Ground School

Pink-faced with delight  
I entered the friendly doors  
of my parish school.  
The bright room of learning  
opened its arms to me  
and I heard the words  
"Welcome Davoren" ringing  
in my boyish ears.

Festive sounds are rare  
in solemn academic schools,  
but my new class hums  
with busy happy beavers  
building mounds of knowledge  
and damming the streams of dark water  
where once I used to drown.  
Now I too can swim free.

I am one of the lucky special education pupils. I sincerely hope that many more like me will enjoy what I enjoy every day. You see, it can work for them too. I should know!