

A Remarkable Dance Performance

Br David Robinson

During the recent half term holiday small groups of pupils from four schools in Bournemouth and Poole came together to prepare a short dance performance. What was notable about this event was that two of the schools, Victoria School for Physically Handicapped Children and Linwood School are special schools for disabled pupils.

Victoria Education Centre in Poole offers specialised, high quality education, care and therapy for young people with physical impairments and associated neurological and learning difficulties. These include cerebral palsy, epilepsy, spina bifida and muscular dystrophy, as well as more rare conditions. They cater for over 100 day and residential students from nursery age through to 19.

Linwood School in Bournemouth welcomes pupils from a wide geographical area and supports a comprehensive range of Special Educational Needs. The range of needs includes moderate, severe and profound learning difficulties and pupils with autistic spectrum disorders.

The preparation of the performance during the half term holiday was organised by [CandoCo](#) which describes itself as "the leading contemporary dance company of disabled and non-disabled dancers."

When the schools reopened after the holiday the performance was staged in each of the four schools.

The performances were supported by DATco (Disabled Actors Theatre Company) and TOPS Theatre Company, two Disability Theatre Companies in the South West region. According to their [website](#):

"Founded in 1999 DATco and TOPS perform to a wide range of audience groups (throughout Dorset), many of whom have not visited the theatre before. The two theatre groups were born out of an awareness that there were few opportunities regionally for disabled people to participate in and excel in the arts. In the past, disabled people have often been marginalised and excluded through poor access to buildings and negative attitudes to their abilities, making it virtually impossible for them to fully participate in theatre activity."

I accompanied the participants from St Peters School (six girls from Year 8 with a dance teacher) to the performances in the two special schools. Two of the boys were in battery powered wheel chairs which were much more powerful than the sort you see being driven along the pavements. The acceleration of the machines and the degree of manoeuvrability the boys could achieve were quite remarkable. Dance movements had been devised in which the handicapped children could join in, in their limited way with the actions of the others. The result was a very impressive 20 minutes entertainment.

The disabled children certainly enjoyed the activity and I am sure the other pupils gained a much greater understanding not just of the problems the disabled have, but also of how much they can achieve.

Also noticeable was the very caring attitude of the members of staff of the two special schools.