



Champion COMMUNITY Page

Learning disabled kids can get the help they need and deserve at Milton's Trillium School

By CARRIE BRUNET
The Champion

There's still hope for learning disabled kids who have exhausted all the services available to them in their local school board.

Demonstration schools, such as Trillium School for the Learning Disabled on Ontario Street, help these kids get an equal footing with their peers.

Kids from all over the province come to Trillium, one of Ontario's three English-language demonstration schools.

Demonstration schools provide residential schooling for kids with severe learning disabilities.

They incorporate holistic learning with counselling and one-on-one training.

Fifteen-year-old Tyler Schneider, a student graduating from Trillium, came to Milton all the way from Dryden.

"At first I didn't want to come," he said, adding that leaving his friends behind to attend a residential school out of town didn't seem appealing to a pre-teen.

However, he realized that his difficulties with school would only get worse as he entered secondary school, and decided to give Trillium a shot.

When he first arrived at the school, Tyler thought the programs were too restrictive.

"I thought this was no good, that it wasn't for me," he said. However his attitude quickly changed.

"Here, they help you with everything. You start to think 'I can do this.'"

Reading level well below average

Generally when kids arrive at Trillium, they're reading at a grade 1 or 2 level.

"Academically, they are way below what we expect them to be," said principal Jim Little.

A day at Trillium starts with 'direct instruction'. Mr. Little described the remedial reading program as a highly-scripted process, where teachers get all their materials directly from a text-book.

"It's a program that has worked well for us," he said.

The rest of the day follows as would any ordinary high school day, except the students are in classes with a student-teacher ratio of about one to seven.

Core classes such as English, math and science are mandatory. Other programs such as shop classes are only available depending on the staff roster.

Different teachers are sent to Trillium on a temporary basis from various school boards.

"We have teachers from Toronto, Hamilton, Durham and York regions," Mr. Little said.

While it's fundamental to have the core classes, Mr. Little said he tries to hire teachers who can offer something new to the curriculum.

"Our kids are great at (shop) classes, the hands-on stuff," Mr. Little said.

He added that the variety is important, as some of the core

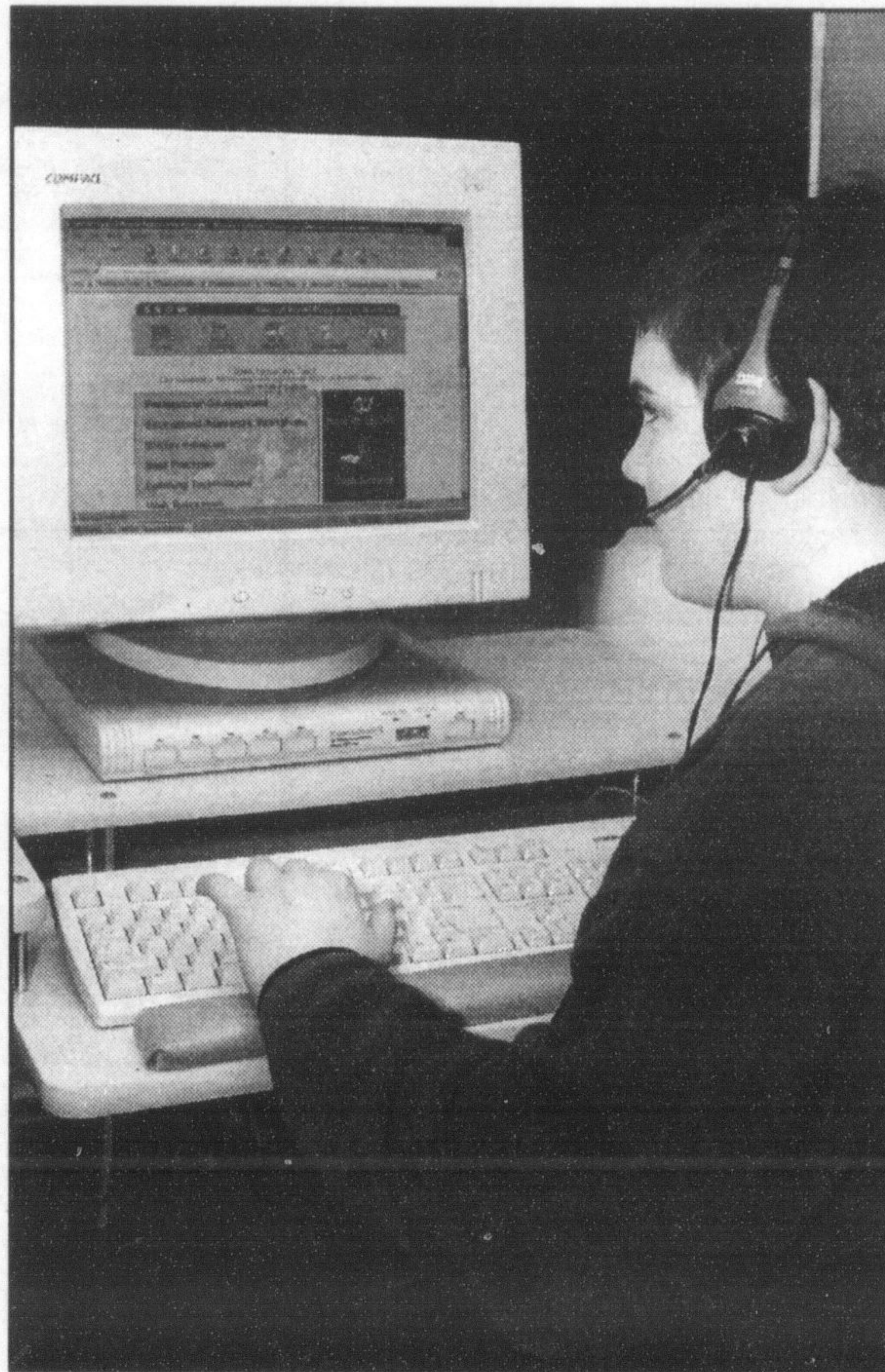


Photo by GRAHAM PAINE

An elementary Trillium School student uses a computer equipped with a program to convert written text into audio words.

classes can be painfully difficult for the children.

"English is a killer for our kids," Mr. Little said.

Difficulty reading is one of the most prevalent symptoms of learning disabilities.

But at Trillium, advances in technology help the kids over this hurdle.

Specialized computers help kids read. Scanning software interprets text and the computer phonetically pronounces words for the kids.

Only the most severely learning disabled kids are accepted into Trillium.

"Our kids are selected after a stringent application process," Mr. Little said.

"We make sure that they have run the gamut of services offered at their school."

In order to be eligible for admission, students must be regis-

tered with a local school board.

Kids who are in private learning institutions need to be brought back into a public education board.

The subsidies are paid for in part by the Ministry of Education and by the child's local school board.

The school is residential so children, like Tyler, come from all over the province.

"We think that the residential program is important in terms of consistency," Mr. Little said.

Children start at Trillium in grade 7 or 8, and complete four semesters.

In the third semester, kids are prepared for re-integration into the education system.

"We tell the board that they are coming back and prepare to have the tools in place for them when they do."

Through the process, students start to build self-esteem and make new friends.

Tyler is a shining example of how Trillium can boost a child's self-confidence. Completing his fourth term, he was president of the student council.

While demonstration schools such as Trillium offer hope to parents of children with learning disabilities, there's still a long trail to go, according to Heather Holden of the Learning Disabilities Association of Halton.

"The learning disabled are still the poor cousins of the physically disabled," she said.

She has been battling the system for years.

Her 30-year-old son was diagnosed with a learning disability and she fought to have him understood by his teachers all throughout his secondary school education.

"This society still equates literacy with intelligence," she said.

Learning disabled intelligent

Most frustrating is that kids with learning disabilities actually have average or above average intelligence.

The inability to read, or decode words, shouldn't be a measure of intellect, but rather the ability to understand and comprehend text, stressed Ms Holden.

As a parent, it's vital to stand up for the rights of the learning disabled child.

"Parents with good advocacy skills produce adults who can stand on their own two feet," she said.

For parents who have the financial resources to do so, a psychological assessment by a professional would provide the means to establish a learning disability.

On the other hand, school boards do provide assessments, but long waiting lists mean kids aren't getting the help they need.

"Parents need to know they have rights," Ms Holden said.

"And often school boards don't provide all the services they should."

She would like to see more schools like Trillium that not only provide kids with a place to learn, but teachers also.

"Ten per cent of the population is learning disabled," Ms Holden said.

"And we don't prepare teachers for it in school."



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COGECO 14 Programming Schedule — February 6th, 2001 - February 12th, 2001

Tuesday, February 6th		Wednesday, February 7th		Thursday, February 8th		Sunday, February 11th		Monday, February 12th	
9am, 10am, 11am, Noon	Plugged In! Encore	9am, 10am, 11am, Noon	Plugged In! Encore	9am, 10am, 11am, Noon	Plugged In! Encore	9am, 10am, 11am, Noon	Plugged In! Encore	9am, 10am, 11am, Noon	Plugged In! Encore
5pm, 6pm & 7:30pm	Plugged In! Seniors Showcase	5pm, 6pm, 7:30pm	Plugged In! Cable in the Classroom	5pm, 6pm, 7:30pm	Plugged In!	5pm, 6 pm & 7:30 pm	Plugged In! Week in Review	5pm, 6pm, 7:30pm	Plugged In!
6:30pm	Optimist TV	6:30pm	Swap Talk	6:30pm	The Issue is ...	6:30pm	Road Watch: Alternative to Anger	6:30pm	Living on the Edge
8:00pm	Bingo	8:00pm	Milton Council, Jan. 29th	7:00pm	Road Watch: Alternative to Anger	7:00pm	Money Week	7:00pm	Money Week
	Halton Hills Council, Feb 5th			8:00pm	Money Week	8:00pm	Cogeco Sports: Jr. A Hockey, Milton at Georgetown	8:00pm	The Issue is ...
					Halton Region Council, Feb 7th			8:00pm	SportsZONE Live

Feature this week: Road Watch: Alternative to Anger - Thursday, 6:30pm