

EBU/UER Children Documentary Series 2004

“Changing Barry”, a film from RTÉ Television, Ireland

Produced and directed by Stephen Plunkett

Synopsis

Barry Frizzelle is a 12-year-old Dublin schoolboy who suffers from ADHD (Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder) and who is also severely dyslexic. Two years ago, after he had been finding it particularly difficult to keep up in his local primary school, he was transferred to St Rose's, a special school for boys and girls with reading difficulties. Now, he must return to his original school, St Joseph's, a mainstream, boys-only school, and he has mixed emotions about this.

This film follows Barry from his last week at St Rose's through his first few months at St Joseph's, ending as the first mid-term approaches. It's a period of major change and upheaval for him. We see Barry travelling with his classmates to St Roses in their final days at the school. They love the place. There are only ten in each class, and pupils are encouraged to help each other learn. There's little sense of academic pressure. Everyone gathers for prize day and then it's the summer break.

Barry thinks about things over the summer and he even calls in for a look at his new school. He discusses his prospects with his friends from St Rose's – they are encouraging. Nevertheless, he experiences a mix of optimism and trepidation. He's hoping he'll fit in well, but will the other boys notice his reading difficulties and will they like him? Will the skills he learned in St Rose's be enough?

It's the first day back and he has to run the gauntlet of schoolmates, old and new. He's under pressure straight away because the discipline is strict and the schoolwork is hard. We see him in class when, as he feared, he is asked to read in front of the other boys. In the first few months, he has his ups and downs, but one thing is a constant: he can't believe how much homework he has to do – or how hard it is! Inevitably, this causes tension at home.

We see Barry with his old friend, Jamie, the two having remained friends from two years ago. Jamie is in Barry's new class, and the two spend time together outside school, too. They both play in their garage band.

Barry's teacher, Mr. Hallinan, once taught Barry's older brother, Conor and, as a result, he's greatly respected by the family. We see how he patiently helps Barry deal with his schoolwork – and his football!

It's hard for any child with special needs and Barry is no exception. Though he tries his hardest at school, he does experience a crisis and when this occurs, he has to rely on his most important ally: his family.