

CHRONICLE FEATURE



■ Pictures representing sounds and the children are taught to listen for them and find the sound when they hear it. EC/283/23/94

Listening and learning

— it does not always come naturally

NATIONAL campaign aimed at raising awareness to children with speech and language difficulties is being launched next week, March 14 - 18.

It will involve the county's only nursery unit which is tackling the problem with pre-school age children. The I CAN Speech and Language Nursery which is integrated with Tanglewood Nursery School, at Melbourn

HOMEOPATHIC & ALLERGY CLINIC
FOOD AND CHEMICAL ALLERGY TESTING, PLUS HYDRO THERAPY, COLONIC AND HOLISTIC MASSAGE
H.P. A.R.M.A.N.M.
Martin Duncombe
Tel: 0245 267296
for appointment

specialist nurses nationwide. It takes eight pre-school children, aged three to five, only a small percentage of the number of children with severe speech problems who live in the area. In Mid- Essex alone there are 52 children who could benefit from the intensive specialist help that is given at Tanglewood unit. There are also about another 30 children who suffer with speech difficulties to a lesser degree at Tanglewood who have to be helped by their teachers and a speech therapist. But that figure is not unusual in a school of 240 pupils and it is a problem that is being found generally in schools today," says the headmistress.

Headmistress of Tanglewood, Mrs Jacqueline Arnot, blames TV and video games which have ousted the traditional bedtime story: "Children are sitting down and putting on TVs and videos by the age of four, but no-one is actually speaking to them. People aren't speaking to their children these days, the schools are having to do it. A lot of head teachers are beginning to think that this must be the cause. There's no feedback from a video, children can't ask it questions. We are producing a lot of children who don't actually talk."

About one in eight of pre-school children says I CAN are suffering from communication difficulties, but pre-empt severe long term behavioural, educational and social problems.

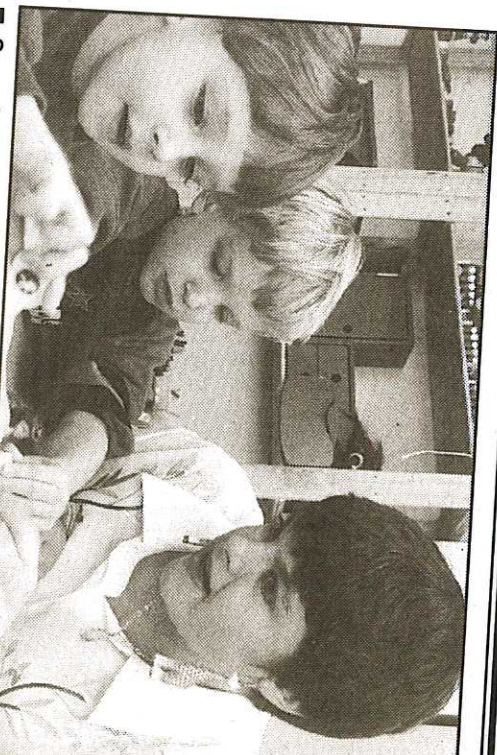
Speech therapist at the I CAN unit, Michelle Parker, said: "They need to be extremely severe to warrant a place here. One little boy of four and a half has no language at all really, because he has no idea what to do with his mouth to make sounds. His whole vocabulary is made up with vowel sounds and completely unintelligible. He was having help regularly once a week but it was not enough for him. We

How ever, these are mainly children who cannot pronounce their words properly and are being helped by a visiting speech therapist. The children who are receiving

intensive specialist speech therapy have more severe problems which are caused by faults in the speech centres of the brain, although the children have normal intellect and skills.

VOCABULARY

Speech therapist at the I CAN unit, Michelle Parker, said: "They need to be extremely severe to warrant a place here. One little boy of four and a half has no language at all really, because he has no idea what to do with his mouth to make sounds. His whole vocabulary is made up with vowel sounds and completely unintelligible. He was having help regularly once a week but it was not enough for him. We



■ Speech therapist Michelle Parker: "I don't find that it taxes my patience. I love it I get so much satisfaction when the children and the parents work together as a team." EC/281/23/94

have some who have problems understanding language. For them it's like listening to a foreign language which is very difficult and very frustrating for them. Some children have a weak vocabulary and don't use the right grammar and don't understand how to assemble a simple sentence.

PRACTICE

The children in the special group are integrated with normal classes so that they can put into practice what they have learnt in the special unit. A lot of Michelle's time is spent liaising with parents and conducting the therapy programme when the children who came in at

the beginning of the project are now looking to placement in mainstream schools some time next term and they have made excellent progress simply because they have had individual help and a lot of support."

One mother whose four-year-old son was attending the unit first realised that there were communication problems when he was six months old although the problem had not manifested itself in his older sister. "He could talk very, very little before he came here, but there is so much difference now. He can tell you things and what's happened at school and his friends' names, it's incredible the progress he has made in such a short period of time."

MUSICAL POPS

Stunning