

Vocational Education

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programme with the emphasis placed on language acquisition. Children are currently admitted at the age of five, but it is hoped to lower this to three.

"And there are some adaptations in the language curriculum to enable deaf children who are behind their hearing counterparts in the acquisition to make up the difference.

"We have had the opportunity of presenting some of our children for the middle school leaving examination" said Mr. Tetteh, "and since 1979 the results have been very encouraging. But both parents and staff members have been confronted with the question of whether students should seek employment or continue school after the completion of elementary education."

Mr. Tetteh, his staff members and parents increasingly came to realise that while a traditional school education was vital to the pupils, vocational training was to be the key to their future ability to help themselves. This idea of a vocational education programme was put to Special Education Headquarters and was enthusiastically accepted. The school was then able to start on further necessary new buildings — a block of four classrooms, a store a show-room a workshop and a home science block.

The need then was to obtain trade teachers and in 1980 Mr. Tetteh approached VSO in London for a carpentry instructor

(who arrived in 1981), to be followed in the next two years by a metalwork teacher and a speech therapist.

Speech therapist Fiona Kingswood (who has now left, and for whom VSO are trying to find a successor) reintroduced the use of hearing aids and oralism—the use of residual hearing through amplification to develop natural language. Where to acquire hearing aids was a problem, but this was solved by an approach to the Commonwealth Society for the Deaf in Britain — who were able to collect and send out to Ghana ex-National Health Service hearing aids. The batteries used in these are rechargeable — which is essential in Ghana because batteries like many other imported products, are extremely scarce.

The VSO carpentry instructor Tony McClosky (who before arriving in Bechem had spent ten years as a cabinetmaker and piano technician) had five students during our visit. After only two years of training they had already been able to turn out an impressive collection of chairs and tables. Each of them had a set of good tools and had learned to keep them sharp and oiled — very necessary in Ghana's humid climate.

One student had completed a large table with tongue-and-groove drawers — a very impressive piece of work. And Tony told us, there were buyers in the local community for all the students' work which was a big confidence booster for them.

As we looked around Ms workshop, metalwork instructor Paul Sunderland also had a success story to tell. "In my two years here the students have learned to make hasps and locks (two or three can be turned out in a morning by each of them, using scrap metal), brazier-type cooking stoves and — the pieces de resistance of which I and the students are especially proud — a series of metal trunks which will have a ready sale.

"The profit on each trunk after completion will be about 1,000 cedis (£22). Sheet metal is expensive to purchase, so they have become adept at combing the countryside for scrap metal for use in the workshop! The students have also learned to keep their tools tidy and in readiness for use — good habits which should remain with them through their working lives."

Paul shortly due to return to Britain at the end of his assignment expressed the hope that his successor would be a blacksmith and welder, so that his students could diversify their abilities — and in fact, VSO Daniel Rafferty 25 from Lanarkshire who has just been selected for the post does have these two skills.

The hope is that, with their vocational skills students from Bechem will be able to obtain factory jobs. But even if this does not prove possible they will be able to return to their villages with a trade under their belts. (Courtesy: Overseas Development).

Vocational Education

FOR the past 17 years a remarkable institution at Bechem has been bringing hope, basic education and—more recently—vocational training to many deaf young people in Ghana where, as in many other developing countries, to be born with this handicap can presage a very dismal future.

It began life, as the Bechem School for the Deaf, in a dilapidated bungalow and a cocoa shed—with just two teachers and 35 children selected from a long waiting list. Today, in recognition of its pioneering work it has been officially designated as the National Vocational Centre for the Deaf and has purpose-built classroom and dormitory blocks, an ample staff including some volunteer teachers from Britain, and an annual intake of 200 students.

Showing us around last year with very evident pride, headmaster George Tetteh—who, with Agnes Opoku, set up the

school in 1968 — enthusiastically acknowledged the contribution of the three Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO) teachers working there at the time. The skills of speech therapist Fiona Kingswood, 27 from Teddington London; metalwork instructor Paul Sunderland 23, from Warrington Lancashire; and carpentry instructor Tony McClosky, 30 from Finchley London had, he said, been of vital importance — and proof of their achievements was visible in the demonstrations of their student's work. Indeed, the success of the whole project was reflected in the happy faces of all the students accompanying us on our tour of inspection.

The original rudimentary buildings and the 18-hectare site on which they stood were given to the school free of charge by the traditional authorities and the chief of Bechem town. (Recently an additional 24 hectares were presented, which