



A child 'fishes' for magnetised picture cards and, having 'caught' one, has to put a name to the picture—a game used during speech therapy sessions.

Photo: John Brooke

THE TRANSFER of responsibility for the education of mentally handicapped children from the Department of Health to the Department of Education and Science was first mooted early in 1968. Now the changeover date has been announced—April 1st, 1971. On the surface a minor readjustment was involved to ensure a major act of justice. The vast educational umbrella was about to be extended the final few inches to ensure coverage for those mentally handicapped children and their teachers who still remained outside the education system. But the delay in the announcement revealed doubts and background difficulties. Protracted discussion and extending confusion preceded and survived the announcement. Amongst points of concern were the mechanics for integrating the teaching staff on both sides of the dividing line, and how to ensure continuing recruitment for existing courses during the interim period.

Until 1970 the nation had encouraged the evolution, expansion and improvement of a separate system of education for children who were mentally handicapped. For a long time a Cinderella, this system developed at an accelerating rate with the

In April next year the Department of Education and Science assumes responsibility for the teaching of mentally handicapped children and the training of their teachers. On the surface, taking over from the Department of Health appeared to involve a minor readjustment, in fact repercussions have been loud and far-reaching. Stanley Segal, principal of Ravenswood Centre for Special Education, clarifies the complexities and warns that the wrangles must be resolved quickly.

Extending the umbrella

creation of the Training Council for Teachers of the Mentally Handicapped. Under the chairmanship of Professor A. D. B. Clarke, this Council prompted a significant extension in the length, number, form and content of training courses. Such courses included a study of normal child development, sharpening the understanding of both normal and subnormal development by comparing the two. The trend had some of the ingredients of practice in the U.S.S.R. and parts of the U.S.A., where students can apply from the beginning for a course of training leading to qualification as a 'special educator' or 'defectologist'.

Within the ordinary education system too, provision for the *educationally* subnormal which had long been a Cinderella was being subjected to a similar stimulus since 1950, when the first one-year diploma course in the education of handicapped (E.S.N.) children was introduced in London's Institute of Education. Two approaches to the training of 'special educators' therefore evolved. Whilst one system trained students from scratch to work with mentally handicapped children, the other offered a range of one-year courses in the education of handicapped children to teachers already qualified to teach in ordinary schools. In practice, whilst teacher-training for the mentally handicapped required a maximum of two years

students seeking to teach in special schools had first to complete a normal three-year course and subsequently to compete for a place on a further one-year course or remain without special qualification for the work.

With the impending transfer, some teachers hoped that an emergency situation would be recognised; one which paralleled the immediate post-war situation when an emergency teacher-training programme was introduced and a body of mature teachers with only one year of training, enriched the profession. The entire teaching personnel in training centres represented only a fraction of one per cent of the giant teaching profession. It was recognised that apart from the one-year emergency-course teachers, a great many teachers in the schools (including special schools) had received only a two-year training. There was everywhere a shortage of staff for the handicapped. And those who worked in training centres had accumulated a body of experience and expertise necessary in the new situation.

It became plain, with the gathering discussion of the transfer arrangements, that a simple transfer was unlikely to prove acceptable. Some representatives of professional bodies which had sought to raise the status of teachers in general and the quality of special education in particular, expressed fears of 'dilution' or 'back door entry' to the profession. Conversely, teachers of the mentally handicapped who had opted for a specific training began to fear relegation to the status of 'second class' teachers in the new combined profession. Plainly it was not enough for the Government to guarantee that the salaries and conditions of the latter would 'in no way be worsened'.

Long before November 20th, 1969 (when the Secretary of State for Education and Science gave the first indication of his department's policy on the future pattern of qualifications for teachers of the mentally handicapped) a range of organisations had been consulted and expressed views on the proposed transfer. Whilst there appeared to be considerable approval for the transfer, many of the bodies consulted could not be expected to have more than a peripheral awareness of what happened to children who were excluded from the school system. Unfortunately, the series of major reports on education (Crowther, Newsom, Plowden) had stopped short at the handicapped, and no Plowden-type survey had been made of the entire area of handicap ignoring the administrative dividing line, and offering guidance on how to meet the pattern of handicap, of provision, and of attitudes to the severely handicapped.

As a consequence no Secretary of State could have received such a range of conflicting proposals. At one extreme it was urged that those holding the

diploma of the Training Council should be accepted as Burnham teachers unconditionally, on the transfer date. At the other extreme it was urged that they should on no account be accepted without further training. The views of the very experienced and highly competent Training Council do not appear to have carried the day. Between the organisations which urged training and those which urged no conditions for diplomates, were a range of suggestions for post-diploma experience varying from two to ten years. The latter proposal had a precedent in the Department's practice with the holders of certain specialised qualifications.

The dilemma facing Mr. Edward Short, the Minister, was more evident still in the divisions amongst those professional organisations which might be thought to be closest to the problem, those which catered for teachers of the various categories of handicapped children. Whilst it was possible for the Joint Council for the Education of Handicapped Children (consisting of 8 or 9 relevant bodies) to go on record as seeking two-years post-diploma experience for diplomates, the largest of these bodies, the Association for Special Education, had already committed its representatives to support a much longer period of post-diploma experience.

The emphasis upon the *length* rather than the quality of the post-diploma experience suggests that much of the discussion or advice bore little relationship to the *quality* of the training or the experience for teaching the handicapped. But the fact that the National Union of Teachers proposed five-years post-diploma experience might be seen as a cautious acceptance of the merits of the diploma course but within the context of fears regarding lowering standards of entry or reducing the length of training. Theoretically also, a diplomate, once recognised as a qualified teacher, could then teach in any school, and some fears were expressed that he might then be lost to the training centre branch of teaching.

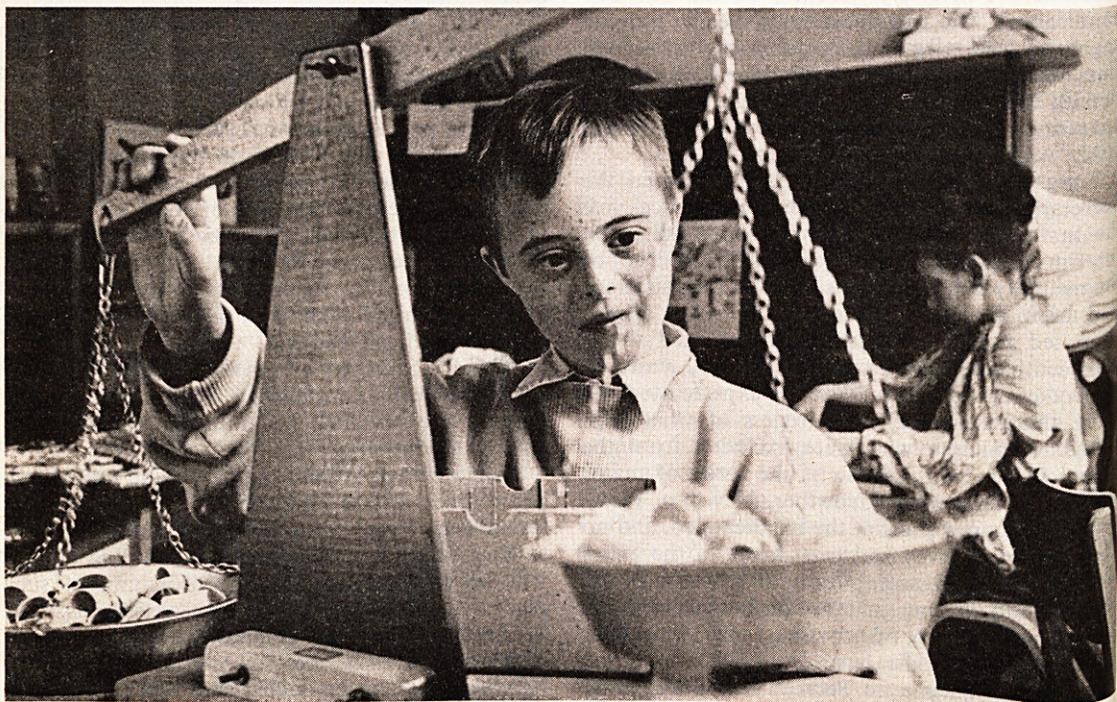
With the Secretary of State's decision in favour of a five-year post-diploma requirement certain points were clarified whilst anomalies and difficulties became apparent.

As the schools regulations now stand only qualified teachers can teach in maintained schools. The school regulations are accordingly being amended so that those who now teach in training centres will be permitted to continue teaching in such places when they become special schools. The Secretary of State has emphasised that he regards diplomates as *fully qualified to teach the mentally handicapped*, and he is confident that they will be well-placed to apply for posts and be promoted within this sector. The confusion devolves around

the concept of *qualified* as it relates to teaching within the schools generally. The five years post-diploma experience required to obtain this wider qualification will not need to be continuous. A great many existing teachers of the mentally handicapped would qualify immediately upon the transfer. The Secretary of State could therefore claim that the Government's pledge to safeguard existing staff of training centres was met, with no one worse off and many better off. This applied also to pensions and related conditions. Pension rights would either remain as before or be transferred to the Teachers' Superannuation scheme. The Burnham Committee would be responsible for laying down the scales for *all* teachers and it would be for this committee to decide whether, or at what point, the salary scale of diplomats was to be in line with that of other teachers. Such clarification could not be seen to eliminate all doubts and difficulties.

The announcement of four new three-year courses in areas which did not at present offer the diploma created a curious anomaly, whereby those fortunate enough to get on them will be qualified in three years whereas their brothers and sisters with equivalent entry qualifications are expected to complete seven years (i.e. two-years for the diploma, followed by five years' experience). To meet this, area training organisations have been

approached and have shown readiness to assist. End-on third-year courses or other ways of enabling existing students to qualify are being considered. Plainly such end-on courses are more likely to affect the *length* than the sense of the two-years plus one course. The normal teacher-training course includes an element relevant to the personal development of the student. This was not included in the two-year course. But the goal now is for all courses to be three-year courses and to be planned as such from the beginning. Meanwhile, the Secretary of State has set up a working party consisting of members of the Training Council and of the Department of Education and Science to consider the emerging situation. This working party plainly has the confidence of such bodies as the NAMH which has been pressing the needs of existing staff in training centres and of students currently in training. It remains to be seen whether or not a damping down of recruitment for current courses will be avoided. Meanwhile it is to be hoped that the enthusiasm for the transfer will everywhere continue and that a detailed study of the entire area of handicap, on both sides of the dividing line, and with particular reference to the supply and training of teachers for the 1970's and 80's will at last be seen to be necessary. Foresight and planning now may later save us the agonies of hindsight.



Learning the concept of comparative weights by playing with a pair of scales.

Photo: John Brook