

TRANSCRIPT: Auditory development: Thomas

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Thomas is a little boy whose hearing loss was picked up through the newborn hearing screen. We've worked with Thomas since he was about nine or ten weeks old and we fitted hearing aids when he was that age. He's got a severe hearing loss and he also has cerebral palsy. Thomas has a good receptive vocabulary and is able to understand speech but he finds it difficult to actually produce speech in a way that you and I would understand clearly.

The work we were doing today was to check how well he functions with his hearing aids on.

There were two tests. The first was 'aided listening to warble tones', which can give us some ideas of the minimum levels he can respond to and, by looking at the minimum levels, would give us some idea about how well he would access speech.

If you or I were doing a conventional hearing test, we would press a button to respond that we've heard the sound. Obviously, from Thomas's point of view, with his cerebral palsy, he would find that physically very difficult to do. So what we were trying to do was make him wait and listen and when he heard the sound he would then put the peg in the board or a man in a boat. We can use a variety of materials with the children and it's usually based on, developmentally and physically, what they're able to do. Thomas, developmentally, will be able to press a button but physically he wouldn't be able to do it, so it's trying to look at something which gives us some idea whether he's actually heard the sound effectively or not.

The second test was 'actual test of speech reception', so we were looking at how he responded to certain speech sounds and we did that through the Manchester Picture Test, which gives him a choice of four pictures with matched vowel patterns and different consonant patterns. And so, by his responses, we can judge how well he's accessing conversational speech and what speech sounds he may be able to hear and what speech sounds he wouldn't be able to hear, and we would perhaps adjust how his hearing aids are set on the basis of the evidence that we can get from today.