



Safe noise levels get the green light

By MICHELLE ROBINSON

The children at Devonport Kindergarten know exactly when they are being too loud.

It is one of 20 early childhood education centres in Auckland to test out a prototype Safe Sound Indicator.

The indicator resembles a traffic light, flashing green when it detects an acceptable amount of noise, orange when things are getting too loud, and red when noise is at a dangerous level.

As young children learn visually, it helps them understand they are being too loud when they see an orange or red light flashing, head teacher Carolyn Rendle says.

The link to traffic lights makes it easy for kids to

understand that red means stop, she says.

"It's particularly useful on wet days. With the noise of the rain and 45 children inside it can get quite loud."

A group of children demonstrated by singing a loud song with hand-clapping near the indicator which flashed red.

The National Foundation for the Deaf is trialling the prototypes to address the issue of noise induced hearing loss in children and educators.

A survey of 65 kindergartens, playcentres and kohanga reo last year showed 20 percent of children had been subjected to a high level

of noise.

Some showed their discomfort by covering their ears or even crying.

Foundation chief executive Louise Carroll says the trial of indicators will allow more detailed information on children's behaviour and noise levels to be collected through questionnaires.

"We hope to have Safe Sound Indicators in every childhood centre in New Zealand within three years."

The foundation recommends that babies and young children wear ear muffs in situations such as sporting events, on the farm, at childcare centres and around vacuum cleaners.

Mrs Carroll says early childhood centres also need to look at the acoustic implications of their buildings.

"Using carpet on floors or acoustic tiles on walls and ceilings can have a dramatic effect on controlling noise build-up and sound quality.

"A lot of the reverberation can come from hard surfaces and poorly designed rooms," she says.

Mrs Rendle says acoustic padding for the ceiling at Devonport Kindergarten has made a significant difference.

"We're quite lucky, we've got a good indoor-outdoor flow and an acoustic ceiling."



Sounds good: Kiki Muir, 3, has fun testing the Safe Sound Indicator