Directory of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities

ACQUIRED BRAIN INJURY is an injury that occurs to the brain after birth. It might result from a blow to the head, oxygen starvation or a variety of medical conditions. Damage to the brain can have far reaching effects on the human body, including paralysis, a reduced ability to think, impaired speech and loss of communication skills.

ACALCULIA is a specific learning difficulty characterised by the inability to perform the basic mathematical processes of addition, subtraction multiplication and division.

APHASIA is a communication disorder brought about by damage to the parts of the brain that control language. It is usually caused by stroke or head injury and can lead to problems with speech, understanding, writing and using numbers. Some people with aphasia are only mildly affected. Those with a severe condition are unable to speak, read or write.

ARTHROGRYPOSIS MULTIPLEX CONGENITA (AMC) is a term that describes a limitation in the range of movement of multiple joints present at birth. The most common form of AMC, which occurs in about 40 per cent of cases, is amyoplasia. While a few children with AMC might have a learning disability, most of them are intelligent, although physically challenged.

ASPERGER SYNDROME is thought by some to be a form of autism and by others to be a separate condition. Several of the characteristics of Asperger syndrome are common to autism including difficulty in socialising and using the imagination. However, unlike children with autism, those with Asperger syndrome generally learn to speak at an early age and the condition night not be recognised until after they start school.

ASTHMA is a condition that affects the airways - the small tubes that carry air in and out of the lungs. When a person with asthma comes into contact with something that irritates their airways (an asthma trigger), the muscles around the walls of the airways tighten so that the airways become narrower and the lining of the airways becomes inflamed and starts to swell. These reactions cause the airways to become narrower and irritated - making it difficult to breath and leading to symptoms of asthma.

ATAXIA is a malfunction of muscle coordination, often causing abnormal movement of the head, limbs or trunk. This lack of muscle control can also cause problems with speech. The most frequent cause of ataxia is when that part of the brain known as the cerebellum is damaged either through a hereditary condition or an acquired brain injury.

ATTACHMENT DISORDER is also referred to as reactive attachment disorder. It is a mental and emotional condition brought on as a result of failure to form an appropriate bond with primary carers in early childhood. Children with attachment disorder often have trouble trusting others. It impacts on a person's mood, behaviour and social relationships, usually because of early experiences of neglect and abuse.

ATTENTION DEFICIT DISORDER (ADD) AND ATTENTION HYPERACTIVITY DEFICIT DISORDER (ADHD) cause children with these conditions to be inattentive and easily distracted. The difficulty they have in concentrating and focusing on a task frequently leads to problems with learning and behaviour. The additional element of hyperactivity in ADHD might be revealed by excessive talking, constant movement or impulsive actions. ADHD is sometimes referred to as hyperkinetic disorder.

AUTISM is a non-progressive developmental disorder. It usually appears before the age of three and persists into adulthood. Children with autism have difficulties with social interaction, communication, imagination and behaviour. Although autism was first identified in 1943, little is still known about its causes. It is known as a spectrum disorder, which indicates that the condition can vary from mild to severe. There is no cure, but it is possible to manage some of autism's effects.

AUTISTIC SPECTRUM DISORDERS (ASD) - According to the National Autistic Society, over 500,000 people in the UK have an ASD. A study published in 2006 shows that as many as one in 100 children may have an ASD. Recent research suggests there is a similar rate of the condition in adults.

BATTEN DISEASE is the name for a group of comparatively rare progressive, degenerative, genetic metabolic diseases that cause advancing deterioration of the brain and nervous system. Symptoms such as problems with vision or seizures (or more subtly, slow learning) most commonly appear between the ages of five and ten. Affected children eventually lose their mental faculties, becoming blind and bedridden before dying at an early age.

BIPOLAR DISORDER (formerly known as manic depression) occurs when an individual experiences swings in mood from periods of overactive, excited behaviour known as mania to deep depression. Between these severe highs and lows can be stable times. Some people also see or hear things that others around them don't (known as having visual or auditory hallucinations) or have strange, unshared, beliefs (known as delusions).

BRITTLE BONES or Osteogenesis Imperfecta (OI) is a genetic disorder of collagen, a protein which forms the framework for the bone structure. In OI the collagen may be of poor quality, or there may just not be enough to support the mineral structure of the bones. This makes the bones weak and fragile and results in the bones being liable to fracture at any-time even without trauma.

CEREBRAL PALSY is a general term for the problems that arise following injury to the cerebrum (the largest part of the brain) before, during or after birth. These problems, which might include muscle stiffness, loss of balance, poor coordination and difficulties with speech, can range from moderate to severe. They affect people in different ways. The majority of children with cerebral palsy usually have some difficulty in walking, but there is no certainty that all children with the condition will have learning difficulties. It is estimated that 1 in every 400 children is born with cerebral palsy.

CHARCOT-MARIE-TOOTH DISEASE (CMT) is an inherited eurological disorder, which causes degeneration of the peripheral nerves, leading to wasting of the muscles in the forearms, hands, lower legs and feet. Ultimately, this may result in deformities of the feet and hands. Although the disease is incurable, there are treatments and special aids available to help people with CMT lead an active life.

COMMUNICATION DISABILITY means that children so affected have problems expressing themselves, understanding others, building relationships and learning. These problems might be the result of damage to the developing brain either before or after birth, or due to a genetic abnormality. The can also occur in association with another disability, such as a hearing impairment or a physical disability.

CORNELIA DE LANGE SYNDROME (CdLS) is a very rare condition, the most striking feature of which is that children with CdLS all look very alike. They are small compared to children of the same age and have distinctive eyebrows, eyelashes, nose and mouth. Most have limb abnormalities and all have some degree of learning difficulty, ranging from mild to severe. The cause of CdLS is not known.

CHRONIC FATIGUE SYNDROME (CFS) also known as MYALGIC ENCEPHALOMYEELITIS (ME), has many fluctuating symptoms, the chief one of which is a long-term tiredness that does not go away with sleep or rest. It occurs twice as frequently in women than men, but children can also be affected. Most commonly at about 13 – 15 years old.

CYSTIC FIBROSIS is the most common inherited disorder in the UK. More than 7,500 babies are affected by the condition in which the lungs, pancreas, intestines and other organs become clogged up with thick, sticky mucus. There is no cure for cystic fibrosis, but following recent advances in the treatment and management of the condition, most affected children survive into adulthood.

DOWN SYNDROME (DOWN'S SYNDROME) is a chromosomal disorder. The condition is also known as TRISOMY 21 SYNDROME. Characterised by flattened facial features and short stature, the presence of an extra 21st chromosome causes varying degrees of physical and mental impairment. Affecting one in every 1,000 people, Down Syndrome is the most common chromosomal disorder and one of the most common causes of learning difficulties.

DUAL-SENSORY IMPAIRMENT also known as deafblind, is a combination of significant sight and hearing loss. Some people with dual-sensory impairment are totally blind and deaf. Others have some use of one or both senses.

Deafblindness can occur in several ways. A child might be born deafblind (typically through rubella); born blind and become deaf; born deaf and become blind (Usher syndrome); develop deafblindness in later years though accident or illness.

In terms of education, the most difficult of these situations to deal with is that of children born profoundly deafblind. It is not possible to convey abstract concepts to children who have never had the use of language.

DYSCALCULIA resembles dyslexia in that it is a specific learning difficulty and affect's a person's ability to deal with numbers. It is not the same condition as acalculia and relates to numerical aspects of life such as telling the time, dealing with money, and measuring things such as temperature and speed.

DYSLEXIA is a specific learning difficulty which affects the ability to read, write and spell. It is a persistent condition that can occur despite normal intelligence and teaching. Dyslexia is quite prevalent (about ten per cent of the population of the UK is estimated to have some form of dyslexia) and varies from mild to extreme.

DYSPRAXIA is a motor learning disability characterised by a lack of co-ordination. It used to be known as clumsy child syndrome. Children with dyspraxia have no clinical neurological abnormality to explain their condition which can cause them to have problems dealing with everyday tasks and to be inattentive.

DYSTONIA is a neurological movement disorder. It is characterised by involuntary and often painful, prolonged muscle contractions which can affect various parts of the body and cause abnormal movements and postures. here is no cure for most forms of dystonia. However, many of its manifestations can be managed successfully.

EPILEPSY is a condition the main symptoms of which are repeated brain seizures. It can affect anyone and develop at any age but is usually diagnosed before the age of 20 or after the age of 60. There are various types of brain seizure. Absence seizure (also known as petit mal), in which awareness is lost for a short time, occurs mainly in children. Treatment with drugs can greatly reduce, and sometimes eliminate, the number of seizures experienced by the majority of people with epilepsy.

FOETAL ALCOHOL SPECTRUM DISORDER (FASD) is to a degree still an unknown in the UK, with little research carried out on the subject. But for young women who drink excessively, if they hadn't been planning to get pregnant they will often not know they are until they're up to 12 weeks gone – and they will have continued drinking during this time, and sometimes beyond. What we do know is it affects many children (as many as 1 in 100), especially those who are in the care system and are waiting to be adopted and fostered.

FRAGILE X SYNDROME is the most common cause of inherited learning disability It occurs in both boys and girls and is associated with varying degrees of learning difficulty. As it is a genetically inherited condition, when one child in a family is diagnosed with Fragile X, there are enormous implications for the parents, brothers and sisters of that child and indeed for many other relatives. Both men and women can be carriers of the syndrome and it occurs in all populations and ethnic groups.

Many children and adults show autistic-like features - a dislike of eye contact, difficulty in relating to other people, anxiety in social situations often leading to tantrums, insistence on familiar routines and hand flapping or hand biting. A minority of individuals with Fragile X have autism. The condition is transmitted on the X chromosome and is so called because of the abnormal appearance of the affected X chromosome when studied under a microscope.

HAND OR ARM DEFICIENCY refers to the condition of people born without an arm or a hand. The term includes those born with incompletely formed hands or malformed or missing fingers.

HEARING IMPAIRMENT refers to a range of hearing loss, covering people who are slightly hard of hearing to those who are totally deaf. Four terms are generally used to describe the degree of hearing loss: mild, moderate, severe and profound.

Over 1,000 children are born deaf each year in the UK and they are now identified very early by the national neonatal hearing screening programme. Children with hearing loss frequently appear to be normal. Hearing loss that is undetected and untreated can result in speech, language, and cognitive delays. Early identification and effective treatment of hearing loss improve language, communication, and cognitive skills.

IRLEN SYNDROME (Visual Stress) is a broadly defined visual perceptual disorder affecting primarily reading and writing based activities. The syndrome is one in which reading is impeded by distortions of print.

LANDAU KLEFFNER SYNDROME (LKS) only affects children and is a rare form of epilepsy that causes difficulty with the understanding of spoken language. It may lead to loss of speech and the development of behavioural problems. Some children make a complete recovery, but many have lingering difficulties with speech, behaviour or understanding.

LOWER LIMB DEFICIENCIES is a term encompassing a wide range of abnormalities in the legs and feet. They can occur before or after birth and include incompletely formed legs and feet, hip and knee problems, twisting of the bones in the leg, differences in leg length, and disorders such as club foot.

MODERATE LEARNING DIFFICULTIES is a term used for a child who has a general level of academic attainment that is significantly below that of his/her peers. There may be difficulty acquiring basic literacy and numeracy skills, speech and

language difficulties and poorly developed personal and social skills. Emotional and behavioural difficulties may also be present.

PATHOLOGICAL DEMAND AVOIDANCE SYNDROME (PDA) is a pervasive development disorder. As with Autism and Asperger syndrome, to which it is related, PDA is caused by a dysfunction of the brain. However, it differs significantly from those conditions in that people with PDA appear to be socially skilled. They are able to use these skills to avoid the ordinary demands of everyday life and distance themselves from responsibility for their actions.

PERVASIVE DEVELOPMENT DISORDERS (PDD) are a group of disorders (of which autism is the most well-known) that feature delays in the development of social and communication skills. The symptoms of PDD may include problems with the use of language, difficulty in relating to people and changes of surrounding, and repetitive patterns of behaviour.

PRADER-WILLI SYNDROME (PWS) is a complex genetic disorder. It is characterised by floppiness at birth, poor muscle tone, short stature, immature development of genital organs and an urge to eat constantly which, if not controlled, leads to obesity. Most people with PWS have some degree of behavioural problem and learning difficulty.

PROFOUND AND MULTIPLE LEARNING DIFFICULTIES (PMLD) is the term used to describe pupils who have complex learning needs. Among pupils with PMLD are those functioning at a level comparable with the earliest levels of development and who have physical disabilities, sensory impairment or a severe medical condition. Pupils require a high level of adult support both for their learning needs and also for their personal care.

RARE CHROMOSOME ABNORMALITY SYNDROMES are disorders that arise from faults in the structure or arrangement of the chromosomes. They include the syndromes CRI du CHAT, EDWARDS, DE GROUCHY, PATAU, WOLF-HIRSCHHORN and several others which are named by reference to the number of the affected chromosome (for example, 17p-).

SEMANTIC-PRAGMATIC DISORDER (SPD) is characterised by the delayed development of language skills. It has particular features such as muddling the use of words ‘I’ and ‘you’ and learning to speak by memorising phrases. People with SPD have difficulty in using speech appropriately and in understanding the meaning of what other people say. It has been suggested that semantic-pragmatic disorder should be considered to be part of the autistic spectrum and that children with SPD to be described as ‘high functioning autistic.’

SEVERE LEARNING DIFFICULTIES (SLD) is the term used for children who have significant intellectual or cognitive impairments which have an impact on their ability to participate in the school curriculum without support.

SPEECH AND LANGUAGE DIFFICULTIES are the most frequently occurring developmental problems in children. They are especially common in children under five years old. It is estimated that over one million children and young people across the UK have some form of speech or language difficulty.Speech and language difficulties cover a wide range of special educational needs. Some children have trouble in physically making the sounds of speech, others cannot understand what is being said to them, or are unable to use language to express themselves. Speech difficulties include stammering, problems with the voice and the way it sounds, and pronouncing words ways that are incomprehensible to the listener.

Children with speech difficulties might be unwilling to speak because they are frightened of being misunderstood. Language difficulties are termed either receptive or expressive.

Receptive difficulties are problems in understanding or processing language. Children with these difficulties might have trouble following instructions and making sense of what is said to them. Expressive difficulties are problems with putting words together and using them to communicate with others. Children with expressive difficulties often find it hard to voice their feelings.

SPECIFIC LEARNING DIFFICULTY is a problem with a particular aspect of learning in a person who otherwise does well. Acalculia, dyscalculia and dyslexia (see above) are specific learning difficulties.

SPINAL INJURY which is typically brought about by falls, road traffic accidents and sports accidents, can damage the spinal cord and result in complete or partial paralysis. Those so injured have to learn how to live again as disabled people. Many of them succeed in developing a full and independent life.

TOURETTE SYNDROME (TS) frequently starts in childhood. Its characteristic symptoms are muscular tics (twitching) and vocal tics (involuntary noises and sometimes words). TS may also involve behavioural problems similar to attention deficit disorder and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. While it is known that TS arises from the way the brain develops, its cause is not yet understood.

VISUAL IMPAIRMENT is the acceptable generic term that refers to all levels of vision loss. Visual impairment does not equal blindness, but vision loss can make it difficult or impossible for a person to do some things. Most children considered visually impaired have some useable vision.Severe or total loss of vision can occur when parts of the eye or brain that process images become damaged through disease or trauma. This can happen before birth, through an infection such as measles. Neither corrective lenses nor medical treatment can restore vision in such cases. Depending on how severe the sight loss is, people so affected are described either as partially sighted or blind.

WILLIAMS SYNDROME is a rare genetic condition which can give rise to physical problems and learning difficulties. Although they often experience delays in development, children with Williams syndrome typically display good language and social skills as they grow older.