INFORMATION FOR TEACHERS

ON NEUROFIBROMATOSIS TYPE 1(Nf1)

Nf1 affects 1 in 3,000 births. It is a genetic disorder of the nervous system, caused by a fault in a gene which may lead to learning difficulties. Nf1 can be inherited but half the reported cases occur in families with no previous history. These cases occur due to a spontaneous gene mutation and this can happen in any family.

As many as 70% of children with Nf1 have specific learning difficulties. Many appear to be fine and will have an IQ in the normal range but they will experience difficulty in class. Some teachers may see them as difficult to teach.

Nf1 causes tumours on nerve tissue. Some doctors are not fully aware of its symptoms and effects and some Educational Psychologists are also unaware of its effect upon intellect. Nf1 affects the nervous system and can also affect bones and internal organs. In a child, unless there are already serious complications, the most usual sign is six or more "café-au-lait" coloured patches on the skin. There can also be a few lumps and bumps under the skin. Children with Nf1 can be clumsy due to the lack of gross motor skills and proprioception. The lack of fine motor skills leads to poor writing, drawing and use of scissors.

The Nf1 child may have great difficulties with reading as words and letters can appear jumbled or "dancing" on the page. The layout of maths causes errors in seemingly simple sums as the child fails to understand.

Poor short term memory is evident and what a child may know today may not be the case tomorrow.

It is easy to mistake the difficulties caused by Nf1 for naughtiness, especially when impulsive and unpredictable behaviour is present. These children can be capable of high achievements in some areas, while struggling with others.

School life can be frightening and frustrating for children with Nf1. Parents see their children failing to fulfil their potential as their child's difficulties go unrecognised.

Parents often have a very accurate picture of the way in which the condition affects their child and should always be closely involved in support programmes. As with any complex learning difficulty, a multidisciplinary approach, which harnesses a range of professional expertise to examine the particular needs of an individual child is likely to produce the best results.