

# Three-year study of an unconventional treatment for learning difficulties

by Jacky Byrne

ONE in five children in the UK will experience learning difficulties, according to an Audit Commission report. Many of them will not only fail to reach their potential, but will feel excluded from mainstream society because of the need for "special help."

At a Guildford specialist's unconventional method for helping such children how to be assessed in academics in a pilot for three-year

ly. Mark Mathews, a registered osteopath and applied kinesiologist, and the parents of his patients claim remarkable success for his Sunflower Method.

The method is used for treating children with conditions such as dyslexia, dyspraxia, attention

deficit disorder, hypersensitivity, behavioural problems, developmental delay and autistic spectrum disorders.

The method, an integrated system of screening and treatment, is based on the theory that children display a variety of symptoms which are classified as learning difficulties because they are neurologically confused.

Applied kinesiology, a technique in which muscles are tested to assess the response of a child's nervous system to stimuli, is used as a diagnostic tool and a treatment regime is devised.

The therapies used in the regime can include osteopathy, nutritional intervention, homoeopathy, acupuncture without needles, neuro-linguistic programming and the teaching of life management skills.

Mr Mathews, who was a dyslexic child himself,

says that the child's nervous system is checked out as if it was a computer, using cranial osteopathy techniques.

"Negative neuro associations are like viruses in a computer programme. They inhibit normal learning responses. Techniques are used to neutralise them which helps to remove the children's emotional barriers to learning. We then check that they have enough of all the right nutrients to operate the main biochemical pathways and supplement where necessary."

He has been using the method for 12 years and says that remarkable improvements in children's health and well being have been noted.

A pilot study and survey revealed that four to five hours of sessions with a Sunflower practitioner spread over several months brought an average 12 point rise in perfor-

mance IQ, a 65% improvement in auto-immune related health problems and a 50% improvement in performance at school, judged by their teachers. A questionnaire completed by the parents of 44 children who had used the method indicated dramatic benefits in 43 of them.

Sheila O'Connor is one of those who believes it works. The guardian of her grandson Leslie, 9, who suffers from a mild form of autism, she read about Mr Mathews's work in a national newspaper and sought his help. Leslie lacked co-ordination, had poor motor skills and a short attention span and was very disturbed by changes in his surroundings or routine.

"We were amazed by the way Leslie responded to Mark," Mrs O'Connor recalls. "There was an improvement right away."

After several sessions Leslie's co-ordination had improved by 85% to 90% and he can now ride a bike and swim, according to



Mark Mathews with the MP for South West Surrey, Virginia Bottomley, at the launch at The Reve Pavilion clinic in Guildford, of the Sunflower Trust, a charity which aims to make the Sunflower Method available to more children. (c)

Mrs O'Connor. He is more confident and relaxed and his attention span and ability to retain information have improved greatly. After a course of cranial osteopathy Leslie is now taking nutritional supplements and homoeopathic remedies. "It's going to take some time but there is light at the end of the tunnel," says Mrs O'Connor. "I can't praise the Sunflower Method highly enough and wish every child with problems could have access to it."

Dr Jamie Macaskill of Roehampton Institute London, which will conduct the research on the Sunflower Method, said that the institute had an interest in early childhood and had developed other

projects in the field. "With the changes in the Education Act there are many issues surrounding efforts to get specialist help for them. We are interested to investigate other approaches that will not reinforce the exclusion from their school-mates that children with learning difficulties often feel."

The project will be monitored independently and researchers will work with therapists, teachers, parents and the children to ascertain how effective the method is.

More information is available from the Sunflower Trust, a charity set up with the aim of making the method accessible to more children, on 01483 531678.