

Bullies' victim wins award



DEATH THREATS: Joe Plumb

A VICTIM of bullying who took action to help other children by setting up a support website has won a prestigious award.

From the age of eight, Asperger's sufferer Joe Plumb was bullied at school by both pupils and teachers, even receiving death threats.

The student, now 16, has won a Princess Diana Award for his website Stand Up Speak Out, which helps sufferers of autism and Asperger's who find themselves at the mercy of bullies. The site, which he funds with two part-time jobs while at college, puts children in touch with specialist psychologists.

The anti-bullying advice comes from Joe himself. "I was ideally placed to help children going through the same nightmare," he said. "At primary

school I sat on my own all the time. The teachers knew I had Asperger's, but didn't care. I wasn't badly behaved, I was just different and had problems communicating." When one pupil brought in a knife to scare him, Joe reported the case to a teacher. "She just said: 'You deserve it,'" he said.

The bullying continued at secondary school but Joe, from Milton Keynes, Buckinghamshire, found solace in helping others through his website.

One teacher had taken a special dislike to him, calling him names and saying he would fail. "I had broken my foot and she took my crutches away," he said. "To this day, I do not understand why she did it." For more information see standupspeakout.co.uk.



ORDEAL: Surgery to remove a tumour left Iona Atkins with brain damage

New brain scanner to save lives

SCIENTISTS have developed a new type of scanner to help save the lives of children with brain tumours.

The pioneering equipment shows the tumour's precise chemical signature. Not only can this increase patients' chances of survival, it means youngsters with less aggressive tumours could be spared damaging treatment.

Up to 400 children under 15 are diagnosed with a brain tumour every year. One in four dies within five years and many more suffer permanent side-effects from surgery, radiotherapy or chemotherapy.

Iona Atkins, 12, was just five when doctors found she had a craniopharyngioma tumour. Ten hours of surgery left her with brain damage which meant her body could not produce important hormones.

A year later she had radiotherapy and suffered radiation burns, extreme tiredness and lost large patches of hair.

Iona's mother, Ann, a former police sergeant, of Solihull, West Midlands, said: "Iona has been through so much treatment which has left her with long-term learning difficulties. The prognosis for children with brain tumours is the same as it was 40 years ago, unlike many other cancers. This new equipment is a great step forward and gives hope for the future."

The new MRS scanning device reveals the precise chemical make-up

EXCLUSIVE
By Lucy Johnston HEALTH EDITOR

of a tumour so that treatment can be tailored to each patient.

Professor Andrew Peet, of Birmingham Children's Hospital, who has led European trials of the new equipment, said: "I am hoping this will reduce the terrible burden these children live with following brain tumour treatment and also increase survival. We are not curing enough children of brain tumours. The new technique gives us even more information than a biopsy. It is really helping us make a difference."

"Going through treatment is really tough. It completely changes children's lives over months or even years. With this equipment we can now start to reduce treatment for some children and identify the children who need more."

Professor Peet, whose work has been funded by the children's charity Action Medical Research, added: "Children like Iona could be helped by this technology in the future."

The scanner could also help scientists to develop new cancer drugs.

"This is very exciting," he said. "We are not just looking at a picture of the tumour, we are getting information on what makes it tick and how to stop it growing."

'It gives us hope for the future'

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