WAKEFIELD EXPERIMENT as an example of poor research

In 1998 Dr Andrew Wakefield conducted research which suggested a link between the MMR vaccine and developing autism- bowel syndrome. The results of his research was published in a reputable scientific journal The Lancet and has been one of the biggest health controversies resulting in large groups of parents opting not to vaccinate their children against measles, mumps and rubella.

Medical and scientific experts and recent research suggests that the research carried out by Wakefield were significantly flawed.

* There was no research hypothesis clearly stated.
* Sample was highly selective – 12 children who had been selected because they had both bowel symptoms and autism like syndrome.
* Sample extremely small – sample size should be 100’s if not 1000’s
* No control group – a group of individuals who had never been exposed to the vaccine
* Parental recall – the alleged link with MMR vaccine was based on parental recall, parents were asked to consider how closely in time the vaccine was with the on set of autism like symptoms. The study took no steps to prevent recall bias i.e. remembering a closer association between two events than actually occurred. The notion that children were normal one day and showed clear signs of autism the next day is scientifically implausible.
* No double blind testing – the researchers who examined the children and analysed the samples all knew that the children had received MMR and that a link had been raised about its link with with autism bowel syndrome.
* Conflict of interest- As well as carrying out research on whether there was a link between the MMR vaccine and autism he was also being paid to acrry out a study for the Legal Aid Board representing parents who believed the vaccine caused autism in their children and intended suing if as soon as such proof was found.