

Dyscalculia – Tell-tale signs

Dyscalculia is very specific and currently very difficult to identify accurately. However, it is important to recognise that just as pupils may have “dyslexic tendencies” so they will have with maths difficulties, (dyscalculia tendencies) according to Judy Boosey, St. Alban’s High School research project.

Dr. Steve Chinn, (a leading expert in dyslexia) defines the difference between dyslexic mathematicians and dyscalculics (National Numeracy Strategy) and suggests that initial observations are the “basic indicator.” Dyscalculic pupils tend to operate at average or above attainment levels in other subjects but demonstrate difficulties in maths and usually associated with number in particular. Dyscalculic pupils lack confidence and practise avoidance strategies often manifesting in behaviour issues and helplessness. Dyscalculic pupils will avoid group/partner work and if put in the situation, will rely totally on others for answers.

The presentation of their work may be untidy and calculations incorrectly aligned or equally the presentation may be more important than the calculations, involving considerable time and care, (avoidance strategy).

In their maths tasks, Dyscalculic pupils will exhibit difficulties:

- Learning and recalling times tables
- Confusion with maths symbols
- Unable to estimate an answer – the inability to subitise even very small quantities
- Unable to recognize whether a numerical answer is reasonable
- Misunderstanding place value
- Lack understanding of mathematical vocabulary
- Cannot recognise inverse operations
- Being able to use more than one operation in a task
- Find any form of sequencing too challenging
- Problems with all aspects of money
- Marked delay in learning to tell the time
- An inability to count backwards reliably

Children with dyscalculia may demonstrate some of these types of behaviour:

- Weaknesses in both short term and long term memory
- Weakness in visual and spatial orientation
- Directional confusion
- Slow processing speed
- Difficulty sequencing
- Difficulty with language
- Inability to notice patterns
- Appear to understand in class but can’t apply the skills
(Difficulties in red are same as dyslexia indicators)