

3.2 Some sample learning programmes

In developing some sample learning programmes that would demonstrate the guidelines in action, schools identified students from the relevant target group and generated a learning programme for them. The learning programmes describe a range of activities that schools are currently using with their students alongside some possibilities they see emerging from using the guidelines. In other words, there are certain aspects described in the learning programmes that are not yet realised, such as a Level 2 school qualification. However, the activities described in the sample learning programmes relate to the schools' own experiences in working towards an existing qualification/award, in some cases this is the FETAC Level 2 Certificate in General learning and in others, it is the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN) award.

The sample learning programmes describe the PLUs for each student. The PLUs are chosen with the specific profile and needs of the student in mind. In general, it is envisaged that a student's learning programme would run for the duration of junior cycle, and on completion this would lead to a Level 2 certificate. It should be emphasised that the learning programmes do not describe the totality of the student's learning. There are other learning activities and experiences the student might undertake over the course of junior cycle that may not be described in the learning programme.

Learning programmes can include learning that is curricular and extra-curricular.

Learning programme 1: Paul (post-primary school)

Introduction

Paul is a first year student in a large urban community school with a student population of 1100. He has a sunny disposition, and is a very sociable 14 year old with many friends. He has a wide range of interests including rock music, swimming, drums and soccer. He is the youngest of three children and an only boy. Paul has Williams Syndrome (Williams Syndrome is a rare genetic condition that causes medical and developmental problems) and is functioning within the moderate range of general learning disabilities. Paul is involved with the Special Olympics and goes to music camp with the Williams Syndrome society. Paul attended a mainstream primary school and his parents are very eager that he attends a mainstream post-primary school.

The school atmosphere is pastoral and its structures and underlying philosophy are nurturing and supportive. It is characterised by its emphasis on partnership, collaboration and cooperation. Collaboration stretches beyond the school as Paul is involved in an outreach programme with a local special school and this is comprised of a multi-disciplinary team of an educational psychologist, speech and language therapist, physiotherapist and occupational therapist.

The junior cycle curriculum is offered in a mixed-ability setting. Students select from a range of 14 subjects - Irish, English, Mathematics, Geography, History, a European language, Science, Business Studies, Social Personal Health Education (SPHE), Civic Social Political Education (CSPE), Physical Education (PE), Religious Education, Art, Craft, Design, Metalwork, Materials Technology Wood, Music, Technical Graphics and Home Economics.

In first year students have an opportunity to sample some subjects, from which they choose their preferences to study in 2nd and 3rd year.

Each day Paul's learning takes place in a variety of settings, the majority with his mainstream peers, and an average of two class periods per day in small group or one-to-one tuition settings.

Paul's timetable has been designed to maximise his inclusion, while being mindful that he is easily tired. In this way Paul attends for 38 of the 45 class periods each week. He follows a reduced curriculum, taking Art, Craft, Design, Metalwork, Geography, Music, SPHE, PE, CSPE, and Computers with his peers, in mixed-ability classes. He works with a resource teacher and a small group (3-4 students) for his Mathematics and English classes for six periods per week each, and has four additional one-to-one withdrawal classes with his PE, Geography and English teachers. Each day Paul's learning takes place in a variety of settings, the majority with his mainstream peers, and an average of two class periods per day in small group or one-to-one tuition settings.

Personalised learning

Paul's IEP focuses on his learning strengths and needs and below there is a summary of his main IEP targets.

Summary of Paul's IEP targets

Literacy

- to identify basic letters and develop reading skills beyond 3-letter words using a phonics based approach
- to work on appropriate social sight vocabulary and introduce story writing

Language

- to expand vocabulary
- to speak for himself when responding to questions

Social

- to greet adults and peers appropriately in school and classroom contexts
- to develop an awareness of people and places that are safe and unsafe
- to sort his materials for various classes
- to plan and execute a sequence of activities in school and out of school

Motor Skills

- to navigate the school building unaided
- to develop strategies for starting conversations in specific settings
- to take steps towards managing anxiety
- to develop hand eye co- ordination (practise with the keyboard)
- to develop a comfortable grip for writing

Social maths

- to develop an awareness of time and the clock
- to further work on the understanding of money
- to develop basic computation

With the IEP as a starting point, and using the curriculum guidelines, the resource teacher generates Paul’s learning programme. In doing so he consults with Paul, his parents, his SNA, and other school staff working with him. Based on his current needs and strengths the most appropriate elements are selected from within each PLU and these are outlined below. Frequent and on-going discussions of Paul’s progress and future plans take place both informally during the school week, and formally at his IEP meetings at the start of the school year, and at review meetings during the year.

Overview of Paul’s Learning Programme

| Priority Learning Units | Elements | Junior cycle subjects/ school activities |
|-----------------------------------|---|---|
| Communicating and literacy | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading to obtain basic information • Using a range of writing forms to express opinions | English and all subjects |
| Numeracy | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Managing money • Developing an awareness of time | Mathematics, Business Studies and all subjects |
| Personal care | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowing how to stay safe | SPHE and subjects |
| Living in a community | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing good relationships • Using local facilities | SPHE, CSPE, Geography, all subjects, <i>Meitheal</i> buddy system |
| Preparing for work | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing an awareness of health and safety using equipment | Metalwork and all subjects |

Collaborating

The resource teacher links in with Paul's subject teachers to see how they might contribute to covering some PLUs in their subject classes. They also collaborate on ways to compile evidence of his achievements in his PLUs and this is mainly through portfolio building and his reading diary. A shared portfolio allows for communication between teachers as Paul moves from subject to subject on a daily basis. Paul's teachers also comment on the current topics and/or skills they are working on using Paul's portfolio.

The school learning support/resource team uses a referral box system in the staffroom where teachers can bring relevant issues to the learning support team. The team undertake to respond appropriately, whether through their own interventions, or through the sharing and discussion of strategies and resources. For Paul, this box system is useful in facilitating collaboration and teamwork in a large and busy school.

Teaching and learning

Paul's learning takes place through differentiated approaches, so that his learning is appropriately challenging for him. It is also concrete and organised in clear stages. Situating work on Paul's reality makes his learning tasks relevant and increases the possibility of the transfer of skills to his experiences outside of his school life. Planned, specific links between subjects further assists the transfer of learning skills.

Differentiating

A number of cross-curricular projects have emerged for Paul through teacher-team collaboration. They provide Paul with opportunities for deeper learning and insight into topics already covered in the mixed-ability classes. They are a source of opportunities for Paul, covering multiple elements within the PLUs. When co-teaching in Geography and Science, two teachers regularly plan discuss and review strategies, materials and approaches to Paul's learning. Strategies such as key words, group tasks, role playing and many others are favoured. The following paragraphs describe two cross-curricular projects that Paul is involved in.

English and music

As music is a passion for Paul, a project on music types is included in his English programme.

Collaboration between the music department and the resource department assists this project. This project explores three different types of Music: Heavy Metal 'Slipknot', Irish Traditional and a Classical piece. The music is listened to and evaluated as to its impact on the listener. Paul is a fan of Mundy's "Galway Girl". He will look at the lyrics and listen to the music a number of times. The music department helps to put together an evaluation sheet for Paul to complete for each piece. This evaluation includes: the title, the composer, tempo, instruments, the meaning of the lyrics, and how the piece makes him feel.

Volcano project

(Geography, Art, Craft, Design, Materials Technology (Wood) and Science)

Paul's Geography teacher also works with him on a one-to-one basis and during this time they are constructing a volcano. It involves vocabulary development, craft work developing hand and eye co-ordination, planning and sequencing a series of activities, measurement, and writing up the project. The craft work (using paper and glue, and a funnel) takes place in the Art room assisted by his Art teacher. This provides an opportunity to discuss a range of issues besides the Volcano. The work on the Volcano involves Geography, Art, Craft, Design, Materials Technology (Wood) and Science departments. During Science, the teacher demonstrates how the action of bread soda and vinegar with food dye can recreate the activity of a volcano. The base for the volcano is produced with the help of his Materials Technology (Wood) teacher. The final piece is Paul's presentation to his Geography class. The range of language and the opportunities for repetition of vocabulary in a very relaxed setting over a six-week period (one period per week) is very valuable to him. He looks forward each week to this class.



Paul's Priority Learning Units

Communicating and Literacy

Paul's parents feel that this PLU is the area of greatest challenge for him but would be delighted if he could write his name, address and fill in basic forms. They acknowledge that he would love to read and have noticed him picking up the newspaper attempting to follow a sports story. In conversation with Paul he identifies 'learning the letters and how to read' as important to him.

Element:

Reading to obtain basic information

Snapshot of some sample teaching and learning activities that cover this element

Language experience approach

A language experience approach has been adopted to advance Paul's reading and writing ability. In this approach a topic of interest to Paul such as a sporting event or a family event is used in conversation and then recorded in sentences. By cutting up these sentences and getting Paul to re-order them, he is learning new words that are relevant to him and that can then be read by him, and further adapted for development of reading experiences.

Reading programme

Paul follows a systematic phonological programme. His parents assist this work by practising the sounds and words at home. Pictorial prompts and visualisation work well for Paul. Paul is familiar with a reading programme from primary school and has enjoyed reading the stories about characters he knew well in the first term in post-primary. Activity books are used to consolidate his reading progress. The CD Rom of the series adds an extra dimension for Paul who is very keen on computers.

Social sight vocabulary

Photographs of the school's signage were given to the primary school when Paul was in sixth class to allow him to be a little more familiar with the building. He also visited the school a number of times with his 6th class peers and with his parents prior to entry. Laminated flashcards of words and corresponding pictures from the school environment are used to teach sight vocabulary. The school collaborates with Paul's parents to work on his social sight vocabulary focusing on his home as well as on the school environment.

Reading diary

A reading diary was created for Paul to track his progress in reading on a daily basis and at home his parents help Paul practise his reading.

Element:

Using a range of writing forms to express opinions

Snapshot of some sample teaching and learning activities that cover this element

Personal storybook

The personal storybook is a major piece of writing kept in a scrapbook format which tracks Paul's family, friends, his pets, likes and dislikes, hobbies and interests, neighbourhood and future aspirations. This piece of work is enjoyable for him and reinforces his sense of his environment. It gives him an opportunity to produce a unique piece of work that enhances his feelings of fulfilment. It is a reflective piece also as it tracks Paul's early life and looks to the future. Paul uses commercially produced assistive writing software to create his story. Printouts are updated weekly in Paul's portfolio. Paul frequently completes worksheets in phonic approaches to word reading, and to assist comprehension through cloze tasks.



Paul's Priority Learning Units

Numeracy

Element: Managing money

Snapshot of some sample teaching and learning activities that cover this element

Concrete materials such as coins and notes are used to role-play shopping. This involves recognising currency, counting correct amounts to pay and checking the change. Paul created a wall display of coins and notes in sequence and refers to it each day. This work is further reinforced during the frequent trips to the local shopping centre, which Paul takes with his resource class. Paul's confidence about paying for something he purchased and for ordering something for example, in a local fast food outlet, has increased with each passing week. His ability to count out the amount needed and to check his change is improving. Paul's parents support the transfer of Paul's learning in this area when they bring him shopping and give him increasing responsibility on these trips.

Element: Developing an awareness of time

Snapshot of some sample teaching and learning activities that cover this element

Developing awareness of time is vitally important to Paul. His poor concept of time leads to increasing anxiety for him as he is unable to tell how long a lesson might last or when break time might come. Using a model clock the hours and portions of hours are taught. The idea of designing a Visual Scheduler was created specifically for Paul by his resource teacher. There is one per day and comprises a page for each period with a photo of the teacher and a symbol for the subject on the page. It is also colour coded according to the location of the classroom in the building and the colour of the doors to those classrooms. A small digital clock is placed on his desk for desk based classes so he can anticipate changes in activity and so that he is aware of when the class will end. For example Paul is asked to set 10 minutes for a reading activity.



Paul's Priority Learning Units

Preparing for Work

Element: Developing an awareness of health and safety using equipment

Snapshot of some sample teaching and learning activities that cover this element

List of key safety risks in the workplace

Paul's Materials Technology (Metal) class provides a realistic context for learning what is safe in a workplace. Safety is specifically taught at the start of first year, and is integral to all and everyday activities in the workshop. The teacher makes basic rules clear, for example, no running is allowed in the workshop, no loose clothing should be worn, all pathways should be kept clear. In Materials Technology (Metal) Paul learns rules and safety procedures when making his key ring, mobile phone holder, and game. He learns safety rules and procedures with his peers and his attention is frequently drawn to the wall chart, where he can point to relevant illustrations and directions. Paul is now able to tidy away tools in their appropriate places and follows direction with regard to the safe use of tools and equipment.

Paul's list includes words and pictures of what is safe and unsafe.



Paul's Priority Learning Units

Living in a Community

Element:

Developing good relationships

Snapshot of some sample teaching and learning activities that cover this element

Links with the wider community through Meitheal, a buddy system

A *Meitheal* system operates in the school. This is a buddy system where senior students apply and are trained to be a mentor. Each senior student befriends and mentors a small group of first year students. One of the areas of great value to Paul is the games club at lunchtime run through the *Meitheal* buddy system. This gives Paul the chance to mix with his peers and to improve his communication skills. He looks forward every day to his lunch break time with the other students. When asked what he likes most in school he will, without hesitation say 'friends'. Contact with the other students is the most satisfying part of his school experience.

Element: Using local facilities

Snapshot of some sample teaching and learning activities that cover this element

Identifying familiar places

Navigating the building is covered for all students in SPHE classes at the start of the school year. Extra support is provided for Paul by his resource teachers who practise this with him. As he tours the building achieving different tasks each time, his confidence increases. To assist him, a sheet of laminated coloured paper, corresponding to the colour of the doors on the four corridors, is attached to each classroom door that Paul uses and also at strategic locations on the corridors where Paul has to make a decision to turn. At break time he is very proud to head off to the canteen unaccompanied. His parents are delighted with this new sense of independence and he is more relaxed about school. Paul himself clearly identifies 'finding my way around the school' as important in his learning this year.

Participating in a school-based community project

Paul is involved in a cross curricular project on Community in his local area and this involves the following subjects - SPHE, CSPE and Geography. In Geography, Paul maps out the local area locating his school community and his neighbourhood. His project work on community looks at the local area and organisations that are helpful to people in the area. A visit to the local library and to the Youth Initiative (club) is part of his work in this project. The visit involves meeting with a key worker in the organisation and photographing the buildings for his portfolio.



Paul's Priority Learning Units

Personal Care

Advice was sought from the psychologist at the local special school in relation to the element relationships and sexuality. Paul's parents expressed a wish to deal with this element.

Element: Knowing how to stay safe

Snapshot of some sample teaching and learning activities that cover this element

Personal safety

In SPHE classes, discussion takes place on the right to personal safety. Using a range of different scenarios, Paul draws stick figures to describe what should happen next. Situation cards are used in the class also, as well as role plays of how a person might deal with a particular situation.

Teacher and peer observation are used in a range of the PLUs for example Paul's participation in SPHE discussion and his participation in the *Meitheal* programme.

Main assessment tasks/ activities for evidence of learning

Paul enjoys a challenge and loves to succeed. Therefore opportunities are created to respond to his progress and to recognise his learning achievements. Any difficulties he encounters are seen positively, and as opportunities to learn something new. Here are some examples from Paul's school life.

In Mathematics, the teacher designed differentiated worksheets that enable Paul to move from one question to the next, getting feedback from his teacher, as he needs it.

His work on the computer assisted reading programmes gives instant responses to completed work, and enables him to revise, or adjust his responses appropriately.

The use of the reading diary records Paul's work in reading on a daily basis and facilitates his parents' direct involvement in his reading programme.

Paul's portfolio work is the main evidence of his learning. He reviews his portfolio, with his peers during group resource time. Individual reviews also take place with his resource teacher. Paul's parents have the opportunity to look at his portfolio during IEP and parent teacher meetings. The work that Paul has covered in his learning programme is currently being used as evidence of learning for the New Horizan ASDAN award.

Some reflections on the learning programme

As this was the first time the school had a student with Paul's profile, organising a programme of learning for him presented its challenges. Having the guidelines offered a structure to work from. Paul's priority learning targets from his IEP were addressed in his learning programme.

The planning work around Paul's learning programme linked in well with his IEP. It was also possible to identify and capitalise on his love of music, sports and his interest in people in preparing work on his PLUs.

Getting Paul's subject teachers to link into the learning programme required a level of collaboration, with some subjects presenting greater opportunities to develop the PLUs than others. In mixed-ability classes teachers included Paul in the teaching and learning to the greatest extent possible. Having more examples available of how to integrate the PLUs with Junior Certificate subject classes would be very helpful. The role of the SNA in supporting Paul's involvement and interest is very important. The daily contact between the SNA and subject teachers allows both to receive feedback on Paul's progress.

Parental involvement has been important to the success of the programme. Paul's parents have been supportive of the work and feel that the school has individualised the programme for him. They felt there was anxiety on both sides at the beginning of the school year but were pleased by the lengths the school went to, to consult them. They are pleased with the variety of work available to Paul. They remarked that he loves learning new things and enjoys talking about them at home.

Paul's parents have been supportive of the work and feel that the school has individualised the programme for him.

In Science he really enjoys the experiments. He can locate the equipment and work in partnership with two other students to do an experiment. He is fascinated by the mixing of chemicals which involves a colour change. In writing up the experiment his task will be to colour in the drawing of the apparatus.

Paul's parents are very positive about how he has grown in confidence this year. Having a learning programme which can focus the learning in the area of communication has really supported Paul's communication and social skills.

At the same time they feel the learning is challenging enough for him and any further pressure might be counterproductive. This is an area of concern for the resource teacher as well because, while the activities within the PLUs lend themselves very nicely to the junior cycle subject classes in first year, the teacher is concerned that this may not be the case in second and third years as the work becomes more challenging. For the coming year, the school is exploring the possibility of Paul linking in more formally with the local special school, for example one day a week to work on some specific PLUs.

Learning programme 2: Fiona (special school)

Introduction

Fiona is a thirteen old student who attends the junior cycle section of a special school. Fiona has five older siblings, and is an aunt, who takes great delight in what her nieces and nephews are doing. She has an interest in music, dancing, fashion, movies and movie stars. She is a keen swimmer who represents the school in competitions. Her attendance in school is excellent.

Outside of school she enjoys meeting up with her friends, shopping with her family and particularly going to music concerts. She functions within the moderate range of general learning disabilities and has a diagnosis of Down Syndrome. Fiona can communicate quite well verbally. Fiona was recently diagnosed with Diabetes type 1 and is learning how to deal with this illness. When she leaves school, she says “I would like to get a job and earn my own money”.

In this school Lámh signing (Irish sign language) is taught to all students and is used alongside all spoken communications within the school so that every student is included and understands what is going on.

The special school that Fiona attends provides a learning environment for students with moderate to severe and profound general learning disabilities including students with Autistic Spectrum Disorders (ASD). To maintain a sense of progression for students it has three main sections, primary, junior cycle and senior cycle. The junior cycle class has eight students. Fiona’s junior cycle class covers seven subjects: English, Mathematics, Social and Personal Health Education (SPHE), Home Economics, Physical Education, Music and Art, Craft, Design along with two double periods per week to engage with topics in History, Geography, and Civic, Social and Political Education (CSPE). While all the students in the class have been identified as having moderate general learning disability, their individual abilities vary. For example, three students, including Fiona, can read some text, while the other five have a basic sight vocabulary, but find reading difficult.

In this school Lámh signing (Irish sign language) is taught to all students and is used alongside all spoken communications within the school so that every student is included and understands what is going on.

Personalised learning

Fiona’s IEP identifies her strengths, needs, talents and interests which forms the basis for designing a suitable learning programme for her. Three times a year, Fiona’s class teacher, Fiona, her parents, the SNA who works with her class group and the appropriate therapists (speech and language therapist, physiotherapist, and occupational therapist) meet to discuss her IEP. The table below summarises the information from her IEP outlining her baseline for learning at the start of the school year.

Summary of Fiona's IEP targets

Abilities, skills, talents and interests

- is sociable, friendly, caring and kind
- enjoys music and singing into a microphone
- is a talented swimmer – has represented Ireland in Special Olympics
- enjoys boy bands (Boyzone), shopping, make-up, hair and nails, clothes, fashion magazines
- is interested in boys and having a boyfriend

Communicating

- can initiate and develop conversation can always make herself understood
- can form 4-5 word sentences, using appropriate vocabulary can deliver a message
- makes good eye contact
- becomes silent and withdrawn if a question is too complex says yes if she doesn't know the answer to something

Literacy

- can read simple sentences
- has a vocabulary of 100 words approximately
- can read most 4-letter words, relying on the initial consonant sound, context and visual prompts
- writes neatly (won a national handwriting competition) can write her name, struggles with her address
- can write simple sentences – My name is Fiona Murphy. I am a girl.

Numeracy

- knows numbers from 1-20
- can add and subtract single numbers using the number line can read the hour on an analogue clock
- can recognise all coins €5, €10, €20, but cannot use money accurately when shopping
- has started to use the calculator for simple maths operations

Personal care

- may not say when she has a pain
- has had a recent diabetes diagnosis, so needs to learn to self- monitor

Living in a community

- enjoys family weddings, parties and local discos sometimes hugs people inappropriately
- may not express her feelings or needs adequately

Preparing for work

- Fiona would like to get a job and earn her own money is not able to travel independently into town

A collaborative approach is also taken to plan, develop and evaluate Fiona’s learning programme and this is led by Fiona’s class teacher. Based on her needs and strengths the following elements from the PLUs are selected as the most relevant for Fiona.

Overview of Fiona’s Learning Programme

| Priority Learning Units | Elements | Junior cycle subjects/ school activities |
|-----------------------------------|---|--|
| Communicating and literacy | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading to obtain basic information • Using a range of writing forms to express opinions | English and all subjects |
| Numeracy | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing an awareness of time | Mathematics, Home Economics, and all subjects |
| Personal care | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing a healthy lifestyle | Physical Education, Home Economics, SPHE, all subjects |
| Living in a community | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seeking help and advice | SPHE, all subjects, working with the school nurse |
| Preparing for work | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finding out about work | Home Economics and Geography |

Teaching and learning

Differentiating

Most of Fiona's learning experiences in school take place within her base classroom, where students work as a whole class, in small groups, one-to-one, and independently, as is appropriate to their learning at any particular time. Her interests and talents form the basis of much of her planned learning experiences. Fiona's parents, teachers and therapists find that visual structures assist and scaffold her in her learning, so these are incorporated into teaching Fiona. Carefully structured and staged approaches are favoured for her to optimise her learning.

Using ICT

ICT is used to support and provide further applications of learning experiences, and is especially useful for Fiona, being highly visual, and multi-sensory. This also affords her independence and choice in her learning activities and supports collaboration with her class peers.

Transferring learning

While each subject period is allotted 30 minutes, Fiona's class teacher identifies, plans for, and avails of many and frequent opportunities throughout the school day to integrate and apply learning for her and her classmates across the curriculum. Other applications of learning are facilitated through in-school and out-of-school activities, such as regular (often weekly) use of the school shop, local supermarkets, swimming pool, library, garden centres, and local café. Fiona's experience and success in the wider community setting of the Special Olympics is an additional learning opportunity, providing a variety of contexts for the application of her PLUs.

Linking learning with the wider community

Fiona's school welcomes contact with its neighbouring community. Open days, celebratory events, visits out, trips, and sport are some of many, ongoing means for outreach. The school is very involved in preparing students for the Special Olympics. In recent years this school has set up a link with a local post-primary school, whereby its transition year students get involved in some of the special school activities, during planned weekly visits. Fiona's class then visits the post-primary school during second term to collaborate in a transition year activity – last year they made an artefact in a Materials Technology (Wood) class, and this year they are involved in a musical programme, exploring singing and rhythm.



Fiona's Priority Learning Units

Numeracy

Element:

Developing an awareness of time

Snapshot of some sample teaching and learning activities that cover this element

Teaching and learning time on the quarter past and to and the half hour, is directly dealt with during Mathematics class, and informally during the school day. Learning time is linked to fractions, folding circular and other shapes in two, and in four, and tracing the fold lines. These fold lines are then linked to hand positions on the clock face. Students learn to adjust the hands corresponding to their folds. Each classroom has a working clock, and the teacher uses large and small analogue faces to assist the students in their learning. Assembly starts at 9.30am each day, some classes start on the quarter to the hour and the students' attention is drawn to these times. A large analogue clock is in the dining room, and Fiona's attention is drawn to this daily. This links too with Home Economics – cutting toast in half, and dividing cake or pizza in quarters. Planning trips to the cinema or to the bank involve recognition of start times and opening hours. These also provide the opportunity to consider how long the trip will take and start and return times. Fiona's swimming times, and records of these are of great interest to her, noting the differences in performance from one swim to the next and assist her in developing a concept of differing time intervals. Following a TV schedule for her favourite series also offers opportunities for time learning.



Fiona's Priority Learning Units

Personal Care

Element:

Developing a healthy lifestyle

Snapshot of some sample teaching and learning activities that cover this element

Weekly swimming and other team and individual activities with her classmates during PE also support good lifestyle choices. During PE the class keeps an exercise diary, and students are encouraged to include exercise they do outside of PE class. The school is involved in an Inter-Schools league and so opportunities to play with other teams and schools are also available. Lunchtime play and exercise offers further opportunities.

Communicating her emotional and physical state

Social stories, role plays and picture cue cards during SPHE class enables Fiona to communicate her feelings, both physical and emotional. The SPHE teacher poses questions like 'What do you do if...?' Opportunities for identifying and communicating her physical and emotional feelings are fostered throughout the school day.

Fiona's well-being

With the assistance of the school nurse, who uses a pictorial sequence and role playing, Fiona is learning how to test her blood sugar levels. When required she goes to the nurse's room and asks for her diabetes monitoring kit and with support she tests her own glucose levels, learning the significance of the outcome.

Healthy eating

Home Economics class on Thursday mornings deals specifically with healthy eating. Here Fiona learns about good food choices, how to prepare food, following a step-by-step recipe, for example, on grilling sausages - going to the shop to buy them, checking the date, putting the sausages in the fridge while she prepares for cooking and so on. In the canteen at breakfast club and at lunchtime, Fiona has opportunities to transfer her learning about healthy eating, and is supported in making healthy food choices.



Fiona's Priority Learning Units

Living in a Community

Element: Seeking help and advice

Snapshot of some sample teaching and learning activities that cover this element

While the SPHE syllabus explores this area through many topics including 'Communication skills', 'Friendships relationships and sexuality', and 'Emotional health', all curricular areas and school experiences offer opportunities for asking for help and support. In SPHE class methods like social stories and role play are frequently used to enable learning in this area. These include a great variety of situations that occur both in and out of school. These activities give rise to rich discussions on options that a person has in situations, support one might need and how to deal with them. A range of prompt questions are used in the discussions 'What would you do if...?'

Teacher: What would you do if you were in G Stores and got lost?

Fiona: Don't panic, ask a member of staff.

Teacher: How would you recognise a member of staff?

Fiona's management of her Diabetes offers a real life situation for her, in asking for help to monitor her glucose levels.

In second term social stories, role plays and picture cue cards during SPHE class enable Fiona to communicate her feelings, both physically and emotionally. The SPHE teacher poses questions like 'What do you do if...?' Opportunities for identifying and communicating her physical and emotional feelings are fostered throughout the school day



Fiona's Priority Learning Units

Preparing for Work

Element: Finding out about work

Snapshot of some sample teaching and learning activities that cover this element

During the school year Fiona and her class visit a variety of further education and vocational training centres. From these visits, students may choose further education options for when they leave school. Fiona will most likely need to be able to get a bus into town to get to work. So preparations have begun, through map work, discussion of landmarks in Geography class, followed by supported trips into town. In class Fiona is shown the route to the post office on a map, which she highlights, noting the key landmarks – for example traffic lights or certain shop.

Students take digital pictures of the route and the key landmarks from the bus stop to the post office. Once back in school these are printed off, and added to their maps, which can be used on the next outing. Over time, in this way, Fiona will learn to find her way to different amenities in town e.g. the local library, the swimming pool.



Fiona's Priority Learning Units

Communicating and Literacy

Element:

Reading to obtain basic information

Snapshot of some sample teaching and learning activities that cover this element

Fiona reads a series of short stories which develop her word recognition and comprehension. She can describe how the story has gone using pictures as prompts. Sometimes she draws pictures to convey how a story is going. Fiona's interest in movies and movie stars is used to provide reading materials for her. Fiona compiles magazine cuttings of relevant pictures in a project on her favourite singers or movie stars. These are also used to look at various advertised products, and their uses.

In school all the symbols for toilets, fire exits and so on are international signs and symbols, and are displayed above or on the relevant doors. In class Fiona matches the signs with the corresponding words and explains what they mean using a range of pictures.

Element:

Using a range of writing forms to express opinions

Snapshot of some sample teaching and learning activities that cover this element

Fiona goes to the bank with her classmates and they fill some banking forms there, e.g. depositing or withdrawing money from their accounts. During English class in school Fiona learns the address layout for envelopes and postcards. The class group address envelopes for birthday and Christmas cards. Other activities include writing short messages on postcards to family and booking on line for a concert she wants to attend, filling in the entry form for access to competitions, such as the interschool handwriting competition, or entry to her events in the Special Olympics. Other writing activities are also based on Fiona's reading programme. She undertakes many writing tasks using commercially produced assistive software.

As Fiona is an avid fan of musicians and movie stars these provide rich contexts for personal written communication, using digital pictures, magazine articles and pictures. Watching a film with her class group also provides further stimulus for some of Fiona's writing.

Recognising achievement

Fiona and her teacher discuss their ideas on how she might progress. They start by checking the goal of her learning and how her work meets that goal. Self-assessment is encouraged, mainly through question and answer sessions, such as:

Main assessment tasks/ activities for evidence of learning

Fiona and her teacher discuss their ideas on how she might progress. They start by checking the goal of her learning and how her work meets that goal. Self-assessment is encouraged, mainly through question and answer sessions, such as:

How do you think you got on? What could we do next time?

Fiona loves to get feedback and encouragement and an idea of how well she is doing. Her gradually growing portfolio of work is a source of great pride to her, and she enjoys showing her completed work at review sessions and on other occasions. Her parents have the opportunity to look at Fiona's portfolio during IEP and parent teacher meetings. Her progress on the computer assisted reading programme is charted for each completed section, which Fiona can access and explain. She can modify and resubmit exercises and assignments, thus seeing for herself the progress she is making, or spotting where the error is and rectifying it. Fiona is learning to interpret the nurse's charts on her diabetes, with a growing awareness of the significance of her results.

Some reflections on the learning programme

Fiona's learning programme gives a structure and a means to address her needs and strengths which are outlined in her IEP. Her learning programme and IEP are reviewed on a monthly cycle through her teacher's monthly reports. While the learning programme addresses Fiona's individual needs many of the activities to develop the PLUs are appropriate for her class group as well. At the moment Fiona and her class peers are working towards the FETAC Certificate in General Learning at Level 2. A lot of the work covered in Fiona's PLUs has contributed to this Level 2 FETAC award.

Having a variety of teachers in Fiona school life reinforces the idea that she is doing the same as her peers attending mainstream post-primary schools.

Fiona has gained a lot of independence since she started her learning programme. In particular her ability to find her way around the town has greatly improved.

Fiona is also now better at asking for help to manage her blood sugar levels. The learning programme has linked Fiona's learning to her own life in a very real way.

To enhance Fiona's learning programme it would be great to get a teacher to teach Materials Technology (Wood) and a Physical Education teacher would also be an advantage. Subject-specialised teachers would offer a greater range of opportunities for Fiona and her class peers to develop the elements within the PLUs.

Having a variety of teachers in Fiona school life reinforces the idea that she is doing the same as her peers attending mainstream post-primary schools.

Learning programme: John (post-primary school)

Introduction

John is 15 years old, and is functioning within the moderate general learning disability range. He is a member of the Traveller community and lives with his paternal grandmother and two other siblings. John's school is a small DEIS rural co-educational vocational school of just over 200 students. The school offers the Junior Certificate, the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP), the Leaving Certificate, the Leaving Certificate Applied and Post Leaving Certificate courses.

The school organises the class groups in mixed-ability settings. John is in second year in a class of 24 students. His class is following a range of Junior Certificate subjects, they are participating in the JCSP. To support John's learning he has a laptop and software.

His class is following a range of Junior Certificate subjects, they are participating in the JCSP. To support John's learning he has a laptop and software.

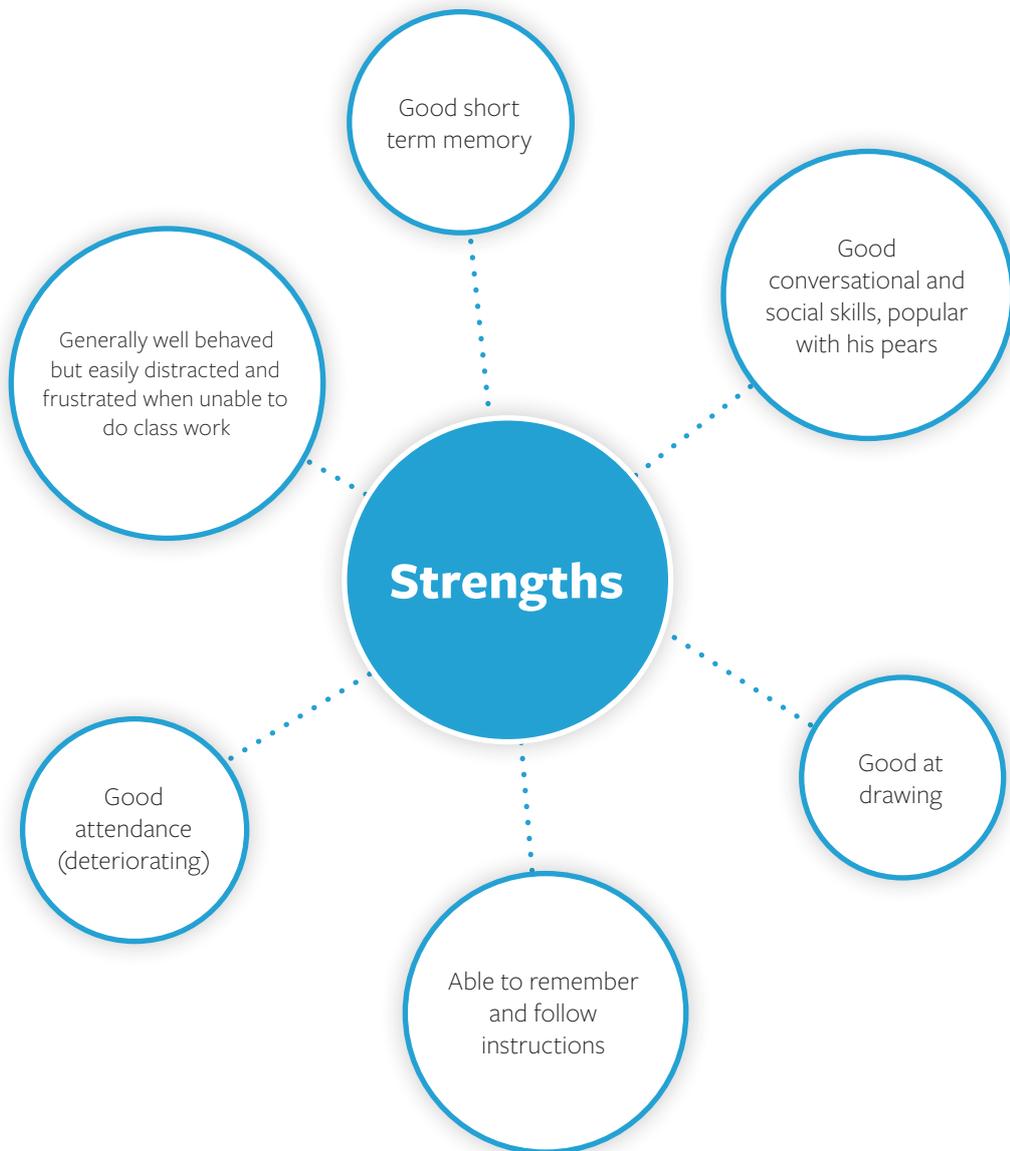
John's timetable is differentiated

The resource teacher modified the second year timetable in order to integrate the teaching and learning of John's PLUs.

The aim is to work within the resources available, to keep withdrawal to a minimum and to maximise John's learning with his year group. As John has an Irish exemption, during Irish classes he meets with his resource teacher and his SNA to discuss his progress, problems that have arisen, possible solutions and to plan the week ahead. This time is also used for one-to-one tuition in his PLUs. Another free time slot is used for visits out of school to town, for shopping or other associated curricular activities. Otherwise John's learning takes place in the main classroom with his classmates. The Irish/cultural studies slot on another afternoon is used for a small group session with three other students who also have Irish exemptions, where the focus is on local and cultural studies.

Personalised learning

Through the IEP process, John's strengths and learning challenges are identified and these inform the selection of PLUs for his learning programme. John's main strengths and learning challenges as described in his IEP, are set out in the graphic below.





Overview of John's Learning Programme

A collaborative approach is taken to designing John's learning programme, which includes the resource teacher, his SNA and other staff working with him.

| Priority Learning Units | Elements | Junior cycle subjects/ school activities |
|-----------------------------------|---|---|
| Communicating and literacy | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading to obtain basic information • Using a range of writing forms to express opinions | English and all subjects |
| Numeracy | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing an awareness of time | Mathematics, Business Studies |
| Personal care | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing a healthy lifestyle | Physical Education, Home Economics, SPHE, Science, CSPE |
| Living in a community | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using local facilities | All subjects, <i>Meitheal</i> buddy system |
| Preparing for work | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing an awareness of health and safety in using equipment | Materials Technology (Wood), Home Economics |

Collaborating

The school is characterised by an emphasis on collaboration, led by the principal and the management team, the special educational needs co-ordinator and subject departments.

The resource teacher meets each subject teacher to discuss the implications of John's PLUs for their subject, and how John's learning can best be facilitated. They agree on the building and maintaining a portfolio of work for him.

Planning and review related to John's learning programme is also informed by visits to his family home. John's family and the resource teacher agree and commit to ongoing communication to reinforce and support John's learning in school, by visits to and from school, telephone, texts, and through John's learning journal.

In school, collaboration is exemplified by his English teachers. John's year group is divided into two English classes. Both teachers work very closely together on their subject programme, and collaborate to organise events for film studies, or when a local storyteller or poet comes to visit. Collaboration extends to the student cohort. John's school runs a peer responsibility programme, such as the Big Brother Big Sister (BBBS) Programme and paired reading.

The school also has well developed links with other services provided by the VEC including facilitation of progression to adult basic education programmes, YouthReach and VTOS schemes.

Teaching and learning

Linking learning with the wider community

John's timetable allows for two trips out of school per week. His teacher, SNA and his small group classmates go to local sites of potential learning, such as the bank and post office. As his school is in an urban setting there are lots of opportunities for learning signs and symbols and for modelling good and appropriate behaviour in various settings. Examples of these would be going shopping for wood for his woodwork project and going to the local graveyard to learn about local history. Other links with the local community include visits in from Health Service Executive personnel or guests who speak to students on awards night. There is an ongoing focus in school on John's cultural heritage as a member of the Traveller community, and this is also fostered through interventions organised for Traveller students locally.

Subjects where ICT is integral

In Business Studies, John uses a calculator when he is working with numbers. John's teacher photocopies simplified real life budgets and bills. With support, John reads the budget or bill and then uses the calculator to work with the figures. In Mathematics he uses his calculator almost daily. John and his classmates also play short games on the internet to reinforce topics that are taught. This also makes learning fun, as John likes working on the computer and it is something he does with greater ease than writing.

He also uses computerised mathematical games, both commercially produced and free downloads from the internet.

ICT

John uses his laptop while working on his various projects and while using his educational software in different subject classes. He also uses a printer and scanner and the internet to reinforce learning in Music, English, Mathematics and Business Studies classes.

John attends his timetabled ICT class once a week with the rest of his 24 classmates. Class content includes learning how to type, which reinforces John's literacy, numeracy and ICT skills. John enjoys ICT and he was already familiar with some of the hardware and educational software from his time in primary school. He works on the same class content as his classmates but works at a slower pace. John is enhancing his literacy with a programme using free online software. John is assigned a place in the class-seating plan. He has to turn on his computer, let the virus programme run, locate his folder, open his folder, follow the lesson, save his work and shut down his computer properly. John learns the appropriate procedure by following the same steps in every class.

He also uses word processing in a range of short projects, for example he designed an advertisement to sell some of his pups. He loves using the internet to look up images of dogs and asks the teacher or a peer to read the accompanying text. He locates images of dogs on the net and pastes them into Microsoft Word. The pictures are then combined with common basic vocabulary. John enjoys printing out the pages and bringing them home to show his family.

His engagement with technology also includes using washing machines, microwaves, and ovens, all of which John encounters and uses repeatedly in Home Economics. John also uses this technology at home. On his trips out with his teacher or with his family John has the opportunity to use other technology such as an ATM.



John's Priority Learning Units

Numeracy

Element: Developing an awareness of number

Snapshot of some sample teaching and learning activities that cover this element

John uses the 100 square to help him recognise numbers up to 100. He reverses his numbers sometimes, so he practises and tries to catch and correct himself by filling in missing numbers in part blank 100 squares. John can add numbers up to ten on paper and uses a calculator for larger numbers. John draws a number line and uses it for subtraction and adding. He practises what he has learned using commercially produced software and his teacher downloads some mathematical games and number bonding worksheets for him and his classmates. Levels are variable, so John can work at an appropriate level while his peers work on theirs.

Learning in this area includes money, such as coin and note recognition by number and otherwise, calculating change, researching the cost of pups etc.

Transferring learning

There are many opportunities across the curriculum for application and transfer of learning in quantity and number, including in the subjects Materials Technology (Wood), Science and Business Studies.



John's Priority Learning Units

Communicating and Literacy

Element: Reading to obtain basic information

Snapshot of some sample teaching and learning activities that cover this element

John benefits from staged, repetitive, consistent and structured teaching methods embedded in real life contexts that interest him. John has an opportunity to select a book on reading day in English class. The teacher first reads the title and John is then asked what he thinks the book is about. Pictures on the cover prompt conversation. While reading, the teacher and John look at the pictures first and then read the text. Words that John needs in everyday life are sometimes emphasised, but the main aim is reading for pleasure. The books in the English room are of high interest but of low reading age. The same process is followed for John in a paired-reading programme, with a senior student volunteer. His aunt and sister read some basic books that he borrows from school. Many of John's teachers use a keyword approach, pre-teaching important words. John uses a bookmark of key words, and teacher places them on a wall poster.

Element: Using a range of writing forms to express opinions

Snapshot of some sample teaching and learning activities that cover this element

John is focusing on everyday basic vocabulary from the Dolch list of basic sight vocabulary, along with familiar functional words. Application forms for the driving test, tax and bank forms are useful resources for John to learn how to write his name, address, date of birth, and to help his familiarity with real life documents. Repeating activities like addressing envelopes, writing postcards and greeting cards reinforce his learning. John uses his laptop on a daily basis. Commercially produced writing assistive software that speaks text as he writes enables him to write and respond to tasks of his own choosing, and as directed by his teachers. John uses his laptop throughout the school day.



John's Priority Learning Units

Living in a community

Element: Using local facilities

Snapshot of some sample teaching and learning activities that cover this element

John belongs to many communities, including family, local, school and Traveller communities. He participates in a school-run student mentoring programme – the Big Brothers Big Sisters (BBBS) where a senior student mentor is matched with a first or second year mentee. The aims of the mentoring programme are discussed at interview – these included some of John's social and communication objectives. Once the mentors are selected the mentors and mentees meet once a week for lunch, while supervised by the BBBS facilitator and a teacher. John and his mentor make lunch, sit, eat and chat. Together they then play games e.g. cards, a board game or listen to music with other mentors and mentees. John's mentor models appropriate behaviour in the group. Through his unique friendship with John, his mentor is able to advise him on how to behave and to discreetly advise him on inappropriate behaviour.

John's grandfather used to make traditional caravans. After detailed discussion in class John and his classmates looked up traditional Traveller caravans on the internet, copied pictures, and created a drawing using the pictures as models. John likes drawing as a hobby as well as in his Art, Craft, Design class. In this way his community membership is combined with a pleasurable, creative, leisure activity.

His art work is routinely displayed, alongside his peers' work in the art room. His artefacts in Materials Technology (Wood) are also displayed and acknowledged.

As part of Irish/cultural studies John and his classmates go to visit the local graveyard. There they read names from tombstones, and tell stories based on people buried there. John loves to recount stories and these trips provide an opportunity for this. Sometimes John or one of the others will role play, e.g. a tourist, asking questions about families and places, and listening to the responses.



John's Priority Learning Units

Personal Care

Element: Developing a healthy lifestyle

Snapshot of some sample teaching and learning activities that cover this element

Healthy eating is emphasised in Home Economics in particular. John cooks and prepares simple meals with his working partner. The teacher uses simple menus that John reads with her help. John is encouraged to cook at home also. In Physical Education (PE) John learns how to put a healthy lifestyle into practice. Most PE classes are outdoors. John participates in the class with his peers, but he sometimes forgets his gear. Phoned reminders home usually sort this out. During wet days his teacher incorporates personal care practice, healthy diet and fitness into class work. This includes each student developing an exercise plan. John and his classmates take turns washing, ironing, and folding school football jerseys. John learns how to care for clothes and the importance of personal hygiene after exercise.

The BBBS mentors and mentees shop for healthy food for their lunch meeting. This provides an opportunity for John to practise using money and to select healthy snacks while shopping. The BBBS also provides an opportunity to practice preparing lunch with the group. The school is planning work experience for him in a local café in his third year.



John's Priority Learning Units

Preparing for Work

Element: Developing an awareness of health and safety using equipment

Snapshot of some sample teaching and learning activities that cover this element

The guidance counsellor gives John individual vocational guidance e.g. about the availability of further education and/or working in the community. A small group of students including John visit local adult education centres, YouthReach and training centres to explore further education opportunities with the guidance counsellor.

Transferring learning

Preparing for, planning and participating in visits out to e.g. the Fire Station, Garda Station and workplaces gives John an understanding that health and safety and personal safety are important. 'What if...' scenarios are used to prepare for trips out or John is asked what advice he would give his younger brother in certain potentially dangerous situations. John went on a trip with his Geography class, teacher and SNA to a local quarry, and had to follow strict health and safety rules while on site. In Home economics John learns hazard labels on products. He likes to copy and draw the symbols and learns them in this way. The Science laboratory, Materials Technology (Wood) and IT rooms all have particular rules on health and safety. John and his peers regularly participate in a fire drill, which practises safe behaviour during a potentially dangerous situation.

Recognising progress and achievement

John's efforts and persistence at learning are acknowledged as much and as often as possible in school and at home. Teachers are consistent and as a policy, feedback is always communicated individually to John so that he knows what his next step in learning is. In class the date, homework and the purpose of the lesson is written on the whiteboard. John's BBBS mentor is particularly gifted and helpful in his feedback to John. Teacher observation and differentiated task sheets are used to assess a range of his PLUs. All of his work is collected in his portfolio, which is reviewed throughout the year.

Main assessment tasks/ activities for evidence of learning

Student of the year and special recognition awards are distributed during awards night, and John has received one for his improved attendance and project achievements. This is an annual event attended by families, the CEO of the VEC, members of the board of management and other guests. John's guardian has his awards for attendance and special recognition framed and displayed at home. John's and his peers' artwork is routinely displayed in the art room. His and his classmates' project artefacts in Materials Technology (Wood) are also displayed for comment (John has made a tool box recently). His best work was put on display during open night, and he and some of his friends helped the teachers in their various rooms on the night to represent and promote the school.

Some reflections on the learning programme

Before John enrolled in the school, it did not have experience in working with a student with moderate learning disabilities. It would have been great to have the learning programme for him in first year, because before the programme his behaviour and attendance was beginning to deteriorate. Although John's class is participating in the JCSP and they find it very beneficial as it shows progress through the completed statements, none of the statements other than those in the basic skills section are suitable for John.

The learning programme offers a way of putting a structure on John's learning and a way of showing his achievements.

This is very important as John will not be sitting any subjects in the Junior Certificate examination. John and his guardian are hoping that John will get certification for his time in school.

John's family have reported that John was very happy in school. They commented on how he had become more assertive. The school feels that the learning programme incorporated learning embedded in real life scenarios and was cognisant of John's interests and strengths. It is also clear that John has improved in all the PLUs – the most noticeable progress is John's improvement in the use of money, time, ICT and social skills.

The learning programme needs to be communicated more clearly to all of John's teachers so that all teachers are in a position to commit themselves to delivering the learning programme. One way of doing this might be to further break down the learning outcomes into more manageable steps for him in each subject class. This might also entail greater communication with all the parties involved in John's education. The programme should be reviewed twice yearly, in line with the school policy on reporting back to parents/ guardians on students' progress. Further planning is needed in the Preparing for work PLU – some type of work experience would enhance John's learning and further consultation with the guidance counsellor needs to be considered.

John's class are participating in the JCSP and they find it very beneficial as it shows progress through the completed statements, none of the statements other than those in the basic skills section are suitable for John.

Learning programme 4: Mary (special school)

Mary is a 16 year old sociable, sensitive, popular and happy student. She has a considerable interest in music, which she shares with her sister who is two years older than her. She loves listening to music, singing, dancing and skipping and has excellent rhythmic sense. She can be quite shy and often needs prompting and encouragement to interact with others.

Mary is on the autistic spectrum and has a moderate learning disability. Her auditory skills are enhanced; she can hear and distinguish sounds from a distance. In school, noise is very distracting for her. A quiet learning environment suits her well. Mary has weak muscle tone and poor manual dexterity, and her organisational and sequencing skills are poor. Mary accesses speech and language, reflexology and music therapies during her school week. She also has an exercise programme for manual dexterity.

Mary is in her third year at junior cycle, and in a class of 8 students of varying abilities and needs, including students with behavioural problems. The class atmosphere is good humoured and class morale is generally positive. Mary attends a special school of 73 students, with 11 teachers and 12 SNAs. The school is co- educational, divided into primary, junior and senior cycles, offering programmes at Level 2 of the NFQ, Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate Applied. The school's culture is one of nurture, praise, encouragement, and challenge for its students. This leads to the enhancement of self-esteem and an appreciation of each student's personal value and contribution to the school community.

The school's culture is one of nurture, praise and encouragement, and challenge for its students, leading towards the building and enhancement of self-esteem...

Personalised learning

Mary's IEP is drawn up by her class teacher, in collaboration with other professionals involved, her SNA, her parents and herself. It is reviewed and updated by this team at least three times during the school year, together with regular weekly review and planning by the class teacher. The priority learning targets identified for Mary in her IEP are:

- 1 The Promotion of independence for her in the area of personal care.
- 2 The building of appropriate and meaningful relationships with others.
- 3 The enhancement of her self-esteem.

An overview of Mary's learning programme

| Priority Learning Units | Elements | Junior cycle subjects/ school activities |
|-----------------------------------|--|---|
| Communicating and literacy | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Speaking appropriately for a variety of purposes and demonstrating attentiveness as a listener | English and all subjects |
| Numeracy | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Managing money Developing an awareness of time | Mathematics |
| Personal care | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Developing good daily personal care | Physical Education, Home Economics, SPHE, Science, CSPE |
| Living in a community | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Developing good relationships Resolving conflict | SPHE, PE, Materials Technology (Wood) |
| Preparing for work | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Taking part in a work related activity | Guidance counselling |

Teaching and learning

Whole school approach

A whole school approach is adopted to promote all students' emotional development. This acknowledges each student's unique responses to situations, activities and learning. Teachers and staff are committed to the development of emotional awareness for each student as the basis for all their learning.

Differentiating

Mary's teachers often use social stories to personalise learning for her, and for the various groups she participates in throughout the school day. These target a specific aspect of her learning which is important in a particular topic in a learning area. Modelling is a method that suits Mary and her classmates. Teacher modelling, peer modelling, and watching commercially produced DVDs, whether on her own, or in small or class groups, also provides variety and focused learning opportunities for particular skill enhancement.

Mary's teachers are aware of the value of multi-sensory prompts for enhancement of her learning. Real situations such as involvement in the breakfast club, work experience, and shopping are invaluable. In the classroom pictures are often used, as well as the spoken word, to develop skills and learning, e.g. sorting pictures into appropriate categories, using conversation cue cards to scaffold Mary's conversational skills, using assistive technology such as laptops for reading programmes and writing tasks, internet browsing, and emailing.

Teaching and learning

Teaching and learning approaches include the use of music in learning, as music is a passion for Mary. For example, Mary's teacher uses musical prompts to signal changing from one task to the next, and to signal break and lunch times (thus supporting learning about time. Music is also used in SPHE to explore of moods and emotions - students are encouraged to 'draw the emotion' - say boredom - after selecting an appropriate piece of music to correspond to boredom from a selection offered by the teacher. This leads to great fun among the group as they respond to different pieces. Mary enjoys these approaches.

Throughout the day there are many opportunities provided for pair work, where roles are assigned to each student. Mary often finds this very challenging and she is supported throughout, by prompting, modelling, and lots of encouragement.



Mary's Priority Learning Units

Numeracy

Element: Managing money

Snapshot of some sample teaching and learning activities that cover this element

This PLU is taught and learned through games, role playing, real life shopping experiences, as well as desk and classroom work. Recognition of money is through plastic coins and notes, then moving on to real money. Matching, and pairing exercises assist recognition, for example, *Find me the same coin as this one*. The coins are then laid side by side until they are matched together. This is then developed into equivalence matching games, and finding the coin and note combinations to meet required amounts. In class, make-believe shopping situations are arranged by the teacher with the group.

Mary is guided by an adult through real shopping experiences, finding an item she can afford, finding the right coins to pay for it, and anticipating the correct change.

Element: Developing an awareness of time

Snapshot of some sample teaching and learning activities that cover this element

Mary learns to follow her own timetable using a Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS) style picture timetable. Pictures of Mary's daily routine are laid out in sequence daily. Mary works on this with support. Thus Mary knows what activity is coming next. The timetable is drawn up with Mary and she colours and glues them in place. This enables Mary's ownership of her daily schedule.

Mary's comprehension and use of her timetable develops over time. She learns to recognise key times in the day, such as break times. Appropriate clock faces are associated with each pictured activity, so clock reading is combined with following the time schedule.



Mary's Priority Learning Units

Communicating and Literacy

Element:

Speaking appropriately for a variety of purposes and demonstrating attentiveness as a listener

Snapshot of some sample teaching and learning activities that cover this element

This PLU extends across all of Mary's school experiences. Conversation about her musical interests, whether she enjoyed an outing, or her opinion of a new release by her favourite singer are all opportunities that are used to develop her talking and listening throughout the school day. Mary's receptive language ability is strong relative to her expressive language. Role play, DVD examples and other modelling along with games, assist Mary to distinguish language appropriate to different settings. Conversation skills are prompted and modelled through a morning news style lesson. The teacher and Mary take turns telling their news. Questioning forms a vital part of this for Mary.

Teacher: 'What did you do last night?'

Mary: 'Television.'

Teacher: 'Did you watch Fair City on television?'

Mary: 'Yes'

Teacher: 'Do you want to know what I did?'

Mary: 'Yes.'

Teacher: 'Ok, ask me!'.....

Another example of learning in this area would be in Materials Technology (Wood). The teacher demonstrates to Mary how to do a task and gives a running commentary, e.g.

'Now, Mary, I'm going to cut this piece of wood here and then we'll cut it together with this piece. Can you hold this block for me?'

Mary's response is that she smiles and repeats some of the vocabulary of the lesson. She enjoys the activity. At the end of the project Mary has a finished piece of work for herself, which she has achieved with some support, e.g. a shelf and a CD rack. With support and question prompts, she can describe in basic terms what it is and how she made it.



Mary's Priority Learning Units

Living in a Community

Element: Developing good relationships and Resolving conflict

Snapshot of some sample teaching and learning activities that cover this element

For this PLU, talk and discussion of topics during SPHE class is useful. Mary is involved in listening attentively to, responding to and initiating conversation, as well as participating in discussion. Particularly relevant are the SPHE topics of communication skills, friendships, relationships and sexuality.

Links with the wider community

Mary participates each morning in the breakfast club. This provides for learning in an atmosphere of calm and wellbeing, and gives students opportunities to interact with each other in a sociable way. The smell of toast and hot tea in the morning before class starts is encouraging to the students and gives them a positive start to the day. Mary thoroughly enjoys this social setting each morning. Her role on a day might be setting the table with an SNA's assistance and drying up utensils afterwards. Her peers take turns in doing this with her.

Mary is an enthusiastic member of the school's *rings* team. This fosters turn taking, competing, resolving difficulties that naturally arise in team activities – who does what, goes first and so on? Inter-school competition also enhances negotiation and co-operation in groups. This learning is further supported in PE through dance and other activities, through group and pair work in Home Economics, in drama class and many other collaborative learning opportunities across the curriculum.



Mary's Priority Learning Units

Personal Care

Element:

Developing good daily personal care

Snapshot of some sample teaching and learning activities that cover this element

All Mary's activities in this area of learning are practical and based in real life. Washing one's face, brushing teeth, hair, and dressing oneself are taught by modelling. Mary has her own wash bag with face cloth, soaps, toothbrush and toothpaste which she uses for these lessons. She is encouraged to be as independent as possible and can complete these tasks with a minimum of prompting and support. Using zips and fasteners is taught in a realistic way also. Mary is shown which side of the zip to hold and which side to pull up with her right hand to close the fastener.



Mary's Priority Learning Units

Preparing for Work

Element:

Taking part in a work related activity

Snapshot of some sample teaching and learning activities that cover this element

The guidance counsellor meets Mary once a week to review and plan this PLU. Mary is involved in the school's in-house work experience programme. She takes responsibility for different areas of the classroom and school, with support. A rota of tasks includes ringing the school bell at appropriate times (linked with learning of time above), staffroom shopping and organisation, caring for the grounds, working in the school garden, assisting with recycling, e.g. colour coding and labelling of bins. The rota in which Mary participates also includes maintaining soaps and towels in the toilet. With SNA help, Mary gathers towels and soaps and travels around the school wheeling a push trolley, distributing clean towels to the classrooms, and taking used towels to the laundry. Mary is prompted, when necessary, to ask for the towels and uses social vocabulary of 'please' and 'thank you' in her interactions with school personnel. This is preparation for the out-of-school work experience offered to students in senior cycle, in a local hotel. Mary will be able to participate in this next year.

Recognising progress and achievement

The school fosters honest acknowledgement and recognition of progress and achievement in both positive behaviour and learning.

Whole school assemblies on Fridays provide opportunities for celebrating sporting, academic, social and other achievements.

Within their class each week students are awarded green and gold cards for specific achievements each week. Students of the month are proposed from each class. The overall winner receives a plaque and a framed photograph. Phone calls home and notes in journals also communicate achievements and learning, and recognise the positive progress of students.

Main assessment tasks/ activities for evidence of learning

Mary's class teacher acknowledges Mary's learning strengths and her achievements on an ongoing basis throughout the school day, combining this with suggestions and support as to how she can meet some of her challenges.

Mary likes charting her progress and this is a continuous motivator towards further learning. Setting her new learning targets is also integral to her learning and its ongoing assessment for her. Sharing her learning successes and challenges with her family helps sustain and encourage Mary's interest in her learning.

Mary's learning is assessed by teacher observation of skills acquired and targets reached. Her portfolio is assessed weekly, with her, in terms of task completion. Class tests are differentiated. These are also stored in her portfolio.

Some reflections on the learning programme

The learning programme is a great way to review Mary's progress and achievements throughout the year. It has been very useful for the school to link the review of Mary's learning programme to her IEP review meetings. Going forward the school will need to pay more attention to different ways of gathering evidence of Mary's learning, for example maybe taking a video clip of her demonstrating a task. It is also vital to establish links with the outside agencies involved in Mary's care and to include them in the planning and implementation of her programme.

Mary's foster sister has noted that she has become more social and she interacts more with her peers. She has become interested in doing things for herself, making her own lunch and looking after her appearance. Her foster sister is very concerned that Mary's independence and life skills are the main focus of her learning programme next year.

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