

Activity 1: The Diversity Walk: A Step Towards Equity

Case Study: Jake

Jake is a 15-year-old student in his third year in the local community school. He is the eldest of four siblings and comes from a single-parent household. His father is currently in jail for armed robbery, leaving his mother to raise the family on her own. They live in a small apartment next to the hotel where she works, which makes it challenging for her to closely monitor both Jake's behaviour and academic progress.

Jake often finds the school day tedious and struggles to stay engaged in most classes. He has difficulty sitting still for extended periods and maintaining focus, which affects his learning. His NEPS report highlights significant challenges in literacy and numeracy, as well as diagnoses of dyspraxia and ADHD. This information is documented in his student support file. Academically, he finds subjects such as mathematics, science, and business studies particularly difficult.

Despite these challenges, Jake is passionate about football and plays for both his school team and a local club. His PE teacher recognises his natural talent and believes he has the potential to secure a scholarship with one of the English Premier academies.

Teachers have varying perspectives on Jake's behaviour and potential. Those who teach practical subjects often describe him as a bright and capable young person with significant promise. However, other teachers note that he can be hyperactive and prone to behavioural issues, which sometimes disrupt the classroom environment.

Case Study: Oleksandra

Oleksandra is a 16-year-old Transition Year student from Ukraine who arrived in Ireland in 2022 with her mother and siblings. Her father remains in Ukraine with the army, and she worries about him, especially as their contact is limited. Despite arriving with little English, she has progressed to a B2 level and is a talented piano player, performing at school events. She also enjoys dance and was previously engaged in extracurricular activities. She had worked very hard in junior cycle as she was preparing for her Ukrainian exams while trying to keep up with her junior cycle studies.

Recently, teachers have noticed significant changes in her behaviour. She has become withdrawn in class, her attendance has declined, and she often appears tired, pale, and distressed. She frequently asks to leave the classroom and has, on occasion, left the school without permission.

Living in a hotel for an extended period may be impacting her well-being. In response, the school has assigned an SNA for some classes and placed her on the "Lean In, Lean Out" list to ensure she receives additional support. Teachers continue to monitor her attendance and engagement while encouraging her involvement in activities that bring her joy.

Case Study: Margaret

Margaret is a 15-year-old third-year student from the travelling community. She was placed in the Level 2 Programme in first-year due to a diagnosis of a general learning difficulty and attends a combination of mainstream and withdrawal support classes. In her mainstream classes, she often benefits from team teaching.

Margaret engages well in class when she is present and in good spirits, but her attendance is a major concern. Her family frequently travels to Northern Ireland throughout the school year, contributing to her frequent absences. She is also consistently late to school each morning, which affects her ability to settle into the school day.

Margaret was suspended following a physical fight with another student, which escalated from a verbal disagreement. As part of her reintegration, she attends the Behaviour for Learning classroom to reflect on the incident and develop strategies for managing conflicts in the future. While she engaged somewhat in these sessions, there are ongoing concerns about her ability to regulate emotions in challenging situations.

She has expressed a desire to leave school after third year, as none of her siblings continued into senior cycle. Despite her challenges, Margaret has an exceptional singing voice but does not participate in any extracurricular activities. Teachers continue to encourage her to engage with school life, as music could provide her with a positive outlet and a sense of belonging.

Case Study: Gary

Gary is a 17-year-old student who performs very well in most of his classes. His parents have high expectations, which he strives to meet. He was a student of the Centre for Talented Youth Ireland (CTYI) in primary school, demonstrating strong academic ability from a young age. While he places some pressure on himself, he generally maintains a balanced approach to life and study.

Gary has told his teachers that he is receiving grinds in maths and chemistry to ensure he achieves the highest possible grades. He is highly motivated and has a clear career goal of becoming an engineer. He is methodical in his approach to studying and is particularly strong in problem-solving subjects.

In addition to his academic success, Gary actively contributes to the school community as a junior coach for the 1st-year basketball team, a role he initially took on as part of his Gaisce Awards during Transition Year. His commitment to coaching has continued beyond the programme, highlighting his leadership skills and dedication to teamwork.

Overall, Gary is a diligent student with a strong work ethic and a clear academic path. Teachers continue to support him in refining his exam techniques and managing academic pressure while encouraging his leadership skills in extracurricular activities.

Case Study: Tommy

Tommy is a 14-year-old, 2nd year student in a small rural DEIS school. He lives with both parents on a small family farm and is an only child. Tommy transitioned from a small rural DEIS school last year and has presented with very low literacy and numeracy scores on standardised assessment. His 6th class teacher reported that Tommy had received intervention in primary school but continued to struggle to access the curriculum. There are concerns that he may have dyslexia and dyscalculia. Tommy was closely monitored by teachers during first year and the work has been differentiated to meet his needs, teachers cognisant of his difficulties and challenges.

Tommy attends regularly but is becoming increasingly distracted and unfocused in class. Although he rarely completes homework and his handwriting is difficult to read, Tommy is happy in school, is sociable and has a friendship group, some of whom share his interest in farm machinery and agriculture. He does not participate in any sports.

The HSCL is also closely involved with the family. Both parents can't comprehend how Tommy is not accessing the Level 3 curriculum equal with his peers but are adamant that Tommy should not be withdrawn for small group support or be given 'easy worksheets' to complete in class as this caused him great upset previously.

Tommy is considered a student who is 'at risk' of school refusal and has been absent on occasions where class exams have been scheduled.