**Appendix 3: Case study from pilot project**

**School Context**

This school is a community college, operating under the local Education and Training Board. It is based in a large town and caters for 344 students enrolled from a mixture of 20 urban and rural primary schools. It has 36 teachers and 2 SNAs on the staff.

**Step 1:**

**Identification of students with special educational needs**

Since 2013, assessment strategies in this school involved assessing students’ literacy and numeracy skills on standardised tests, analysis of students’ 6th class reports and teacher observations. On average 30% of students attained below STen 3 in numeracy and literacy. A number of first-year students with significant needs did not have professional reports. Participation in the pilot provided the school with greater scope to ‘look beyond’ professional assessment and to focus on actual learning needs as opposed to diagnosis. This enabled the school to address aspects that were not previously assessed, such as students’ skill development in Mathematics.

**Step 2:**

**Setting learning targets**

Through participation in the pilot, the school became aware of the advantages of using the

Continuum of Support and Student Support File as a means of recording students’ learning targets and of tracking their progress in meeting these targets. The Continuum of Support enabled the school to bring a whole-school approach to the process of target-setting.

**Step 3:**

**Planning teaching methods and approaches**

Overall, the school found that participation in the pilot allowed it to respond in a more immediate way to the range of student needs. In an effort to build whole-staff capacity, the school developed and implemented its own approach to *Assessment for Learning* (AfL). As part of this, teachers agreed on ten assessment strategies and requested that all staff experiment with these. In their reflections at the end of the pilot, teachers reported that they saw evidence of this having a positive impact on teaching and learning.

The school also used some of its resources to engage in team-teaching. What was most beneficial about this approach was that it enabled all students in the class to participate, whereas in a more traditional mixed-ability English class, many of these students with special educational needs may have participated less.

Finally, in the teaching of Mathematics the school used some of its teaching resources to provide targeted intervention for a small group of students with particular difficulties in this area.

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**Step 4:**

**Organising early intervention and prevention programmes**

In order to support incoming first-year students, the school put a student support team in place. This team viewed transition to first-year as a process and was charged with overseeing the early intervention and transition programme for incoming first years. The team met weekly and sought to identify the learning needs of incoming students and to implement strategies, track and collect data (both hard and soft data) and evaluate the students’ progress. In terms of devising learning priorities, the support team adopted a broad holistic approach and considered social, emotional and behavioural issues as well as learning needs.

**Step 5:**

**Organising and deploying teaching resources**

In its approach to timetabling, the school prioritised its provision for students with special educational needs. This was done prior to allocating other teachers and classes and facilitated the development of a core team for special educational needs.

Participation in the pilot project highlighted the need for the school to build a core team of special education teachers. This has now become a priority for the school and the model provided more flexibility to do this.

**Step 6:**

**Tracking, recording and reviewing progress**

Participation in the pilot project facilitated the school in looking at its system of planning, tracking and recording for students with special educational needs, especially students without professional assessments. As a result of their learning during the pilot, teachers worked on a new whole-school approach to planning, tracking and recording progress. During the pilot they found that the reassessment of students at the end of a unit of work or a specific intervention had enabled them to measure progress in a real way. They also found that the use of assessment data to inform learning plans made the process more meaningful for teachers, parents and students.

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