

C: Services

Write-Minded

Write-Minded **youngballymun**'s literacy support service is an area-based literacy and educational strategy. *Write-Minded* aims to improve literacy outcomes for children and young people in Ballymun. It is designed to provide culturally sensitive supports and interventions to promote literacy and educational wellbeing within the community through the application of targeted and universal supports to children, young people and their families. *Write-Minded* is being implemented in partnership with community and statutory organisations.

Write-Minded has been developed by the Literacy Support Service Design Team, whose membership is listed below:

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The key features of the **youngballymun** strategy – integration; innovation; research and evaluation; capacity building; sustainability; and a life-cycle approach informed the service design.

The work of the Service Design Team was also informed by: the expertise and experience of the team; presentations on the respective literacy strategies from the Ballymun Principal's Network, Trinity Comprehensive, Youthreach, and the Ballymun Adult Read and Write Scheme; research commissioned by the Ballymun Development Group^{122 123}; research carried out by School of Education and Life-long Learning, UCD¹²⁴; and other relevant national and international research.

Rationale for the Service

Speaking and listening, together with reading and writing are primary communication skills that are central to children's intellectual, social and emotional development. Competence in oral language and the successful transition to literacy is seen as a crucial protective factor in ensuring later academic success, positive self-esteem and improved life chances¹²⁵. Conversely poor communication skills put children at risk of rejection and isolation by their peers¹²⁶, being bullied¹²⁷, and developing associated behavioural difficulties¹²⁸. As they grow older these children are more likely to have poorer emotional health and are less likely to remain in education. In adulthood there is a stronger likelihood of mental health problems, criminal involvement¹²⁹ and restricted employment opportunities. Almost all children with language or communication difficulties will require support with some aspect of learning to read or write; assessment, identification and appropriate intervention are vital in this regard.

Early language development is an important factor in the foundations of literacy and longitudinal studies show that language continues to be associated with good literacy outcomes throughout schooling¹³⁰. There is a high incidence of language delay amongst children in Ballymun. Research

122 McKeown, K., Haase, T. (2005; 2006) *ibid*.

123 Hayes, N. & Bradley, S. (2006) *ibid*

124 Mac Ruairc, G. et al (2008) *Literacy in Ballymun: Interim Report*. School of Education and Lifelong Learning. UCD.

125 Rose, J. (2006) *Independent Review of the Teaching of Early Reading*: Department of Education and Skills. DfES Nottingham.

126 Botting, N. & Conti-Ramsden, G. (2000) *Social and Behavioural Difficulties in Children with Language Impairment* *Child Language, Teaching and Therapy* 16:105-120.

127 Knox, E., & Conti-Ramsden, G. (2003) *Bullying risk of 11-year old Children with specific Language Impairment: Does school placement matter?* *International Journal of Language and Communication Disorders* 387:1:1-12.

128 Davidson, F. & Howlin, P. (1997) *A follow-up study of children attending a primary age Language Unit*. *European Journal of Disorders of Communication* 32: 19-36.

129 Clegg, J., Hollis, C., Rutter, M. (1999) *Life Sentence: What happens to children with developmental language disorders in later life?* *Bulletin of the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists* 571:16-18.

130 Stothard, S., et al (1998) *Language impaired preschoolers: a follow-up into adolescence*. *Journal of*

from the UK shows that the prevalence of speech and language disorders in lower socioeconomic areas is as high as 57%¹³¹. A communication assessment of Junior Infants pupils in a Ballymun School in 2007 revealed that more than one in every three children in the class (37%) had speech difficulties, and approximately two in every three children had receptive language difficulties (66%) and expressive language difficulties (69%)¹³².

There are many other challenges related to literacy development. There is a clear association between socioeconomic disadvantage and literacy achievement. For example, numerous Irish studies have found that reading achievement is below average in schools where a large proportion of pupils are from disadvantaged backgrounds, or where the school is designated as disadvantaged^{133 134 135}. At a primary school level, more than one in four children (27%) in Ballymun fall below the 10th percentile on recognised reading scores compared with roughly one in ten pupils nationally¹³⁶. In simple terms, these are pupils with serious reading difficulties (ff10th percentile). Thus primary school children in Ballymun are at least two and a half times more likely to have serious reading difficulty than children in a representative national sample.

If unaddressed, difficulties with reading become more pronounced as children move through to the senior cycle of primary school and transfer to secondary school. This was highlighted by research commissioned by **youngballymun** which analysed standardised test scores of attainment in literacy in primary schools in Ballymun¹³⁷. The findings indicated a downward shift in the pattern of overall literacy attainment; 10% of the children in 1st class scored less than the 10th percentile compared to a 20% in 3rd class and 35% of children in 6th class.

Reading scores are positively correlated with attendance; meaning that regular school attenders tend to have higher reading scores¹³⁸. In addition children's attitudes and motivation to reading

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- Speech Language and Hearing Research.41:407-418.
- 131 Locke, A., & Ginsborg, J. (2003) Spoken language in the early years: the cognitive and linguistic development of three-to-five year older children from social-economically deprived backgrounds. *Education and Child Psychology* 20:68-79.
- 132 Quigley, D. (2008) Pupils benefit from innovative Speech and Language Programme. *HSE Health Matters*. 4:3:25.
- 133 Eivers, E. et al (2005) *Literacy in Disadvantaged Primary Schools: Problems and solutions*. Education Research Centre: Dublin.
- 134 Cosgrove, J. et al (2000) *The 1998 National Assessment of English reading*. Dublin: Education Research Centre.
- 135 Weir, S. (2001) The reading achievements of primary school pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds. *Irish Journal of Education*. 32:23-43.
- 136 McKeown, K., Fitzgerald, G. (2006) *Experiences and Attitudes of early school leavers: Report prepared for Equal Youth Project in Ballymun and Mayo*.
- 137 Mac Ruairc, G. et al (2008) *ibid*.
- 138 Cosgrove, J. et al (2000) *ibid*

are linked to reading achievement; in so far as those who like reading have higher reading scores than those who do not. Motivation appears to be influenced by what children see as the function of reading and also how they perceive their ability to read¹³⁹. Reading scores are also positively correlated with parental educational attainment. Levels of educational attainment among parents in Ballymun are lower than the national average. For example, research indicates that mothers in Ballymun leave school early; the highest level of educational attainment for the majority (74%) is the Junior Certificate. Conversely at a national level the majority of mothers have a Leaving Certificate or higher (65%)¹⁴⁰.

Although parental education and socioeconomic status are important factors in children's literacy attainment, the home environment (e.g. reading to children at home, having plenty of books in the home) is also important. For example, pupils who have been read to regularly before starting school have much higher reading scores than those rarely or never read to¹⁴¹. Moreover research indicated that reading instruction facilitated by a specialist teacher does not produce improvements in attainment comparable in magnitude with those obtained from working with parents¹⁴². The development of children's oral language and literacy skills in the home and community presents a particular challenge for schools and teachers. An Irish report detailing the challenges to literacy in disadvantaged primary schools identified the lack of parental involvement in children's schooling and pupils' lack of exposure to books and other educational capital in the home as a barrier to promoting literacy skills¹⁴³. Parents themselves often need support in how they can best help their child with reading in the home, particularly if they have poor literacy skills and lack confidence in this regard. Moreover there is a sense that, as children move through the primary school cycle, parents are less likely to become involved¹⁴⁴. Thus community support for parents needs to be extended to empower them to become educators of their own children.

In light of the identified needs within the community **youngballymun** developed the *Write-Minded* Service to improve the literacy attainment of children and young people in Ballymun, through targeted literacy and language support, engaging with parents, supporting and enhancing school attendance, delivering teacher training and development strategies to ease the transition between primary and secondary school.

139 Mac Ruairc, G. et al (2008) *ibid*.

140 McKeown, K. & Haase, T. (2005) *ibid*.

141 Eivers, E. et al (2005) *ibid*.

142 Tizard, J. et al (1982) Collaboration between teachers and parents in assisting children's reading. In Wearmouth, J. et al (Eds). *Addressing Difficulties in Literacy Development, Responses at Family, School, Pupil, Teacher Levels* (pp. 39-57) London & New York: Routledge Falmer.

143 Department of Education & Science (2005) *Literacy and numeracy in disadvantage schools; Challenges for teachers and learners*. Dublin: government Publications Office.

144 Mac Ruairc, G. et al (2008) *ibid*.

Guiding Principles

The Strategy understands literacy to be a holistic concept that extends far beyond simply reading and writing. While communication is at its heart, it is more than the technical skills of communication. In accordance with the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA)⁴⁵ the following definition is used:

Literacy involves listening, speaking, reading, writing, numeracy and using everyday technology to communicate and handle information. It includes more than the technical skills of communication (reading, writing and spelling): it also has personal, social and economic dimensions. Literacy increases the opportunity for individuals and communities to reflect on their situation explore new possibilities and initiate change.

With this understanding, *Write-Minded* is guided by the following principles:

Guiding Principles	
1	The Service will maintain continuity of support between primary and secondary level education and of relationships therein.
2	The Service will adopt an approach which fosters the inclusiveness of all agencies involved in education and learning through family-based needs, child-friendly services and appropriate language.
3	The Service will ensure accessibility for all to community and statutory services and supports, as well as cultural inclusivity.
4	The Service will be integrated, streamlined and collectively owned.
5	The Service will adopt a non-judgemental approach which supports individuality and flexibility.
6	The Service will implement consultative processes which encourage ongoing monitoring and supervision, reflection, review and evaluation.
7	The Service will facilitate smooth transitions between life stages, with integration between different service providers.

Target Groups

The Service has identified literacy needs across four main groups in the community;

Target Group	Risk Factors
Children & Young People	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delayed literacy attainment • Delayed oral language development • Poor reading comprehension skills • Disengagement with the educational system • Transition difficulties between primary and secondary school
Parents/Families	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Negative experience of, and association with, school • Health challenges, include high levels of depression • Disengagement with the education system and children’s education • Multiple stresses
Schools & Teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highly stretched resources • Limited peer support and mentoring • Limited training and capacity building to enhance existing strategies and interventions. • Curriculum overload
Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Absence of text/literature within the community • Limited opportunity for creative, oral, written celebration at a community level • High levels of intergenerational disengagement with formal education and poor literacy

Desired Outcomes

The focus of *Write-Minded* is on child outcomes. Considering the child within the context of the family, the school and the community ensures that the family, schools and community services are very much embedded in the Service.

Write-Minded seeks to improve the literacy outcomes of children and young people in Ballymun through targeted literacy and language supports, developing a positive attitude to reading and supporting children's transition between primary and secondary school. *Write-Minded* will also support school attendance, enhance parental engagement and deliver teacher training and capacity building.

Service Components

Write-Minded Service design team has developed an integrated strategy that will interface with children and young people, parents and families, the community, schools and teachers. There are both targeted and universal dimensions to the strategy. The targeted strategies will focus on children, young people and parents with specific needs. The universal strategies will prioritise additionality and coordination. The specific components of the service are:

1	Literacy and language development (in-school)
2	Teacher training and capacity building (in-school)
3	Transition between primary and secondary school
4	Parental engagement
5	Family and Community Strand
6	School Attendance strategy
7	Additionality and Coordination

1. Literacy and Language Development

Language is the key to literacy. An in-school oral language and comprehension strategy will be developed to support the implementation of the curriculum. This intervention will be integrated with the existing DEIS supports, thereby ensuring no duplication. A full-time Literacy Coordinator and Oral Language Development Officer were appointed in Spring 2009 to deliver this aspect of *Write-Minded* in partnership with the primary and secondary schools in Ballymun. The specifics of this intervention will draw on evidence of what works, the learning from current practice within the DEIS programme of work, and opportunities for innovation. The objective of this intervention will be to enhance oral language, comprehension and literacy outcomes.

2. Teacher training and capacity building

An in-school strategy will be directed towards developing a whole school approach to the teaching and promotion of literacy across the school staff team. Training to enhance understanding and awareness of the importance of culturally appropriate approaches will be provided; opportunities for the accreditation of training will be pursued. In addition, mentoring and peer support that encourages reflective practice will be made available.

3. Transition between primary and secondary school

Planning and support of the transition between primary and secondary school will be provided. In addition, the support and coordination of existing initiatives will include the promotion of school attendance; this will integrate with existing attendance strategies.

4. Parental engagement

The service design has recognised the central role of parents in children's learning. The engagement of parents will be supported across the literacy strategy through a variety of means including for example, school and community events that profile the work of the children and engage with parents, the outreach role of the home-school-community liaison team, as well as the active targeting of parents of children in the literacy and language development programme.

5. Family and Community Strand

The Family and Community Strand of the strategy includes:

- Creating opportunities to include parents in activities within the school that support and enhance children's literacy and learning
- Providing opportunities across the community for parents to participate in their children's literacy and learning
- Promoting the vital role that adult and community education plays in family learning
- Raising the awareness across the community of the role the community, family, and school can play in promoting children's learning; children's attendance in school; and making the transition to secondary school easier for young people to manage.

Write-Minded through *The Family and Community Strand* aims to improve literacy outcomes for children by increasing Focus on literacy, Quality of engagement and increasing Time on literacy tasks:

- **Focus**
 - Addressing barriers to engagement with literacy development
 - Increasing awareness of the importance of literacy development
 - Promoting high expectations for all
- **Quality**
 - Continued professional development
 - Empowerment and increased capacity of caregivers
 - Enhancing existing services
 - Supporting the creative use of ICT
- **Time**
 - Short-term and long-term planning to increase time spent on literacy development
 - Expansion of after-school services
 - Addressing holiday fallouts (out-of-school)

6. School Attendance

The research conducted by UCD indicated high levels of non-school attendance. This is a direct barrier to children's learning and educational attainment. **youngballymun** is an active member of the Ballymun School Attendance strategy and is lead agency in two strands including the monitoring and evaluation of the strategy.

7. Additionality & Coordination

The universal strand of *Write-Minded* will provide both additionality and coordination specifically to teacher training and capacity building and the transition between primary and secondary school. **youngballymun** acknowledges that there are currently strategies in place aimed at teacher training and capacity building and supporting the transition between primary and secondary school but that many of these strategies remain disconnected from one another, reducing the effectiveness of each and failing to maximise the resources available across the community. Therefore, *Write-Minded* will provide both 'additionality' and 'coordination' specifically in these areas with key service partners.

The *Write-Minded* service design has highlighted the need for these strands to be integrated – both at the specific strand level and across strands - and driven.

Evaluation of Write-Minded

youngballymun is currently developing a detailed Evaluation Plan for the *Write-Minded* service. Further updates will be available on www.youngballymun.org.