

Evaluation of Write-Minded

A shared area-based literacy strategy
Summary Report



*A shared area-based literacy strategy
for all children aged 4 – 18+*

Write Minded

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank all the schools, parents, children, and community organisations in Ballymun that have contributed to this evaluation. We have had a warm welcome from the local community during our many visits and have enjoyed the time we spent in Ballymun.

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- Marie Lawless, Policy and Research Officer, Ballymun Local Drug Taskforce
- Dr Eileen O'Connor, Director, Drumcondra Education Centre
- Fiona Rushe, Professional Development Support Team (PDST)
- Kate Hogan, Chairperson, Ballymun Principals' Network (BPN)
- Dr Máirín O'Sullivan, Department of Education and Skills (DES)/ *youngballymun* Board
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Introduction

1. This report presents the findings of the independent evaluation of Write-Minded undertaken by SQW in partnership with the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER). Write-Minded is an area-based literacy strategy that aims to support schools, families, and community-based initiatives and projects in Ballymun to improve literacy outcomes for children and young people. The strategy provides comprehensive, coordinated, system-wide supports for the implementation of a mix of targeted and universal evidence-based practices focused on promoting literacy and educational wellbeing for children, young people and families in the community.
2. Write-Minded is one of a suite of services and strategies that constitute *youngballymun* - a ten-year complex community change initiative - established as part of the Government and Atlantic Philanthropies funded Prevention and Early Intervention Programme for Children (PEIP).^a It fits with and reinforces, at a community level, the work of Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS). This is a national initiative, introduced by the Department of Education and Science in 2005, which aims to 'ensure that the educational needs of children and young people from disadvantaged communities are prioritised and effectively addressed'^b. The DEIS Action Plan for Educational Inclusion for 3 to 18 year olds was designed to provide a more coherent and targeted approach to educational disadvantage drawing together a focus on literacy, numeracy, home-school engagement and family literacy. It includes the provision of additional teaching resources and other supports for primary and post-primary schools.
3. In Ballymun, however, which has some of the highest deprivation levels of any area in Ireland^c, there was recognition that additional support and resources were necessary to augment DEIS supports and to counteract all of the barriers to educational inclusion faced by children and young people in the community. While all schools in Ballymun are designated as DEIS schools, they face a number of identified (although not necessarily unique) challenges in relation to developing literacy skills amongst the children in their classrooms. In particular;
 - Literacy attainment data demonstrates that children's primary-level reading scores are historically lower in Ballymun than the national average and that difficulties with reading become more pronounced as children move through the senior cycle of primary school^d.
 - The high incidence of language delay amongst children was an issue that

a The Prevention and Early Intervention Programme for Children (PEIP) was formally launched by government in 2006 to provide an innovative programme of support and quality care to foster better outcomes for children, young people and families from disadvantaged backgrounds.

b DES (2005) *Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS)*: Dublin Stationary Office.

c For example Ballymun D is the 2nd most deprived ED in Ireland according to the National Deprivation Index for Health and Health Research (see Kelly, A., & C. Teljure (2007) SAHRU Technical Report December 2007). Ballymun B is the 2nd most disadvantaged ED in Dublin City according to the Haase & Pratschke Deprivation Index. (<http://trutzaase.eu/deprivation-index/area-profiles/>).

d Mac Ruairc (2008) *Literacy in Ballymun*. UCD, School of Education and Lifelong Learning. Unpublished Report. *youngballymun*.



teachers considered to be problematic in each of the primary schools in the community, and is supported by research evidence^e. Moreover, data suggests that Ballymun pupils' language competencies decrease as they progress through the school cycle^f.

- Although there are a range of initiatives already in place to address reading comprehension difficulties, the need for greater consistency with respect to reading comprehension support was identified by schools^d.
- The difficulty in sustaining the progress of children in relation to their language development and literacy is compounded by the low level of parental involvement in their children's learning. The need to empower parents to become educators of their own children was identified^d.

e Quigley, D. (2008) Pupils benefit from innovative Speech and Language Programme. *HSE Health Matters* 4:3:25.

f Quigley et al (2012) Exploring the Observational Rating Scale (ORS) as language screening tool for primary school teachers: Implications for children with emotional and behavioural difficulties. Submission to the Special Issue of the *Journal: Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties* "Language, Communication and the Child with Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties: Implications for Practice".

4. In response to local literacy challenges, *youngballymun*, in partnership with the community of schools (11 primary schools and one post-primary school) and other key stakeholders, engaged in an independently facilitated service design process between February 2008 and October 2009. The ensuing locally developed literacy strategy, designed to bridge the divide between research and practice in the field, and to complement DEIS, focuses on two strands of work; school-based literacy support and family and community-based literacy support.
5. **Table 1** below summaries the key features of the Write-Minded Literacy Strategy across the two strands.

Table 1: KEY FEATURES OF THE WRITE-MINDED LITERACY STRATEGY	
School-Based Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop and implement a balanced literacy framework (addressing reading comprehension, reading fluency, writing and oral language) to support the embedding of literacy learning across the curriculum as a priority for all teachers within all schools in Ballymun
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tailored capacity building, teacher training activities and pedagogical support to facilitate the ongoing development and implementation of whole school literacy plans (via the balanced literacy framework) and to further integrate proven language and literacy methodologies into teaching across the curriculum.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support and embed school-wide assessment and ongoing monitoring procedures (outcome) to ensure the needs of children are identified (as early as possible) through assessment processes and addressed through the provision of timely, appropriate, supports.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support children's transition from primary to post-primary school through the development and implementation of Ballymun Transitions Programme
Family & Community Supports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop and implement methodologies and initiatives to engage and support families' literacy and educational support skills (using the balanced literacy framework) to empower them to become positive role-models for, and co-educators of their children.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engage, support and mentor community-based organisations to build their capacity to integrate literacy within their work and to respond to the emerging literacy needs of their client groups.

6. A core team are tasked with driving and supporting the facilitative implementation of the Write-Minded literacy strategy; a Literacy Co-ordinator^g, an Oral Language Development Officer^h (both appointed in 2009) and a Family and Community Literacy Development Officerⁱ (appointed in 2010). The core team actively guide and mentor those directly responsible for implementing the strategy; to this end they work with all schools in the community (11 primary and one post-primary school), the teachers therein, a range

g The Literacy Co-ordinator was formally DEIS Advisor

h The Oral Language Development Officer was Senior Speech and Language Therapist with the HSE, seconded to youngballymun.

i The Family and Community Literacy Development Officer was formally Family Literacy Co-ordinator and Tutor in Ballymun Adult Read and Write Scheme.

of community-based initiatives and projects and parents and families in Ballymun. In turn, the core team are mentored by experts in the field, including Professor Timothy Shanahan (Director of the Centre for Literacy, University of Illinois), Dr. Gerry MacRuairc (School of Education, University College Dublin) and Dr. Martine Smith (School of Linguistic, Speech and Communication Sciences, Trinity College, Dublin). An Implementation Team, comprising multiple local stakeholders, oversees the work of the core team and supports the ongoing implementation of the literacy strategy with fidelity and good effect. Strategic direction is provided to the team by youngballymun's Programme Manager.

7. A phased approach was adopted to the implementation of the Write-Minded strategy. Initial implementation started in early 2009 with the appointment of the Literacy Co-ordinator. The evaluation commenced once the core team had reached capacity (in mid 2010) to fully support the implementation of all strands of the strategy.

Objectives and Approach

8. In August 2010 SQW, in partnership with the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER), was appointed to undertake an evaluation of Write-Minded. The specific purpose of this evaluation was to understand the effectiveness of Write-Minded in relation to:
 - planning outcomes for schools
 - (primary/post-primary) transitional outcomes for pupils
 - pedagogical outcomes for teachers
 - children's literacy outcomes
 - literacy skills outcomes for families
 - literacy development outcomes for the wider community
9. A second aspect of the study was to facilitate the development and implementation of a mechanism to allow for the ongoing monitoring and evaluation of the literacy strategy.
10. Evaluation activity was carried out between October 2010 and January 2012, and comprised of literacy assessments with children in Ballymun primary schools, in-depth school-based interviews and a survey of teachers and Principals, as well as interviews with community organisations and discussion groups with local parents. A summary of the methodology and the timing of activities it outlined in Table 2.

TABLE 2. SUMMARY OF METHODOLOGY

Task & activities (and lead organisation)	Outputs	Dates undertaken
Literacy assessments (two rounds of assessments) – primary schools only <i>NFER</i>	· Collection of reading assessment data for all 1 st /3 rd /6 th class pupils	· February - June 2011
	· Group writing assessment with all 1 st /3 rd /6 th class pupils	· November 2010 – January 2011 and May – June 2011
	· Attitudes to literacy questionnaire with all 1 st /3 rd /6 th class pupils (n=746)	· May - June 2011
	· Analysis of CELF-4 assessments data (with selected pupils)	· June 2011
Qualitative research in schools (two rounds of fieldwork) <i>SQW</i>	· School case studies (all primary schools, 1 post-primary school and Youthreach)	· November 2010/2011
	· Interviews with Principal, teachers & support staff in each school (n=135)	· November 2010/2011
	· Teacher satisfaction questionnaire (first wave of fieldwork only) (n=117)	· February 2011
Community group interviews and parent/pupil discussion groups (two rounds of fieldwork) <i>SQW</i>	· Interviews with community/statutory organisations that have engaged with Write-Minded (n=12 individuals representing 9 organisations)	· January – February 2011
	· Feedback from parents/carers etc.	· December 2011 – January 2012

11. As Write-Minded adopted a phased approach to implementation and work was already underway at the time the evaluation was commissioned, it was not possible to set up a full experimental design using either a randomised control trial or a regression discontinuity design. Therefore, it was agreed that the most practical approach would be to use a pre- and post-test design to assess the impact of the strategy on child literacy outcomes. The approach adopted to measure children's literacy involved three specific assessments as follows:

- Analysis of data from MICRA-T (or DPRT-R, where appropriate) reading assessments^j across three year groups (1st, 3rd and 6th classes^k) at primary level (n=787). Assessment

^j There are two standardised reading assessments available to primary schools in Ireland – the Mary Immaculate College Reading Attainment Test (Micra-T) or the Drumcondra Primary Reading Test (DPRT-R). Three schools in Ballymun have changed to DPRT-R recently so comparative longitudinal data were not available. The remaining (8) schools continue to use Micra-T.

^k In Ballymun schools, children in 1st class are on average 6 years of age, 3rd class children are on average 8 years of age, and 6th class children are on average 11 years of age.



data was collected from all primary schools across all relevant class years for the academic year 2010/11; where appropriate historical data were provided (i.e. three years of assessment data were provided for 3rd class children).

- Analysis of CELF-4 (CELF - the Clinical Evaluation of Language Fundamentals) oral language assessment (a standardised tool for assessing language abilities) data, on a sub-sample of pupils in 3rd and 6th class (in 2010/11; n=165). These assessments were undertaken at two time points: September 2009 (when selected pupils were in 2nd and 5th classes) and May 2011. The CELF-4 assessments were administered to pupils on a one-to-one basis by the Oral Language Development Officer and speech and language therapy students from Trinity College Dublin.
- There is no standardised assessment of writing in Ireland. Consequently, bespoke writing assessments (designed by NFER) were administered by the classroom teachers to pupils (in 1st, 3rd and 6th classes) as a group exercise at two time points. The assessments which comprised of two age-appropriate writing tasks, one shorter and one longer, were designed to focus on different writing forms and purposes.
- A Pupil Data Form was developed that allowed for the capture (on an ongoing basis) of anonymised pupil-level data (using alpha-numeric pupil identification codes) across each of the assessments undertaken. This included the capture of historic MICRA-T/DPRT-R data for all pupils in the relevant year groups (to look at longer-term trends), assessment data from the two waves of CELF-4 assessments (for a

cohort of 117 pupils^l) and the writing assessments (for all pupils in the relevant year groups).

12. In addition, NFER developed two pupil questionnaires based on items from the PIRLS 2011 questionnaire^m (one used with 3rd and 6th class pupils and a simplified version for 1st class pupils) in consultations with *youngballymun*. The purpose of the questionnaire was to elicit pupils' confidence and enjoyment of literacy (i.e. reading, writing, speaking and listening). The questionnaires were administered by classroom teachers to the whole-class groups in May 2011.

Key Findings

Engagement with schools

13. Primary schools have engaged actively with the Write-Minded strategy. This was borne out by teachers' participation in Write-Minded's training and professional development activities (even when delivered outside of school hours). A series of professional development opportunities are provided throughout the academic year, some facilitated by the Write-Minded team and some externally facilitated. Many teachers in the area had previously attended First Steps training, and Write-Minded offered supplementary training sessions. Teacher participation in these First Steps series of training programmes was goodⁿ and the bespoke professional development workshops were particularly well attended^o.
14. The existing local knowledge of the Oral Language Development Officer, the Literacy Coordinator and the Family and Community Literacy Development Officer, as well as their professional experience, was highly regarded by local schools. The team members were trusted and their experience of working in Ballymun schools in their previous roles was valued. This and the fact that the schools (and a broad range of community partners with an interest in literacy) played an active role in identifying the core components of the literacy strategy during the service design process have undoubtedly been key factors in initiating and maintaining primary schools engagement with Write-Minded.
15. Engagement at a post-primary level was more challenging. Once Ballymun pupils have completed their primary education, they have a choice of post-primary schools, both within and immediately outside of Ballymun. Second level choices within Ballymun itself include one post-primary school and a Youthreach Centre (for the education of students aged 16 years and older) and there are twelve post-primary schools within

^l 165 pupils took part on the first wave of CELF-4 assessments, however, only 117 of this group eventually completed all aspects of the literacy assessments (i.e. two waves of the CELF-4 and writing assessments, as well as MICRA-T and/or Drumcondra reading comprehension assessments)

^m The Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) is an international assessment which focuses on three main areas of literacy: process of comprehension, purposes for reading, and reading behaviors and attitudes. The background questionnaire is used to determine the reading behaviors and attitudes. Ireland participated in PIRLS in 2011 for the first time; data will be available in 2012/13.

ⁿ For example, 29 teachers across 7 schools completed the First Steps Speaking and Listening training, 40 teachers across 9 schools completed the First Steps Reading training and 21 teachers across 7 schools completed the First Steps Writing training.

^o For example, 171 teachers across all 11 schools participated in vocabulary and reading fluency workshops, and 92 teachers across 9 school participated in the spelling workshops


two kilometres of Ballymun. This presents a challenge in targeting resources and providing follow-on literacy supports for students from Ballymun primary schools. To a large degree, the challenges posed in developing literacy at post-primary level reflect issues facing the education sector as a whole (e.g. limited instruction in teaching literacy during initial post-primary teacher education and low teacher confidence in supporting literacy) rather than being Ballymun-specific.

Planning outcomes for schools

16. Write-Minded uses evidence-based approaches to develop a focus for the work. The Balanced Literacy Framework incorporates the four categories of instruction recommended by the Chicago Literacy Framework^p—word knowledge, reading fluency, reading comprehension, and writing. The Framework requires equal emphasis on each of these four aspects of literacy instruction. Fundamental to the framework is the integration of literacy across the curriculum and the development of whole school literacy plans.
17. From 2005 onward, DEIS has required those schools which benefit from DEIS funding to focus on whole school action planning to address each of the areas: literacy, numeracy, attendance, retention, educational progression, attainment, engagement with parents and with external agencies and community bodies. Building on individual DEIS schools' whole school planning for literacy, Write-Minded's support has helped to ensure clarity, continuity and consistency in the planning process for literacy across the community of schools. This support has contributed to each primary school in Ballymun now having a tailored whole school literacy planning process in place, informed by the balanced literacy framework, which is also guiding literacy teaching across the curriculum. Teachers reported the whole school literacy plan as being a central feature of many staff meetings, with regular discussion on progress and feedback from teachers on which aspects were working well (or less so). Supporting the ongoing development of whole school planning for literacy in Ballymun primary schools is an important contribution of Write-Minded which is leading to whole school planning for literacy becoming more strongly embedded in school practice.

(Primary/post-primary) Transition outcomes

18. *youngballymun*-commissioned research (during service design) highlighted the particular difficulties associated with transition to second level for all pupils and particularly for those with literacy difficulties. It suggested the need to 'scaffold the children's transition from primary to second level'¹⁴. In response, Write-Minded developed and supported the implementation (at a classroom level) of the Ballymun Transitions Programme, designed to support and prepare pupils for the transition from primary to post-primary school. The transitions programme included the development of a resource pack for teachers and 6th class pupils in collaboration with teachers, Principals and school support services, and informed by feedback from pupils.
19. Feedback from teachers was very positive; they reported growing confidence in delivering the transitions programme and growing awareness of the anxieties children face when they are about to move school. Teachers indicated the initiative was benefiting young people and was making the transition between schools easier for them, because their concerns and anxieties were being addressed.



“It’s my 3rd year teaching Mission Transition - it is really helping to prepare children for secondary school and has been a huge success. The children love the work packs”.

Pedagogical outcomes for teachers

20. Teachers indicated that, as a result of participating in Write-Minded training and development activities, they were adapting their teaching style and putting new techniques into practice. First Steps training series, one-to-one support and lesson modelling were most frequently mentioned as the most useful support received. First Steps is one of several resources being provided under DEIS; it is a highly structured programme that offers a range of evidence-based methodologies to support teaching and learning; it provides advice on how to teach, not what to teach. It covers the areas of oral language, reading, and writing. Teachers reported that the tailored capacity-building activities of Write-Minded have helped them implement First Steps approaches.

“The support of Write-Minded has been fantastic. It has put the First Steps books and messages into action and brought the whole programme to life, providing much needed support resources and ideas, and also making the First Steps programme more relevant”.

21. Examples of changes in teaching practice also included: the implementation of a cross-curricular approach to teaching literacy, more frequent and improved assessment and review of pupil progress, and a greater focus on writing and more interactive teaching approaches. Teachers reported feeling more confident in teaching literacy as a result of the Continuing Professional Development (CPD) support they had received, with several stating they were now enjoying teaching more.

“I have a whole different outlook on teaching English now. I find it easier to teach – that probably has an effect on the children. I enjoy teaching, so they enjoy it more”.

22. That said, several Principals and teachers also suggested that the number of initiatives and new ideas being introduced through Write-Minded had, at times, been a bit overwhelming and that there was a need to slow down and consolidate the learning to date, to make sure that the language and literacy methodologies are being embedded in teaching practice. To this end, it was suggested that more focus on in-classroom support to help embed different literacy approach would be useful, and the development of tailored in-classroom resources for teachers working with the younger age groups.
23. However, teachers also reported a commitment to continuous professional development in schools, evidenced by their ongoing involvement with training and development activities coordinated by the Write-Minded team. The fact that teachers and Principals are keen to see Write-Minded continue, reflects the enthusiasm and value placed on the tailored professional development activity.
24. Teachers in Ballymun reported that changes in their literacy teaching and Write-Minded's professional development activities gave them new understanding of the tasks and new ways of working. However, there is also evidence to indicate that the professional development activities provided a set of conditions that led teachers to change their expectation of and views on how well children from Ballymun could achieve. Teachers explicitly mentioned the fact that the Write-Minded team had encouraged them to raise their expectations of themselves and their pupils.

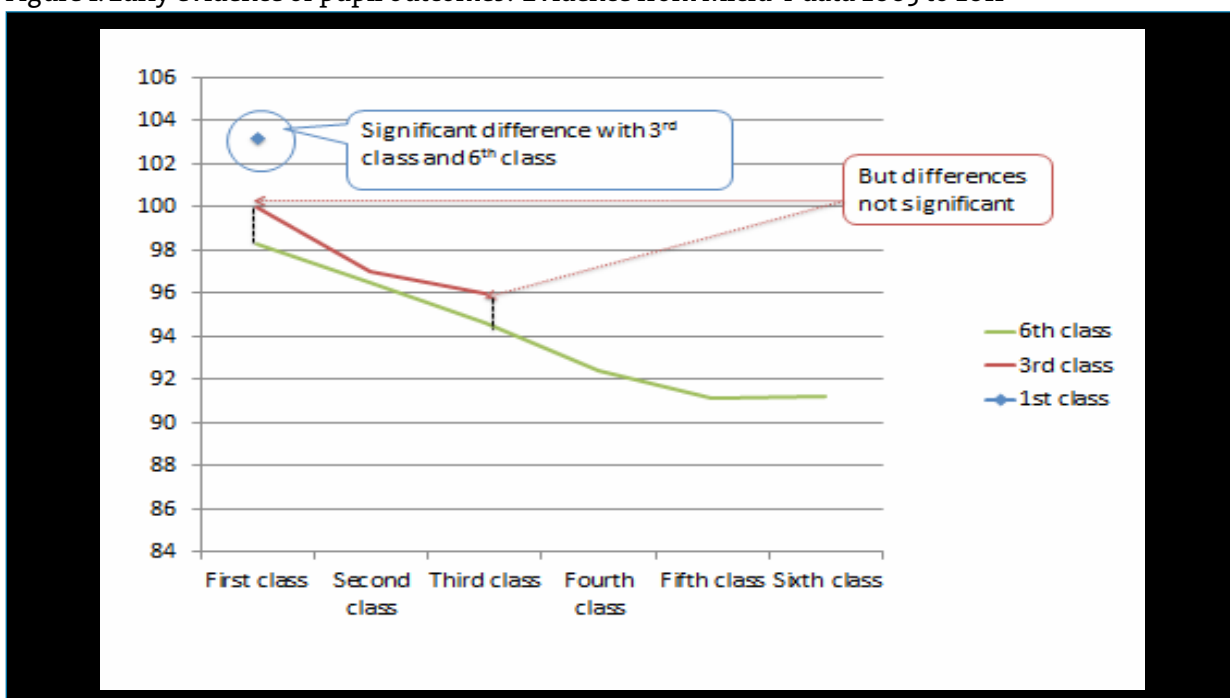
Children's literacy outcomes

25. Analysis of the historical standardised reading assessment data (MICRA-T) showed that the 2010/11 cohort of 3rd and 6th class children experienced a decline in performance on this assessment (to below the national average) from 2nd class onward. However, **Figure 1** indicates a levelling off of the decline in performance for the 6th class cohort over the previous two years (i.e. in 4th and 5th class). This is contrary to the pattern previously identified in Ballymun (Mac Ruairc, 2008)^d which indicated that a downward shift in literacy attainment scores was evident in 2nd class, with a very significant shift in a downward direction in 4th class. Indeed, analysis in 2010/2011 revealed a slight upturn in performance for the 6th class cohort (between 5th and 6th class).
26. At the same time, analysis revealed a decrease in the rate of decline of the 3rd class

“It is important to raise the bar – which Write-Minded has helped us to do. In an area like this it is easy to become complacent and ‘that will do’, but it [Write-Minded] has really helped us push against the barriers and challenges us and the children”

cohort of children although the scores attained by the 3rd class were not statistically different to those previously attained by the 6th class when in 1st and 3rd class. Of note however, is that the data also shows that the 1st class children (in 2010/11) are a significantly stronger performing cohort in reading than their predecessors. Unlike earlier cohorts, these children would have experienced elements of the *youngballymun* literacy strategy prior to taking Micra-T assessments in 1st class. Viewed together, the performance of 1st class children, coupled with the levelling off of the decline in assessment scores for the 3rd and 6th class cohort in the period since the schools began to implement the literacy strategy (in 2009) point to possible benefits of Write-Minded.

Figure 1. Early evidence of pupil outcomes? Evidence from Micra-T data 2005 to 2011



27. The consensus view from schools was that Write-Minded has been important in providing a greater focus for literacy and in further developing the capacity and skills of teachers around literacy teaching. This, coupled with the early evidence of the current 1st class being a higher achieving cohort than the 3rd and 6th class were in reading at the same age, leads us to be optimistic that the Write-Minded strategy may be having an impact on improving children's literacy through the support provided to schools. It will be important to continue to monitor these scores to capture any measurable impact on improvement within and between cohorts and to compare these scores with other DEIS areas in order to attribute any such change to the Write-Minded strategy.

Literacy skills outcomes for families

28. The Write-Minded literacy strategy recognises that parental and family involvement is central to its success. Since mid-2010 the Family and Community Literacy Development Officer (building on earlier work) has planned, coordinated and implemented a programme of activities aimed at supporting the involvement of parents in their

children's learning (e.g. Story Sacks^q, Incredible Book Club^r, Big Dreams^s). The success in engaging parents and families is evidenced through the numbers that have completed Story Sacks (106 between September 2010 and January 2012), have attended school-based activities such as Story Time and the consistently high attendance at Breakfast Buddies sessions, with an average of 60 parents participating in each session. The latter Breakfast Buddies – is a bi-monthly forum in which basic literacy skills workshops are delivered. Each facilitated workshop has a specific theme (linked to the balanced literacy framework) and parents learn to model good literacy practices with their children. The approaches taken by Write-Minded to engage parents in developing their children's literacy skills have been successful in drawing together different communities from within Ballymun, with women from the local Traveller community and those from non-English speaking immigrant families, for example, attending the Breakfast Buddies sessions.

29. Parents were very enthusiastic about their experiences of attending the Write-Minded activities focusing on developing their children's literacy skills. The benefits resulting from participation in these activities that were noted by parents included more reading taking place in the home, reading being more interactive and fun, learning specific techniques to support literacy, and greater confidence in being able to support children in developing literacy skills. Community and family literacy activities continue to build momentum, with word of mouth being particularly important. Thus, over time, the potential impact of this work could grow even further, given that this strand of work only formally commenced in mid-2010.
30. An important, if unintended, consequence of family and community literacy activities is that parents have been able to share experience and support each other, and new friendships and support networks have developed. Families have valued this.

Literacy developmental outcomes for the wider community

31. The Write-Minded literacy strategy recognises that there are a range of community-based initiatives and local projects that are readily accessible to children and parents and provide a platform for children's literacy development. To this end, the Write-Minded team - led by the Family and Community Literacy Development Officer - work with a range of community-based partners to improve their understanding, knowledge and skills about how to support the literacy skills of children and parents

q Story Sacks is a programme for supporting the development of literacy skills. The 'Storysacks' programme facilitates parents to bring a book to life to support their children's literacy development. It promotes the role of parents as key partners in their child's literacy development. During the programme parents create a Story Sack (a large cloth bag decorated by parents) which contains a child's fiction picture or story book, relevant props to help bring the story alive for children (such as soft toys of the main characters and scenery related to the story), and a non-fiction book linked to the book theme. The Story Sacks programme is delivered to parents over 8-10 weeks (two hours per day) in local schools and community organisations.

r 'Incredible Book Club' is a literacy add-on to the Incredible Years Parent programme. It highlights the links between social and emotional learning and literacy development and encourages parents to communicate with their children through reading and discussing books together. This book club initiative has been extended to many other local community organisations.

s Big Dreams –is a family book about the importance of reading launched in 2011. This family-friendly book was disseminated widely to parents and community organizations.

32. The family and community strand of work is informed by a structure developed during the service design, which emphasises the importance of increased focus within the family and community on literacy development, greater time dedicated to supporting literacy development within the family and community and improved quality of attention given to supporting the literacy development within the family and community.
33. Tailored capacity building activities in this strand of work include modelled reading sessions (for community workers and families), integrating evidence-based literacy strategies into youth programmes, implementing a Summer Slide Programme^t, providing guidance on how to develop young people's speaking and listening skills and more generally providing support on how to integrate literacy activities into their work with community groups.
34. Community-based initiatives and projects have welcomed support from the Write-Minded team because they have sought to engage with, and enhance existing services, and build on the expertise, programmes and community-based partnerships that already exist. Community organisations indicated that, through working with Write-Minded, they had developed greater awareness of literacy issues and the important role they play in developing and promoting literacy skills in the community.
35. There is evidence that community groups are developing the skills and confidence to implement the techniques and approaches introduced by Write-Minded, and are eager to continue to develop their capacity in this area. It appears that the Write-Minded strategy has had a real and direct impact on building the capacity and skills of the community sector around literacy support, with new strategies and approaches being embedded within services, which will contribute to sustainability.

Influencing policy

36. As a systems change initiative, *youngballymun* seeks to inform and influence national policy. *youngballymun* and the Write-Minded Team have hosted conferences, workshops, round table events, and have presented at several conferences in the last three years.
37. It is notable that the Coalition's Programme for Government 'Towards Recovery: A Programme for a National Government 2011-2016'^u makes direct mention of *youngballymun* in the section on education priorities, and that it makes a commitment to increase the amount of time spent on literacy to 120 minutes per day in DEIS schools as recommended by the Chicago Literacy Framework and others, and 90 minutes per day in non-DEIS schools. The new education priorities and recognition of the work of *youngballymun*, would suggest they have been able to influence national policy initiatives.

t Summer Slide' is a term describing the loss of valuable literacy skills over the summer months if children are not engaged in literacy activities. The programme supports community organisations to integrate a literacy focus into their summer programmes.

u http://www.taoiseach.gov.ie/eng/Publications/Publications_Archive/Publications_2011/Programme_for_Government_2011.pdf



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Conclusions

Sustainability of the work of Write-Minded

38. There are encouraging signs in schools that the whole-school planning process for literacy has been strengthened leading to more effective implementation of school literacy plans in guiding literacy teaching. As a result of the enhanced CPD and in-school support provided to teachers by the Write-Minded team many teachers reported growing confidence in teaching literacy and in using different techniques such as the *First Steps* approach. They also suggested that, given the plethora of activity in the last three years, it would be useful at this stage to have time to consolidate and assimilate new learning.
39. There are encouraging signs that schools, community groups and parents/families are further developing their capacity to support literacy development as a result of their engagement with the Write-Minded strategy. Whilst community organisations value continued advice and support from the Write-Minded team, there is evidence that they are implementing the strategies and activities Write-Minded introduced and taking ownership of these approaches.

Replicability of the Write-Minded Model

40. The available evidence suggests the Write-Minded model could be replicated elsewhere. Over the last three years and as part of Write-Minded's literacy strategy, the core team has developed a series of locally accessible, tailored, capacity building activities, networking opportunities, and one-to-one support focused on teacher, school, community agency and family needs. In addition, a bank of tools and resources has been developed that, with appropriate training and mentoring, could be scaled up and replicated elsewhere.
41. To replicate the Write-Minded team model in other areas would be resource intensive. However, based on the learning in Ballymun some major efficiency savings in the replication of the Write-Minded area literacy strategy can be achieved. Key elements of replication include: undertaking CPD on literacy with teachers; additional support for schools in developing their whole school literacy plans; delivering associated literacy leadership training; up-skilling and development of family and community support services capacity to support literacy. In addition, the reorientation and refocusing of key education support roles at local level and increased integration between School Completion and the Professional Development Support Service for teachers (PDST), education support services, HSE speech and language therapy services and schools would be recommended. Building on existing initiatives and resources the Write-Minded team has helped to ensure a shared area-based literacy vision across schools and families and community services; enhanced momentum, co-ordination and integration across agencies and services; and with their mentoring support the overall replication process is likely to be effective, if carefully planned and targeted. The ongoing work in Ballymun to embed the area-based literacy strategy and to ensure its continuity post the ten-year change agenda of youngballymun will also make an essential contribution to a larger scale literacy project.

Theme	Recommendations
National Policy	<p><i>youngballymun</i> should disseminate the findings and learning from this evaluation with a view to influencing national policy development in the field of school-based literacy support. This activity should include a focus on highlighting the importance of capacity building in the voluntary and community sector, alongside work in schools, to support the work of schools and to increase parental and family engagement.</p> <p>Where possible, the <i>youngballymun</i> team should seek to identify routes to share and disseminate, outside of Ballymun, the tools that have been developed by the Write-Minded team (such as the template for the whole-school literacy plan, as well as the practical resources that have been developed for teachers and community organisations).</p>
Strategy level (core team)	<p>There is a need to review the logic model developed for Write-Minded to identify and make links with the wider activities supported by <i>youngballymun</i> that may be having an impact on children's literacy (including Incredible Years <i>youngballymun</i>, and the Learning Years' Service). There is also a need to assess how a specific focus on the 'voices of children' could be used to identify learning activities and ways of working that might make the link between inputs, activities and outcomes more productive.</p> <p>There are a number of difficulties in engaging effectively with second level schools around literacy development and these stem from issues that are inherent at a national level (including teachers' understanding of how to support literacy at second level, and their perceptions of their role and responsibility in doing this). With this in mind, we suggest that the Write-Minded team review whether there is much to be gained from directing resources at this activity in the short- to medium- term. Instead, it may prove more effective to direct their resources towards influencing national policy and support structures around literacy in second level education.</p>

Theme	Recommendations
<p data-bbox="199 309 422 421">School-based activity (core team)</p>	<p data-bbox="547 309 1388 600">We suggest that, going forward, there is a need for a focus on promoting the embedding of effective literacy approaches in the classroom amongst individual teachers, with a reduction in emphasis, over time, on awareness raising or whole-school instructional and/or information sessions. These have largely proved productive already and are now less critical to progress than the embedding and consolidation of teaching and learning activities in the classroom.</p> <p data-bbox="547 678 1361 824">From discussions with teachers, we believe that there is still a need for the development of additional classroom resources to support literacy teaching amongst the youngest age groups (the Junior and Senior Infants)</p>
<p data-bbox="199 902 327 936">Schools</p>	<p data-bbox="547 902 1361 1048">Schools should engage with their whole school planning process on an ongoing basis and continue to engage with reflective practice to consolidate and review approaches and share resources and ideas that prove effective.</p> <p data-bbox="547 1126 1393 1272">Schools should encourage all <i>First Steps</i> trained tutors to take the lead in inducting new staff in using the <i>First Steps</i> approaches. This should lead to greater school ownership and less reliance on the Write-Minded team to disseminate these approaches.</p>
<p data-bbox="199 1350 422 1529">Parent & family development activity (core team)</p>	<p data-bbox="547 1350 1377 1529">The Write-Minded team should consider whether there could be a greater focus, in family work, on supporting older children's literacy. Parents expressed an interest in learning how they can support and develop literacy skills amongst their children in second level education.</p> <p data-bbox="547 1608 1377 1787">There is potential for the parent and family development activity to reach even larger groups of parents if more parents can be trained to lead activities. We recommend taking a 'train the trainer' approach, with volunteers being trained and supported to lead Story Sacks sessions, for example.</p>

Theme	Recommendations
<p>Community organisation development activity</p>	<p><i>youngballymun</i> should consider ways in which links between Write-Minded and the Learning Years' strategy could be enhanced to develop the capacity of the childcare and early years' education workforce in supporting children's early literacy development. This could include running Story Sacks session for staff in early years' settings (perhaps also involving parents and carers).</p> <p>As with the parent and family development activity, there are opportunities to develop a 'train the trainer' approach to ensure development activity is embedded and can be rolled out more widely.</p>
<p>Monitoring and evaluation</p>	<p><i>youngballymun</i> now has a set of tools and baseline data which allows for the long-term monitoring of the Write-Minded strategy to understand trends in pupils' literacy skills over time. We recommend that the following actions are taken:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to collate and analyse MICRA-T/DPRT-R reading comprehension data to monitor trends in performance over time. Ideally this should include annual data collection for the baseline cohort (i.e. those that were in 1st and 3rd Class at the time of the current study), as well as data collection for the new 1st Class pupils each year, repeating data collection for these cohorts at 3rd and 6th Class. • If possible, and the relevant data can be obtained, compare the assessment scores of the study cohorts with those of matched cohorts in other DEIS areas to look at comparative progress over time. There are a number of statistical considerations here, including whether access to individual pupil data from Micra-t or DPRT-R can be obtained and whether other pupil and school level variables can be included in the analysis. Any such comparative analysis will need to be very clear about data caveats. • Repeat the NFER developed writing assessments with the original cohorts included in the study (1st and 3rd Class), when they are in 3rd and 6th Class, to allow for comparison with the original baseline results for those year groups. If resources allow, we would also recommend repeating the 1st, 3rd and 6th Class writing assessments at regular intervals (say every 2-3 years) with new cohorts of pupils where reading comprehension data is being collected. • Compare findings from the pupil attitudinal surveys with the relevant questions from the national PIRLS survey outcomes (when the data is released) to explore any differences with pupils nationally.

Theme

Recommendations

Monitoring and evaluation

- Repeat the pupil attitudinal survey every 2-3 years to identify trends
- Repeat the CELF-4 assessments with pupils in 3rd Class at the time of the study, when they reach 6th Class. Ideally, we would recommend a rolling programme of such assessments with successive 1st class

Measuring outcomes from parent and family and community development activity is complex and within the scope of the evaluation the evidence we gathered was largely anecdotal (but consistently positive). Attendance at parent events, for example, was high and growing, and outputs from these activities, including the construction of Story Sacks, are measurable, but the extent to which they contribute to higher levels of literacy activity in the home cannot be captured by measuring such activity alone. We suggest youngballymun consider options for addressing this to allow for more robust monitoring over time. Examples might include:

- An annual (or two yearly) survey of community organisations (and their staff) to understand attitudes to literacy, confidence in teaching it, and the extent to which it forms part of the organisations' work.
- A survey of parents to gather data on literacy activity in the home (e.g. regularity of reading with children) which can be repeated and tracked over time. Whilst the opportunity for a baseline survey (i.e. pre-2010) has been missed there is still an opportunity to understand the extent to which community development activity is influencing literacy support for children in the home. The challenge here, however, would be cost and levels of literacy amongst some parents. Whilst self-completion paper surveys, distributed through schools, would be the least expensive means of conducting such surveys, response rates are likely to be low and therefore not sufficiently informative to provide a longitudinal analysis. The cost of conducting computer-aided telephone or face-to-face surveys would be significantly higher, but response rates would also be higher, particularly if parents were informed in advance and trusted the interviewer.

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