

## **Background and Context**

- 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 a crucial protective factor in ensuring later academic success, positive self-esteem and improved life chances.
- Conversely, if unaddressed, difficulties with oral language and reading become more pronounced as children progress through the educational system, with the effect of greater risk of early school leaving, poor literacy often persisting into adulthood, reducing employment opportunities and other life chances and increasing risks of poor mental health in adolescence and adult life.
- There is a clear association between socioeconomic disadvantage and literacy achievement. National research shows that children who attend schools in areas designated as disadvantaged have significant lower literacy standards than their counterparts in schools in non-disadvantaged area or in national norm groups. Furthermore, the literacy gap between children in disadvantaged areas and national norm groups increases with grade level.
- At a local level, research indicates that there is a high incidence of language delay amongst children in Ballymun. A communication assessment of Junior Infant pupils in a Ballymun showed that more than one in three children in the class (37%) had speech difficulties, approximately two in three children had receptive language difficulties (66%) and a similar percentage had expressive language difficulties (69%).
- Furthermore, primary school children in Ballymun are 2.5 times more likely to have serious reading difficulties than children in a representative national sample.

## What the evidence shows

- The professional knowledge of teachers and the quality of teaching significantly influences children's literacy attainment
- The available evidence shows that parental education and socioeconomic status and the home environment (e.g. reading to children at home, having plenty of books in the home) are also an important factor in children's literacy attainment.
- However, research indicates that an effective school reading programme that emphasises the fundamentals of literacy learning and devotes dedicated time to reading and writing instruction can teach most children to read, no matter what the income level or education of their parents.

## Write-Minded

- Write-Minded, youngballymun's literacy and oral language support service, aims to improve the language and literacy outcomes for children and young people in the community. It is being implemented in partnership with community and statutory organisations.
- The service is provided by a Literacy Coordinator (a teacher and teacher-trainer) and an Oral Language Development Officer (a Senior Speech & Language Therapist).
- Broadly speaking there are two strands to the work; an in-school strand which focuses on literacy and language development, teacher training and capacity building and a family and community strand which focuses on family and community awareness raising and addressing contributing and/or causal factors to lower literacy levels.
- The in-school strand includes the development of an integrated in-school oral language and comprehension strategy, the development of a whole school approach to teaching and promoting literacy, teacher training and capacity building, planning and supporting the transition between primary and secondary schools and promoting school attendance.
- The family and community strand includes creating opportunities to include parents in activities within school that support and enhance children's literacy and learning, community awareness raising activities, and promoting increased *focus, quality and time* outside school on literacy tasks.