



Is Literacy Really an Issue in Ireland?

One in ten children in Irish primary schools have serious difficulty with reading and writing but this rises to between 27-30% in some disadvantaged schools (Eivers et al., 2004). This means that approximately 50,000 Irish children are struggling with literacy skills.

⇒ Children who underachieve in literacy are more likely to leave school early, to have poor employment prospects and to have poor health outcomes, all of which cost the State significant sums in later years.

In 2006, Ireland ranked 5th in the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) which measures the literacy achievement of 15 year olds; in 2009 our rating had slipped to 17th out of 34 OECD countries. (Perkins et al., 2010). In addition, the numbers performing at the lowest levels increased significantly (from 11% to 17%) while the numbers performing at the highest levels halved (14% to 7%).

⇒ This has serious implications for Ireland's future workforce competitiveness in the 21st century knowledge based society.

Project Overview

Write to Read is an ambitious college / school / whole community partnership project to improve literacy outcomes for children in disadvantaged schools based on an **award winning dissertation by Dr. Eithne Kennedy** from St. Patrick's College, Dublin which received the International Reading Association's Outstanding Dissertation Award in 2010, only the 2nd time since 1964 that the award has gone to a university outside of the North American continent.

This **internationally recognised Irish model** has been **proven to produce impressive results** in an original pilot in a very disadvantaged school in Dublin 17. This is a **low investment – high impact project** which has the potential to deliver real social change to disadvantaged communities throughout Ireland.



Main Project Components

- Customised, multi-faceted, continuing professional development (CPD) to enhance literacy teaching and to help educators to create an innovative evidence-based cognitively challenging balanced literacy framework for pupils which will build their higher-order thinking skills (synthesis, evaluation, inference, critical analysis, problem-solving) in reading, writing and oral language to enable children to develop as readers,

writers and thinkers. The CPD will be provided on site, once per fortnight in each school by 2 teachers with an M.Ed. in Literacy and a Ph.D. fellow, working under the supervision of Dr. Kennedy

- Whole community approach to literacy – innovative literacy work in schools will be complemented by a programme of literacy activities to be delivered by community projects working with the children and their families outside of school hours with particular attention to afterschool homework clubs and summer camps and activities to combat the ‘summer slump’ experienced by children in disadvantaged communities but not by their more affluent peers.
- Children’s literacy needs and gains are rigorously monitored through the collection of qualitative and quantitative data to inform the customised CPD and the development of a framework for national roll-out over the next 2 years.
- Significant investment in improving the quality and quantity of literacy resources in schools.
- The development of professional learning communities within each school and within each of the 3 project clusters.

Partners & Governance

- A total of 9 participating schools in **Dublin 1 (2 schools in Seville Place), Dublin 17 (2 schools and 3 community groups in Darndale)** and Dublin 8 (5 schools & 4 community groups in Inchicore, Bluebell and Cork St)
- An Executive Committee has responsibility to drive the project roll out and comprises Dr Eithne Kennedy, creator of Write to Read; Dr. Fionnuala Waldron, Head of Education, St. Patrick’s College; Gerry Keating, Director, Deloitte; Eilish Comerford, St. Michael’s Estate Family Resource Centre Afterschool; Breda Murray, Principal, Our Lady Immaculate JNS; Anne McCluskey, Principal, Our Lady of the Wayside NS; Éadaoin ní Chléirigh, CEO, St. Michael’s Estate Regeneration Board; Sinéad Murphy, Project Development Co-ordinator, St. Michael’s Estate Regeneration Board; Dr. Gerry Shiel, Senior Research Fellow, European Research Centre.
- All participating schools and community projects are represented on the project Advisory Committee which meets once per term.

Predicted Impact:

Improve literacy outcomes through systemic change process:

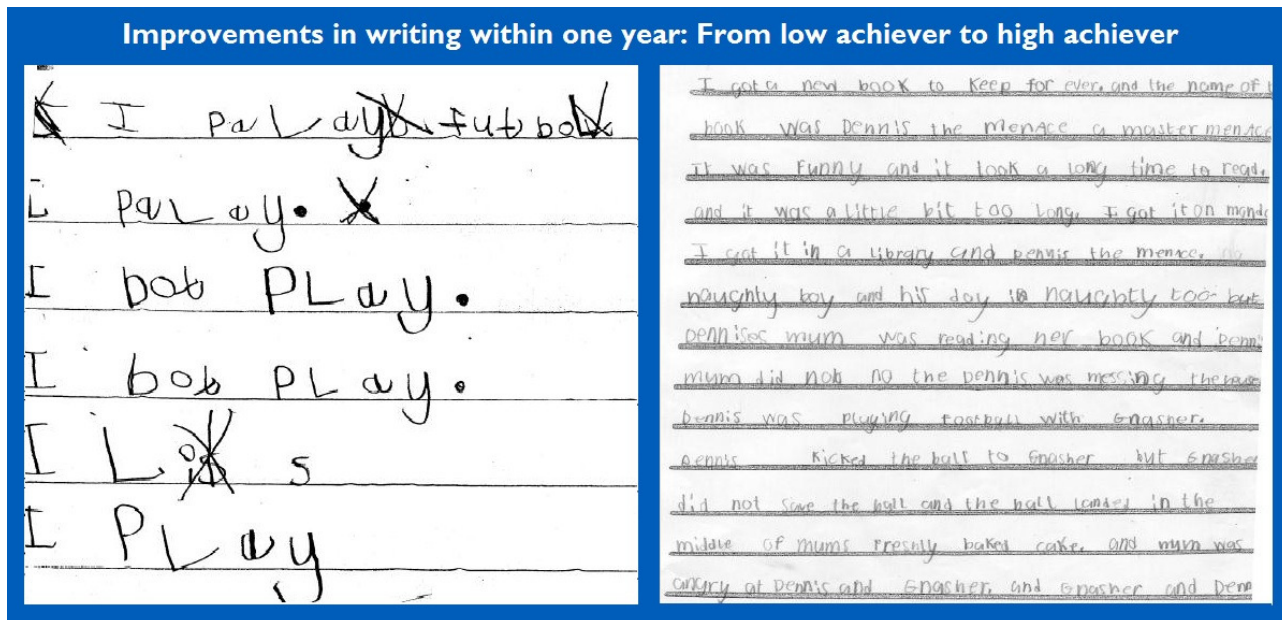
The original pilot project in Our Lady Immaculate JNS, Darndale has achieved impressive results including:

- The numbers of children performing below the 10th percentile were reduced by 75%, exceeding the goal of the National Anti-Poverty Strategy review.
- 20% were now performing above the 80th percentile on a standardised reading test at the end of the study. On average, just 6.2% of pupils in very disadvantaged schools perform above this benchmark (LANDS study, DES, 2005b).
- Children were now more motivated, engaged, persistent and strategic in their



approach to challenging academic tasks and were choosing to read and write outside of school as well which had had a positive effect on the family as a whole

It is expected that Write to Read will achieve similar results in the 8 new schools that will participate in the project roll-out and will develop a comprehensive research-based framework for literacy development that can be rolled out nationally and internationally.



Direct Impacts in 8 schools & 5 community afterschool projects:

- 1,440 children in the chosen schools will directly benefit from significantly improved literacy resources and improved outcomes from the project.
- The project will develop a sense of agency and independence in these children while also building their creativity, critical thinking and problem solving skills essential for full participation in the knowledge-based society and workforce of the 21st century.
- 124 teachers in 8 schools will be directly trained increasing their efficacy, self-confidence and expectations for children.
- Over 946 children and their families linked into 5 community organisations in the target communities will benefit from improved literacy activities and summer camps.

I think it affirmed for me that if the right structures are put in place and resources and thinking, something amazing can happen.

(Brigid, teacher)

I think that I'm getting better and better every day and that my writing is getting better and my spellings are getting better. Well I've grown up very fast and my brain is getting bigger and bigger with all the writing, reading and words that's in it. I remember it and I put it into my stories.

(Madelaine, aged 7 years)