US Ambassador visits writing process schools

Thursday, June 5 was a significant day for Vittoriosa and Mqabba primary schools. Both writing process schools were visited by US Ambassador Molly Bordonaro, who witnessed the progress in language development registered by the children and their families.

Writing process schools embark on a three-year programme with the Malta Writing Programme (MWP) within the Foundation for Educational Services (FES). The aim of such programmes is to train and support teachers to implement writing process methodology in their classrooms. The programme also impacts on the whole school community, enhancing literacy and parental involvement.

Mrs Bordonaro first visited Vittoriosa primary school, within St Margaret’s College, where she was greeted by Franz Borg, Permanent Secretary at the Ministry for Education, Youth and Employment; Sandro Spiteri, college principal and head of the Malta Writing Programme; head of school Michelle Spiteri, and MWP coordinator Rachel Schembri.

The children and their parents also welcomed her warmly and she witnessed first-hand a writing workshop where children and parents tapped into their creativity and wrote together.

The Ambassador then viewed an exhibition which showcased the work of Year 5 students and highlighted the various stages of the writing process. Four children walked Mrs Bordonaro through their publications which focused on one particular writing on-site activity which was organised by the Vittoriosa Year 5 teachers in collaboration with MWP tutors.

Mrs Bordonaro welcomed Mr Spiteri’s presentation of an FES publication, When I Feel Lonely, and reciprocated by presenting the school with a set of American children’s books.

Mqabba primary school, the pilot school which first embraced the Writing Process School Community Project in 2005, was the second school Mrs Bordonaro visited. Since this is the last year of the project, Mrs Bordonaro was invited to the celebratory ceremony to commemorate the whole school community’s achievements in the programme over the past three years.

On arrival, Mrs Bordonaro was greeted by Marilyn Sciberras, college principal of St Benedict’s College, and head of school Theresa Miceli. A group of children guided the Ambassador through the interactive writing process exhibition organised by all year groups. Children, in each year group, gathered until Year 6 to express their enthusiasm for writing through their passionate explanations.

The celebration ceremony began with children, from each year group, reading their chosen piece of writing. Before his speech, Mr Borg read out the acrostic poem that was presented to him, earlier that morning, by the Vittoriosa schoolchildren. He highlighted the importance of the child’s creativity within the learning process. Finally, Mrs Bordonaro presented the school with the Writing Process School Trophy which is modelled on a butterfly symbolising freedom and creativity in writing.

“Mqabba primary school is the first school to complete the three-year programme. The trophy Mrs Bordonaro presented to the school on behalf of the MWP is a token which symbolises what the school has achieved through its trained cadre of Writing Process Teachers. “This will enable the school to continue applying writing process methodology with minimal support from the MWP. Moreover, Mqabba primary school can also serve as a beacon school for other schools within St Benedict’s College who would like to implement writing process methodology,” Mr Spiteri said.

Mrs Bordonaro pledged her continued support to the MWP both in terms of teacher training and also through strengthened links between the MWP and the National Writing Project, US. She stressed the importance of continued collegial relations between Malta and the US.

“I am very pleased to see the positive impact that the Malta Writing Programme is having. Started in 2001, the programme was selected last April to be an International Affiliate Site of the US National Writing Project, a teacher training institution with over 30 years of experience in the field of the teaching of writing. The Malta Writing Programme is the only such programme in Europe to hold this distinction,” Mrs Bordonaro said.

Mrs Bordonaro stated that she was “very happy to support this celebration of the huge success of the programme, particularly at Vittoriosa primary school and at Mqabba primary school.” The Ambassador added that “it was fitting that the celebration at the Mqabba primary school, once was the pioneer school in implementing the programme in the community level to reach the USA not only of students, but also of their families.

Speaking about the US Embassy’s commitment to supporting educational initiatives like the Malta Writing Programme, Mrs Bordonaro said that the embassy is constantly seeking opportunities to strengthen the relations between US and Maltese educational institutions and programmes.

Guests, including the Council of Heads from St Benedict’s College, and Bernadette Azzopardi, former head of Mqabba primary school, who had initiated the pilot project, accompanied Mrs Bordonaro to a reception to conclude this red-letter day for both primary schools as well as for the Malta Writing Programme.