



Blue Star Programme

Report and Review of the Second Year of the
Blue Star Programme
by European Movement Ireland



European Movement Ireland
July 2013

Table of Contents

Table of Contents	3
Executive Summary	4
Background to Programme	5
Initial Concept	5
Timeline.....	5
Year 2	5
Implementation of the Programme	6
Partnerships	6
Steering Committee	6
Expressions of Interest.....	6
Resource Packs.....	7
Blue Star Programme	8
Programme Content	8
Europe Week.....	13
Art Exhibition in Mansion House	14
Participating Schools.....	15
Mentoring & Support.....	17
Teacher Training Day	17
School Visits	18
Assessment	20
Programme Collateral.....	21
Media Coverage Snapshot	23
Brussels Trip.....	27
Conclusions & Successes	29
Expressions of Interest for 2013-2014.....	29
Recommendations & Observations	30

Executive Summary

European Movement Ireland is pleased to have the opportunity to submit this report reviewing the second year of the Blue Star Programme to the Minister of State for European Affairs at the Department of the Taoiseach.

This report has a number of different goals and objectives, namely;

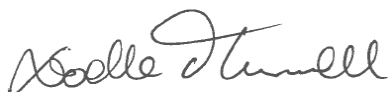
- To provide a full review of the second year of the Blue Star Programme to the Department of the Taoiseach
- To outline the learning objectives and journey paths of the different schools and pupils involved
- To analyse the achievements and outcomes of the second year of the Programme
- To document media coverage of the Programme
- To offer observations and recommendations

In August 2012, European Movement Ireland was confirmed as the National Implementation Body for the Blue Star Programme. September 2012 marked the commencement of the second year of the Programme.

The idea of the Programme was simple; to foster better understanding and knowledge of the European Union and how it affects our lives amongst Irish primary pupils. This was to be achieved through a series of classroom-based projects, activities and tasks centred around a number of different themes and concepts, culminating in specific events to mark Europe Day on 9 May.

Over the course of ten months, the Blue Star Programme introduced participants (pupils, teachers, parents and the wider community) to the EU, what it means and how it works, including an overview of its different Institutions. The second year of Blue Star Programme also saw a special focus on the Irish Presidency of the Council of the EU. It's no exaggeration to say that the Programme succeeded in fostering a strong sense of citizenship and knowledge of Europe among the Programme participants, be they rural three teacher schools in East Galway to 50 teacher schools of over 1,000 pupils in North-West Dublin, and that this sense of citizenship and knowledge extended far beyond the school walls into the wider communities.

The second year of the Blue Star Programme saw 94 schools register to participate in the Programme in the autumn of 2012. To date, more than 50 schools have been awarded their "Blue Star," comprising of a certificate and EU flag, following approval from the Programme Steering Committee. We expect at least a further ten school reports to be submitted in September 2013. Based on average pupil numbers across the different participating schools approximately 5,500 pupils from all corners of Ireland participated in the Programme. European Movement Ireland is delighted to have been the organisation managing the second year of this Programme and to have witnessed the Programme go from strength to strength. We look forward to having the opportunity to continue our successful partnership with the Minister and the Department of the Taoiseach in expanding this Programme further in future years.



Noelle O Connell
Executive Director

Background to Programme

Initial Concept

At the heart of the Blue Star Programme is the goal of informing young Irish people about Europe, and Ireland's engagement with Europe. The idea of the Programme is to foster better understanding and knowledge of the European Union and how it affects our lives amongst Irish primary pupils through classroom projects and activities. The Programme aims to help lessen the information and communications deficit that exists in European affairs amongst this key demographic in Ireland.

The Blue Star Programme asks schools, teachers and pupils to focus on four key areas:

1. Historical
2. Geographical
3. Cultural and Creative
4. Institutional

In addition, schools are required to stage an event or series of events to celebrate Europe Day on 9 May.

Timeline

European Movement Ireland was invited to continue to act as the project managing organisation for the second year of the Blue Star Programme in August 2012.

Work began in September 2012, when the Steering Committee was formed, mainly composed of the same stakeholders as the previous year, an element which ensured the continuity of the Programme. The Committee agreed and signed off on targets, the implementation process and marketing plan. September 2012 saw emails being sent out to every primary school in the Republic of Ireland, inviting them to register and participate in the second year of the Blue Star Programme.

Year 2

Once schools had registered to participate in the second year of the Programme, they were provided with a resource pack and resource materials from a variety of sources, including the European Commission Representation in Ireland and the European Parliament Information Office in Ireland. These included wall-charts and EU country guides to offer tips on the types of projects the pupils could undertake and to help guide the teachers in how best to facilitate the pupils. Throughout the year, the teachers aimed to ensure that the four pillars of the Programme, and the Europe Day activities, were carried out. It was agreed that at the end of the school year (e.g. before end June 2013), all successful schools would be awarded an EU flag and a Blue Star.

As the Irish Presidency of the Council of the European Union was taking place from January-June 2013, it was also decided that the second year of the Programme would put a special focus on this event. In doing so, the pupils were made aware of the Presidency and gained an understanding of its role and significance.

As part of the Blue Star Programme, a large number of schools received official assessment visits from the Minister of State for European Affairs and European Movement Ireland staff, as well as unofficial visits from European Ambassadors, MEPs, TDs, Senators and Councillors, which added to the excitement and success of the Blue Star Programme amongst participating schools.

Implementation of the Programme

Partnerships

The Blue Star Programme was operated for a second year by European Movement Ireland on behalf of the Department of the Taoiseach and the Office of the Minister of State of European Affairs.

The Programme benefitted greatly from a strong working relationship at all levels with the Department, the Minister's private office and the European Commission Representation in Ireland. The European Parliament Information Office in Ireland was co-opted as a partner for the second year of the Programme.

These partnerships were vital when it came to preparing collateral and material for schools, as well as co-ordinating school visits and award ceremonies. The European Commission Representation provided the majority of the educational material and collateral which was extremely important as source documentation and information for the participating schools.

From European Movement Ireland's perspective, the flexibility and support the organisation received from its partners must be commended as it enabled EM Ireland to proceed with the successful delivery and management of the Programme.

Steering Committee

The Steering Committee that had been established in the pilot year of the Programme was continued in the second year in order to offer advice and guidance on the implementation, rollout and delivery of the Programme. The Steering Committee decided the initial strategy of the Blue Star Programme, monitored its progress and offered counsel to EM Ireland in its implementation and delivery.

The members of the Steering Committee included:

- members of staff from the private office of the Minister of State for European Affairs
- officials from the Department of the Taoiseach, EU division
- officials from the European Commission Representation in Ireland
- officials from the European Parliament Information Office in Ireland
- members of staff from European Movement Ireland.

The Steering Committee held formal full committee meetings on five occasions throughout the second year of the Programme in order to agree parameters, rollout strategy and secure buy-in to the project from stakeholders. In addition, EM Ireland continued to provide both the Minister and the Committee with regular updates and progress reports so as to ensure that the organisation remained true to the overall goals and objectives of the Programme's successful delivery. The Department of Education and Skills were also invited to contribute to the Programme.

Expressions of Interest

EM Ireland initiated the marketing and public awareness campaign of the Programme in September. Unfortunately, due to Ministerial government business, a scheduled launch for the Programme with the Taoiseach in November was cancelled at the last minute. However, a concerted public relations campaign was put in place comprising targeted press releases and various social media promotions. All MEPs and Oireachtas members were written to and advised of the existence of the Programme. Their assistance

was sought in helping promote and disseminate awareness of the Programme amongst their constituents. They were also invited to visit schools in their constituencies as part of the Programme itself.

Initially, in excess of 100 schools sought information about the Programme, with 94 schools officially registered to take part in the Programme following its launch and the registration deadline at the end of October 2012.

Resource Packs

A designated information resource pack for teachers was developed by EM Ireland. This was also accompanied by background material and collateral for pupils in order to help stimulate ideas and provide guidance on suitable projects, including the new Programme element focussing on the Irish Presidency.

The above proved extremely useful in helping teachers gain a greater awareness and understanding of the Programme, and the feedback from teachers in this regard was very positive.

Blue Star Programme

Programme Content

The Blue Star Programme was composed of four key modules:

1. Historical
2. Geographical
3. Cultural and Creative
4. Institutional (including the Irish Presidency of the Council of the EU)

When researching their projects, pupils were encouraged to use all means of technology available to them, including online resources. Many projects were presented using interactive tools such as Power Point, video clips, audio clips, blogging sites and school websites. The use of technology amongst the different schools was extremely impressive and brought the goals of the Programme to life in a technological sense. In addition to this online aspect, soft copies of the Programme final reports were also submitted in several cases.



The Blue Star Programme featuring on the website of Knockconan NS, Co. Monaghan

1. Historical

For this module, pupils picked an event or person pivotal to European history and completed a project on this topic. Projects focused on a range of areas including World War II, the fall of the Berlin Wall, Leonardo da Vinci, Anne Frank, the EU's Founding fathers, amongst others. Pupils were able to select and focus on a historical theme appropriate to their age and class. In this way, the Programme afforded teachers the necessary flexibility to adopt the Programme to suit their particular class need.



Examples of Blue Star historical project topics

2. Geographical

For the geographical section of the Programme, pupils prepared a short project on an individual EU country. Elements included describing or illustrating the chosen country's flag and providing information on that country's capital city, population, language, what it is famous for and its similarities and differences to Ireland.

This section of the Programme was one of the most successful aspects. Pupils from outside Ireland were encouraged to share their knowledge of their home countries with classmates which helped integrate non-Irish pupils amongst the school population in addition to increasing awareness and knowledge of different nationalities and cultures amongst all participating schools. The success of this aspect of the initiative was demonstrated on the school visits where non-Irish pupils provided an overview of their home country. In addition, parents were often invited to present to the different classes. This in turn helped to extend the Programme to something beyond an abstract concept in the classroom.



Examples of Blue Star geographical projects

3. Cultural and Creative

In this module, pupils explored the places, food and art of Europe. Pupils experienced food from different European countries, for example, or developed a play, dance or song about the different peoples and countries of Europe. This module led to some interesting and high quality submissions ranging from renditions of Ode to Joy and various Eurovision Song Contest entries, to national costume design work and even an exercise in imitating Michelangelo's painting of the Sistine Chapel (see below)!



The painting of the Sistine Chapel as re-created by Blue Star participants

Again, in relation to this module, feedback from teachers and principals was very positive. It was felt that the Cultural and Creative section of the Programme was a great way to include the whole school in the Blue Star Programme and also provided an opportunity for non-Irish pupils to showcase their own cultures.



Blue Star pupils with their cultural and creative work

4. Institutional

Under the institutional section of the Programme, pupils learned about how the EU works, how the different Institutions cooperate with each other and the impact that these Institutions have on their lives. Pupils completed projects on 'A Day in the Life of an MEP'. In many cases, pupils wrote to MEPs asking them a series of questions as well as inviting them to speak to their school. A number of MEPs, TDs and Senators visited schools to speak about Europe and their general work as public representatives. It was felt that this element was more suitable for senior classes, particularly 5th and 6th classes. Many schools initiated programmes whereby older classes formed what they termed, 'Enrichment Groups' which taught the younger classes about the formation of the EU Institutions. This allowed for excellent cross class collaboration and the development of leadership skills among older pupils.



Marian Harkin MEP chats to a class of Blue Star participants

As Ireland held the Presidency of the Council of the EU for the first six months of 2013, all schools were asked to focus on the Irish Presidency as part of the institutional module. Schools looked at Ireland's history of hosting the Presidency and studied articles from newspapers which covered Presidency events and meetings.

As part of the Presidency, Blue Star students from a number of schools were invited to participate in the launch of the Irish Presidency in Dublin Castle on 31 December 2012. On a frosty morning, 40 children from Blue Star schools, accompanied by their parents and teachers, had the honour of participating in the Presidency's opening ceremonies. These children then enjoyed refreshments with the Taoiseach, Minister Creighton and a wide range of VIP guests that included Government Ministers, leading politicians, foreign dignitaries and others.

Europe Week

All schools participating in the Blue Star Programme were required to celebrate Europe Day and to use this celebration as a platform to exhibit and showcase projects, not only internally, but also to parents and the wider community.

As Europe Day 2013 took place during the term of the Irish Presidency, there was a desire to specially mark the day. In light of this, the Communications Unit in the Presidency Planning Unit of the Department of the Taoiseach initiated a nationwide campaign entitled “Shake Hands for Europe”, which was led by the Taoiseach, the Tánaiste, and Minister Creighton in Croke Park on Europe Day. All Blue Star schools were encouraged to take part in this initiative and pupils were asked to wish each other a "Happy Europe Day!" as they joined together in a group handshake. This handshake aimed to acknowledge the diversity and solidarity that exists amongst the class mates who are ultimately all connected together as citizens of the EU. All schools were provided with a Press Release for Europe Day which outlined the theory behind the handshake and also included a quote from the Taoiseach Enda Kenny TD. The handshake proved to be a popular initiative with the schools across the country and received significant press coverage, details of which are provided in the press section of this Report. One of the participating Blue Star schools, which had been on an exchange trip in Italy, conducted the handshake in the small village where they were staying and involved the entire community in the process.



The “Shake Hands for Europe” initiative in action

Many schools did not conduct celebrations on Europe Day itself, but rather on a suitable day during the week of Europe Day. Activities that took place included a parade for the Minister for European Affairs and invited Ambassadors in Delgany Wicklow, an open day for the whole community in County Sligo, a concert and dance show in Gardiner Street in Dublin, an open day and food fair in Co. Tipperary, amongst many others.

Art Exhibition in Mansion House

As part of the Blue Star Europe Day celebrations an Art Exhibition was held in the Mansion House in Dublin where Presentation Primary Warrenmount, Rathgar National School and Gardiner Street Primary School showcased their Blue Star art work. The art exhibition was hosted by the Lord Mayor of Dublin, Naoise Ó Muirí, and addressed by Minister for European Affairs, Lucinda Creighton TD, who spoke to the pupils and answered their questions about life as the Minister for European Affairs.



Minister Creighton shaking hands with Blue Star pupils in the Mansion House on Europe Day

The pupils from the three different schools were entertained by face painters and a balloon artist as they enjoyed Blue Star cupcakes. The National Hand Shake for Europe was also carried out in the Mansion House on Europe Day with Minister Creighton and Emer Costello MEP.



Participating Schools

County	School
Clare	St Flannans NS
Clare	St Cuan's NS
Clare	St Colman's NS
Clare	Kilkishen NS
Clare	Clonmoney NS
Clare	Scoil Réalt na Mara
Clare	St Tola's NS
Clare	Fanore NS
Clare	Feakle NS
Clare	Scoil na Maighdine Mhuire
Clare	Scoil Náisiunta Eoin Baiste
Clare	St Patrick's NS
Clare	St. Aidan's NS
Cork	Gaelscoil an Ghort Álainn
Cork	Our Lady of Mercy NS
Cork	Scoil Oilibheir
Cork	St Mary's Senior School
Cork	Gaelscoil Mhuscraí
Cork	Gurraneasig NS
Cork	Scoil an Chróí Ró Naofa
Cork	Sundays Well Boys NS
Cork	Glasheen Boys' NS
Donegal	Glenmaquin NS
Donegal	Scoil Cholmcille
Dublin	Presentation Primary Warrenmount
Dublin	Balbriggan Educate Together NS
Dublin	St Clare's Primary School
Dublin	Scoil Mhuire
Dublin	St. Louis SPS
Dublin	Preparatory College, Wesley College
Dublin	International School of Dublin
Dublin	Rathgar Junior School
Dublin	Rathgar NS
Dublin	Sandford Parish NS
Dublin	St Anne's NS
Dublin	Gardiner Street Primary School
Dublin	St. Kevin's NS
Dublin	St. Georges National School
Dublin	Scoil an Cheathrair Álainn
Dublin	Gaelscoil Naomh Pádraig
Dublin	Powerstown Educate Together National School

County	School
Dublin	St Brigid's National School
Dublin	St Patrick's Cathedral Choir School
Dublin	St Patrick's GNS
Dublin	St Pius X BNS
Dublin	St. Raphael's NS
Dublin	Gaelscoil Bharra
Dublin	St Mary's NS
Dublin	St Patrick's BNS
Galway	Eglisn NS
Galway	Killeeneen NS
Kerry	Cahir NS
Kerry	Castleisland BNS (Scoil Naomh Chárthaigh)
Kerry	Knockaclarig NS
Kerry	Scoil Mhuire
Kildare	Maynooth Educate Together NS
Kildare	Scoil Bhríde Nurney
Kilkenny	S. N. Móin Ruadh
Kilkenny	St Leonard NS
Kilkenny	Burnchurch NS
Laois	Scoil Mhuire
Laois	Ardlios NS
Limerick	Caherconlish NS
Limerick	Cloverfield NS
Limerick	Askeaton Senior NS
Limerick	Gaelscoil Ó Doghair
Limerick	Glenbrohane NS
Limerick	St. Patrick's NS
Longford	Scoil Bhríde
Longford	St. Mary's NS
Louth	St Oliver's NS
Louth	St. Peter's NS
Mayo	Craggagh NS
Mayo	Kinaffe NS
Meath	Kilmainhamwood NS
Meath	Realt na Mara BNS
Meath	St Fiach's NS
Meath	St. Joesph's NS
Meath	St. Mary's NS
Meath	St. Peter's NS
Monaghan	Knockconan NS
Sligo	Ballinlig NS
Sligo	Culleens NS
Tipperary	St John the Baptist BNS

County	School
Tipperary	St. Mary's Convent Primary School
Tipperary	Scoil Naomh Ruadháin
Tipperary	Scoil Mhuire Kilvemnon
Waterford	Knockmahon NS
Waterford	Waterford ETNS
Waterford	Fenor NS
Westmeath	Presentation Senior School
Westmeath	St. Thomas' NS
Wexford	St. Mary's NS
Wicklow	St Laurence's NS

Mentoring & Support

A significant part of EM Ireland's work through this Programme focused on the on-going mentoring and support of participating teachers and responding to participants' queries. This constituted providing advice and guidance to teachers looking for additional information and resources as well as fielding a range of questions posed by teachers, either over the phone, via email or in person.

All EM Ireland staff were regularly briefed on the project so as to ensure that queries could be dealt with and processed efficiently and accurately by the whole EM Ireland team.

Ensuring that schools were ready for ministerial and MEP visits and to complete the Europe Day aspect of the Programme and providing advice and support for interaction with local press were also major aspects of EM Ireland's successful project management of the Programme.

Teacher Training Day

One of the recommendations from the teachers that took part in the pilot year of the Blue Star Programme was for a training day to be organised for all teachers. In light of this recommendation, a training day was organised for 14 February 2013, during the school mid-term break. 16 teachers from across Ireland attended the training day, and all partners in the Programme participated on the day. The timetable for the training day is outlined below.

Timetable: Blue Star Training Workshop, 14 February 2013	
10.00am	Teachers and trainers arrive in Buswells Hotel, Molesworth Street, Dublin
10.30am	Blue Star Work Shop begins with introduction from Billie Sparks
10.45am	Talk from Blue Star Partners: European Parliament, European Commission, Department of the Taoiseach, and European Movement Ireland
11.30am	Q&A Session
11.45am	Presidency Briefing from Andrea Pappin, Spokesperson for the Presidency

Timetable: Blue Star Training Workshop, 14 February 2013	
12.05pm	Q&A
12.25pm	Break for lunch
1.30pm	Training Module and Best Practice Sharing focussing on the Historical and Geographical sections of the Blue Star Programme
2.30pm	Break
2.45pm	Training Module and Best Practice Sharing focussing on the Cultural and Institutional sections of the Blue Star Programme
3.30pm	Wrap up and Close of Day with a talk from Noelle O'Connell, EM Ireland

The feedback from the training day was overwhelmingly positive with every teacher confirming that they found the training day helpful in their surveys. It was very useful for us also as National Implementation Body to hear from teachers in a non-school environment on their recommendations for the Blue Star Programme as it develops.



Teachers attending the Blue Star training day in February

School Visits

Through the course of the Programme, nearly 20 schools were visited either by members of staff from European Movement Ireland or by Minister Creighton. In addition, schools were visited by their local MEPs or by a European Ambassador and a number of Oireachtas and Local Authority members visited schools in their own constituencies.

These visits took many forms and allowed schools to show off their hard work and ask questions of the visitors. Throughout the month of June, another tranche of schools were visited in order to award them their “Blue Stars” as outlined below.



The school visits to award the Blue Star certificates and EU flags began with the Taoiseach visiting St. Mary's NS, Enfield, Co. Meath on 14 June.

In the remaining weeks of the school term, many more schools from all over the country received visits from MEPs and European Ambassadors, as they raised their EU flags and celebrated successful completion of the Blue Star Programme 2012-2013.



Gay Mitchell MEP visiting a Blue Star school



Ambassador of the Republic of Latvia in Ireland, Mr Pēteris Kārlis Elferts at Gaelscoil Bharra, Cabra.

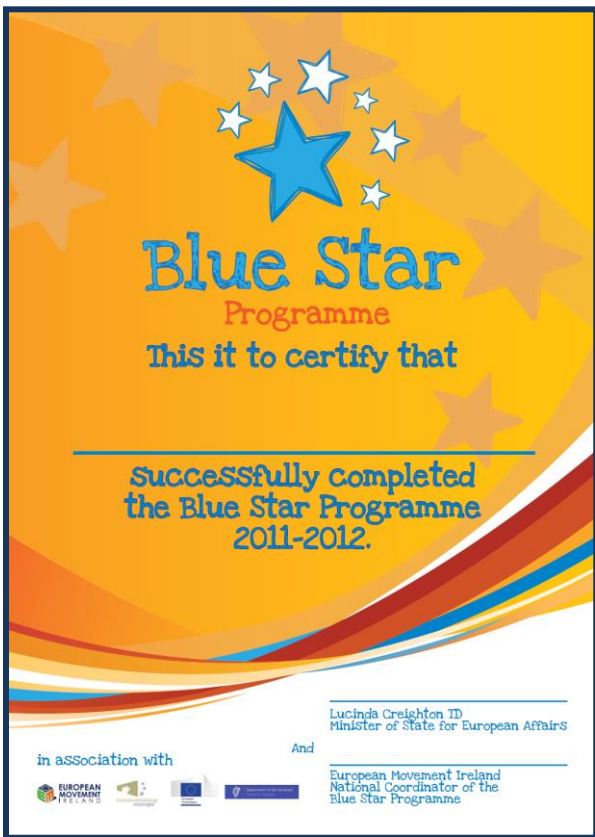
Assessment

At the outset of the Programme, the Blue Star Steering Committee agreed the awarding criteria for assessing each school's efforts in their project submissions. The following process was agreed to be the most suitable and fair in evaluating the submissions received:

- 1) Participating teachers were asked to send through a comprehensive report document with soft copy evidence of projects and events.
- 2) These submissions were reviewed by the Project Manager who then presented submissions to the Minister and also to the Steering Committee.
- 3) It was decided to award the Blue Star and certificate of achievement to schools who submitted these reports to the satisfaction of the Committee. A total number of 52 schools have to date been award the Blue Star.

We had over 100 schools express an interest in the programme with 94 schools registering to do the programme. More schools are expected to submit their reports in autumn 2013.

Programme Collateral



PR & Media Coverage

The Blue Star Programme received extensive coverage across all mediums.

From the outset, participating schools were encouraged to publicise their participation in the Programme and the work they were carrying out. Almost all the participating schools received good media coverage in local papers and on local radio in relation to the project as a whole, in light of ministerial visits, covering Europe Day celebrations or on foot of the awarding of the flags themselves. All schools were sent a press release with a quote from the Taoiseach for circulation around their Europe Day celebrations and this allowed for some good local media coverage during Europe Week.

Due to the project being run in primary schools, it received good coverage from RTE's News 2 Day which is aimed at a younger audience. Europe Day celebrations at one Dublin school were a lead item on the show.

Furthermore, European Movement Ireland ran a broad awareness campaign across our social media platforms, including Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn. Receiving a number of high-profile re-tweets, shares and mentions from Irish politicians and media accounts played an important role in further promoting the Programme.

In a change from last year, a number of participating Blue Star schools were active on social media sites, such as Twitter and Facebook. Schools used social media to highlight their participation in the Programme and promote their Europe Day activities. Schools gained recognition and engagement from many high profile individuals and organisations, such as the Permanent Representation of Ireland to the European Union, who re-tweeted a tweet posted by one of the Blue Star schools.



Raising the Blue Flag at The Sacred Heart Primary School Roscrea with Minister of State for European Affairs, Lucinda Creighton TD – Tipperary Star, 5 February 2013

Media Coverage Snapshot

Date	Publication/Channel	School
05 Feb 13	Tipperary Star ➤ Article about EU flag raising ceremony with Minister Creighton	Sacred Heart Primary School, Roscrea, Co. Tipperary
09 May 13	Mid-West Radio ➤ Article on school's Europe Day celebrations	Craggagh NS, Kiltimagh, Co. Mayo
09 May 13	News2Day ➤ News programme visited the school and interviewed pupils	Powerstown Educate Together NS, Tyrrelstown, Dublin 15
10 May 13	Mayo Advertiser ➤ Article on National Handshake	Craggagh NS, Kiltimagh, Co. Mayo
14 May 2013	Connaught Telegraph ➤ Article on National Handshake	Craggagh NS, Kiltimagh, Co. Mayo
14 May 2013	Southern Star ➤ Article on National Handshake	Scoil an Chroí Ró-Naofa, Castletownbere, Co. Cork
17 May 2013	Dundalk Democrat ➤ Article on school's Europe Day celebrations	St. Peter's NS, Dromiskin, Dundalk, Co. Louth
17 May 2013	Kilkenny People ➤ Article on school's Europe Day celebrations	St Leonard NS, Dunnamaggin, Co. Kilkenny
17 May 2013	Kilkenny People ➤ Reference to National Handshake	St Leonard's, Dunnamaggin, Co. Kilkenny
17 May 2013	Tipperary Star ➤ Article on school's Europe Day celebrations	St John the Baptist BNS, Old Road, Cashel, Co. Tipperary
18 May 2013	Westmeath Examiner ➤ Article on school's Europe Day celebrations	Presentation Senior School, Mullingar, Co. Westmeath
22 May 2013	Argus ➤ Article on school's Europe Day celebrations	St. Peter's NS, Dromiskin, Dundalk, Co. Louth
29 May 2013	Mid-Louth Independent ➤ Article on school's Europe Day celebrations	Realt na Mara BNS, Donacarney, Mornington, Co. Louth
1 June 2013	Limerick Leader ➤ Article on school's Europe Day celebrations	Caherconlish NS, Caherconlish, Co. Limerick



Pupils, teachers and parents at Scoil an Chroí Ró-Naofa, Castletownbere, participating in National Handshake on Europe Day – Southern Star, 14 May 2013



Mairead McGuinness, MEP pictured when she visited St Peter's National School Dromiskin on Europe Day also in picture is Pat Mulligan Principal and students from 4th,5th and 6th classes – Dundalk Democrat, 17 May 2013



Exploring what it means to be European

MARY CODY

THE HALL in St Leonard's School in Dunamaggin became a cultural melting pot on Friday morning when students shared their European experiences with local MEP Liam Alyward.

Principal Jackie Delahunty welcomed pupils, parents and guests to the very special event which included music from all corners of Europe. The youngsters had also undertaken a number of projects (including cookery projects under the expert eye of Trish Finnegan) exploring different member states as part of the Blue Star Project.

Sixth class pupil Aoife Mulhall welcomed the guests and shared her experience of project. "Each participating school carried out projects and tasks that include information about the foundation and development of the EU, the cultural and linguistic diversity of Europe and what the EU does and how its work affects the lives of European citizens.

Guest of honour Liam Alyward congratulated the youngsters on their projects. "I hope that projects such as your project on "Influential women" in Europe have inspired you to think big and aim high in your future studies. I understand that Angela Merkel, the German chancellor was one of the women you studied and while I do not always agree with her politics and her actions, there is no doubt that she is certainly an influential character," said Mr Alyward.

He also told the students that he sits on the Culture, Education, Youth and Sport committee in the European Parliament. "We are focusing on issues such as tackling youth employment, how to improve education systems, how to improve recognition of volunteers and support volunteering and also how to introduce more sport and physical activity into schools and daily life. Active citizenship and engaging with young people on European issues and politics is also a key priority area and in this regards I am impressed with your com-

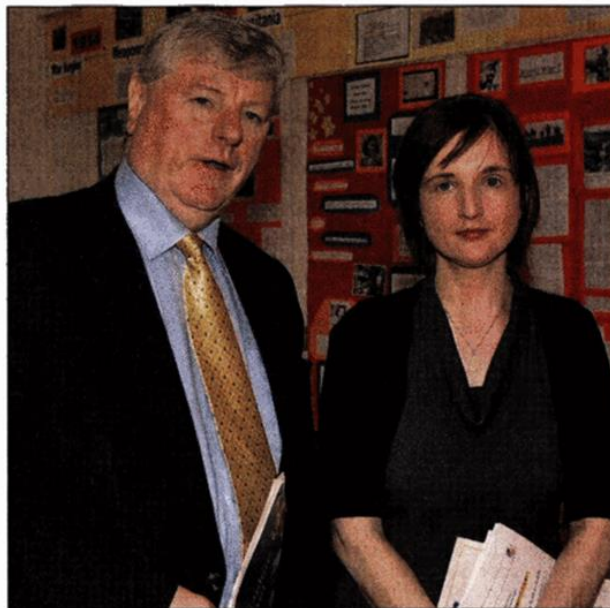
mitment and engagement with the Blue Star Programme and with European issues.

The MEP also commended the students on their projects, which included a project on Anne Frank and the Jews in World War 2. "I think that people are very quick to forget the scale of the tragedy, the devastation and the destruction which was brought about by the two world war and how the European project has brought peace, stability and a greater understanding to the citizens of the 28 Member States which now make up the Union,"

he added.

As part of national Europe Day celebrations, the pupils took part in the country-wide "Shake Hands for Europe" initiative. The Handshake marks the school's participation in the Blue Star programme, a national Irish primary school programme which aims to foster better understanding and knowledge of the European Union.

A book on the history of the school by former principal Sean Costello was presented to the MEP.



MEP Liam Alyward with principal of Dunnamaggin NS Jackie Delahunty

Article in the Kilkenny People – 17 May 2013

Argus

Page: 27 Headline: McGuinness pays visit to St Peter's NS for Europe Day



22.05.2013

McGuinness pays visit to St Peter's NS for Europe Day

THE PUPILS of St Peter's National School, Dromiskin, celebrated Europe Day with a visit from their local MEP, Mairead McGuinness.

The pupils sang, danced and made a presentation about the EU on a day that is set aside to recall the foundations of the EU and celebrate the achievement of peace and unity in Europe following two world wars.

Mairead McGuinness said great credit is due to Principal, Pat Mulligan and his students and indeed the parents and board of management of the school.

'The presentation about the second world war and the horror of the concentration camps was very

poignant,' she said.

'Learning about the past is critical to building a better future and cherishing the peace we have today, a peace that must be nurtured in order to be maintained,' she said.

'The pupils of Dromiskin understand that and their knowledge will spread out into the community and help shape the kind of Ireland and Europe that they will influence in the future.'

The Blue Star programme undertaken by the students at Dromiskin is a pilot initiative for primary schools which focuses on the EU.

The Programme is intended to foster better understanding and knowledge of how the European Union affects our lives through classroom projects and activities.



MEP Mairead McGuinness.

Article in the Argus – 22 May 2013

Brussels Trip

As part of the Blue Star Programme, the European Commission Representation in Ireland kindly organised a study trip to Brussels for participating teachers from the Blue Star Programme. In all, 23 teachers, two staff from European Movement and one staff member from the European Commission Representation visited Brussels from 8 – 10 July 2013. The itinerary for this trip is outlined below:

Tuesday, 9 July 2013	
8.45	Welcome and Introduction by Mrs Isabelle VAN KEIRSBILCK
9.00	<u>THE ROLE OF THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION IN THE EU</u> Mr Ludo TEGENBOSCH Directorate-General "Communication"
10.45	<u>THE EUROPEAN YEAR OF CITIZENS</u> Mr John MACDONALD Team Leader - European Year Directorate-General "Communication"
12.00	<u>MEETING WITH MÁIRE GEOGHEGAN-QUINN</u> <u>COMMISSIONER RESPONSIBLE FOR RESEARCH, INNOVATION AND SCIENCE</u>
15.00	<u>THE EU'S REGIONAL POLICY WITH A SPECIAL FOCUS ON IRELAND</u> Mr Stephen LANGLEY Programme Manager - EU policies Unit "Ireland and the United Kingdom" Directorate-General "Regional and Urban Policy"
16.00	<u>THE EU'S POLICY ON CLIMATE CHANGE</u> Mr Tony CARRITT Information and Communication officer Directorate-General for Climate Action
17.00	Blue Star evaluation & sharing of best practice
18.00	END OF THE FIRST DAY OF THE VISIT

Wednesday, 10 July 2013	
08.45	Meeting with Ambassador Rory Montgomery Permanent Representative of Ireland to the European Union
09.55 10.15	Depart Permanent Representation of Ireland to the European Union Arrive European Parliament ASP building - Security checks
10.30	Meeting with Irish MEPs

Wednesday, 10 July 2013	
	Q&A Session
14.00	Parlamentarium – European Parliament Interactive Visitors Centre
15.00	European Economic and Social Committee plenary session

Conclusions & Successes

This report has enabled European Movement Ireland to assess and evaluate the success of the Blue Star Programme in our role as the Programme's National Implementation Body.

The second year of the Blue Star Programme saw a significant jump in terms of the number of participating schools from last year. The pilot programme began last year with 32 schools, while this year 94 schools registered on the Programme. The Blue Star Programme had participating schools from each of the European Election constituencies which was a key success of the Programme. The participating schools ranged from two teacher rural schools to large urban schools with hundreds of pupils. Approximately 5,000 pupils from across Ireland participated in the Programme.

Undoubtedly, this Programme is an exceptional way of promoting Ireland's European engagement in a curriculum friendly manner through primary schools that reaches beyond simply pupils and teachers to the wider community.

From its humble beginnings, it is no exaggeration to say the Blue Star Programme continues to grow in its successes, both in terms of numbers and in terms of impact. Already schools are contacting EM Ireland to enquire about getting involved in the 2013-2014 Programme. EM Ireland is proud to have been associated with the Programme from its inauguration and would welcome the opportunity to continue driving and developing the potential of the Programme even further.

Expressions of Interest for 2013-2014

In addition to most of this year's participating schools, we have already received expressions of interest from at least 10 schools who would like to participate in the Blue Star Programme 2013-2014. These potential participants heard about the Programme through the media, social media sites and from teachers who are currently participating in the Blue Star Programme.

Recommendations & Observations

Certainly, coming to the end of the pilot stage of the Programme, EM Ireland is in a strong position to review and reflect on the Programme in a constructive critical sense in order to review and enhance the effectiveness of the Programme even further.

As part of the final report pack, teachers were asked to give feedback to the National Co-ordinator about their impressions of the Programme, in particular focusing on where they felt it could be improved. We are pleased to report that the general concept of the Programme was extremely well received by teachers, principals and pupils with special appreciation of how compatible it was with the school curriculum. The phrase, “very curriculum friendly,” featured in many of these teacher surveys.

However, the following issues should also be noted as we attempt to review the Programme in its entirety.

- It would greatly benefit the Blue Star Programme if a large scale launch could be organised with the Taoiseach and Minister in the autumn school term, as this would increase the profile of the Programme and add to public awareness of Blue Star.
- It was felt that the teachers’ training day was very helpful and many teachers who could not attend on the day expressed an interest that another training day could be rolled out, taking place earlier in the school year next time. Many teachers highlighted the benefits of sharing best practice with their colleagues and suggested that examples of other schools’ work be available to view online, which EM Ireland would be happy to facilitate.
- There was positive feedback from teachers in relation to the increased local media coverage that schools obtained by being part of the Blue Star Programme. This increased media coverage was facilitated by drafted press releases being provided to the schools by EM Ireland. While European Movement Ireland worked hard to gain media coverage for the Blue Star Programme, the local schools also often had success in this regard due to their local knowledge. In the future, all press releases should be issued both by EM Ireland and the local schools.
- An element that ties into the upcoming European Parliament elections could be included in an updated and revised Blue Star Programme for 2013-2014. The added benefit of this element would help promote and increase awareness of the European Parliament elections in addition to having a fresh and revised modular element of the Programme for those schools participating again.
- A number of teachers recommended that an online forum would be a great way in which to share ideas among themselves. They have informed us that this is a common facility in many primary school initiatives, such as the Green Flag Programme. The online forum would also enable them to view past projects of schools and gain a better understanding of the Blue Star Programme, which EM Ireland would be happy to facilitate.
- A mentoring system may benefit participating schools. This would involve matching similar schools, e.g. by location (all teachers at the training day indicated an interest in mentoring a new school), with other schools in their area to offer support and guidance on the Programme.

- Participating Blue Star schools could link up with a school from another country, potentially through the incorporation of an eTwinning element. eTwinning is a means of forging cross-national partnerships and working on projects with other schools in Europe using information and communication technology (ICT). It aims to help schools bring a European dimension to their activities and to integrate ICT into the classroom. Again this is something that EM Ireland would be happy to explore in collaboration with all partners.
- Teachers also felt that a special Blue Star flag could be designed and given to successful schools rather than the EU flag, as most schools already have one. Again from a branding and marketing perspective, this is something that could be looked at for the next rollout of the programme
- Erasmus students could be invited to participate in the Programme by speaking to schools about their home countries. This worked particularly well in some schools and this element could be broadened out for all schools on the programme.
- In terms of collateral, teachers advised that it would be a good idea if schools could receive resources specifically tailored for infants, e.g. colouring books, jigsaws, Hans Christian Andersen books, etc. Again, this would be something for discussion with partners on the Blue Star steering committee.



www.europeanmovement.ie