



Blue Star Programme

Blue Star Programme

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

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Executive Summary – Year 3

European Movement Ireland is pleased to have the opportunity to submit this report reviewing the third 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 third year of the Blue Star Programme to the Department of the Taoiseach and other stakeholders
- To outline the learning objectives and journey paths of the different schools and pupils involved
- To analyse the achievements and outcomes of the third year of the Programme
- To document media coverage of the Programme
- To offer observations and recommendations for the Programme going forward

September 2013 marked the commencement of the third 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 third year of the Blue Star Programme also saw a special focus on the European Parliament Elections which were held in May 2014. 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 it a small rural 20 pupil school in Westmeath with three teachers to 30+ teacher schools of over 600 pupils in Wicklow, and that this sense of citizenship and knowledge extended far beyond the school walls into the wider communities.

The third year of the Blue Star Programme saw 106 schools register to participate in the Programme in the autumn of 2013. At the time of the submitting this report to the Department, over 70 schools have successfully completed the Programme, and have been awarded two Blue Star certificates and an EU flag, following approval from the Programme Steering Committee. We expect at least a further 15-20 school reports to be submitted in September 2014. Based on average pupil numbers across the different participating schools, we estimate that approximately 12,000-15,000 pupils from across Ireland participated in the Programme in Year 3. European Movement Ireland is delighted to have been the organisation managing the third year of this Programme and to have witnessed the Programme go from strength to strength. 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.



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 third year of the Blue Star Programme in the second half of 2013.

Work began in September 2013, when the Steering Committee was formed, composed of the new Minister of State for European Affairs, Paschal Donohoe TD, officials from the Department of the Taoiseach, the European Commission Representation in Ireland, the European Parliament Information Office in Dublin and the Department of Education and Skills. The Committee agreed and signed off on targets, the implementation process and marketing plan. September 2013 saw with every primary school in the Republic of Ireland (approx. 3,500), inviting them to register and participate in the third year of the Blue Star Programme. We also sent bespoke invitations to all schools that participated in Year 1 and Year 2 of the programme, inviting them to participate again.

In order to increase the number of participating schools for the third year, all MEPs and Oireachtas members were asked to nominate schools in their constituencies to participate and these schools were also targeted with bespoke invitations. As well as this, we used primary school resource websites, such as www.scoilnet.ie and www.seomraranga.com which significantly increased awareness and

The screenshot shows the Seomra Ranga website, which is a resource for primary school teachers. The page is titled "Blue Star Programme" and is dated 03/10/2013. The main content describes the programme as an education initiative for primary school students across Ireland, aimed at fostering better understanding and knowledge of the European Union. It mentions that the programme has grown since its pilot year in 2011/2012, with over 120 schools and 5,500 pupils participating. The page also includes a "How does it work?" section, which states that teams of pupils from primary schools across Ireland are challenged to think about Europe through projects related to four key elements: history, geography, culture and creativity, and institutions of the EU. A footer note mentions the foundation and development of the European Union. On the right side, there is a search bar, social media links, and a "Subscribe by email" section.

promoted the programme among the specific target market.

A concerted public relations campaign was again put in place at national, regional and local level, around the launch of the third year of the programme, using targeted press releases and various social media promotions to increase awareness.

EM Ireland divided the work programme for Year 3 into a number of different phases and grouped the work activities in this regard in order to maximise and plan around the school calendar primarily. The below draft work programme was based on our experience over the last two years.

Phase 1	Action
September and October 2013	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. In line with previous years, EM Ireland worked with the Department of Education and Skills to communicate with all primary schools in the state – approx. 3,500, inviting them to participate. 2. Contacted all MEPs, Oireachtas members and European Ambassadors encouraging them to engage with schools in their constituency and to make themselves available for school visits throughout the year
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Meeting of the new Steering Committee: Chaired by the new Minister of State for European Affairs, Paschal Donohoe TD 4. Finalised Programme changes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - emphasis on the 2014 European Parliament Elections 5. Agreed format of collateral and material with all programme partners
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6. Organised an official launch of the programme with An Taoiseach, Enda Kenny, TD, and the Minister of State for European Affairs 7. Contacted www.scoilnet.ie and www.seomraranga.com to advertise Blue Star programme in their newsletter and on their website respectively 8. Contacted the INTO's magazine, InTouch, to include an article on the Blue Star Programme 9. Attended teacher's conferences to promote the programme and encourage participating 10. Dealt with school queries in relation to undertaking the Programme and the workload involved 11. Sent registration packs and resource information to all primary schools in the state advising them of registration deadline

	<p>12. Collated responses from schools and filed all registration forms</p> <p>13. Registration of participating schools</p>
November	<p>14. Sent out Action Plan to all participating schools along with Teacher's curriculum guidelines</p> <p>15. Mailed out resource packs with programme materials to all participating schools</p> <p>16. Provided in-house assistance to schools with the preparation of their Action plans</p> <p>17. Created an FAQ section on the Blue Star webpage, developed with the help of Blue Star Champion Teachers, to provide assistance to new teachers</p>
Phase 2	
November	<p>18. Began coordinating school visits with the office of the Minister of State for European Affairs, Oireachtas Members and European Ambassadors</p> <p>19. Provided hands-on support and advice to schools regarding engagement with local media</p> <p>20. In-house assistance to schools starting their projects</p>
January/February 2014	<p>21. In service training day at the European Parliament Information Office for participating Blue Star teachers. A call will be put out to interested teachers and a date will be selected based on feedback</p> <p>22. Steering Committee update session</p> <p>23. Provided ongoing support to schools regarding visits of MEPs, Oireachtas Members and staff members of EMI</p>
April 2014	<p>24. Final Reminder/ Communications Push re: Europe Day - May 9th</p>
Phase 3	
May 2014	<p>25. Europe Day/Europe Week Events – A national Blue Star Europe Day event was organised along the lines of the hugely successful Handshake for Europe/Blue Star Art Exhibitions that took place in the Mansion House with the Minister for European Affairs and the Lord Mayor of Dublin during Year 2 of the Programme</p>

	<p>26. Final Report submissions: Teachers were required to complete soft copy proof of the completion of the programme through photos, videos, voice recordings and also project work completed using online tools.</p> <p>27. Final steering group meeting</p>
Phase 4	
June 2014	28. EU Flag and bespoke Blue Star certificates developed and sent to all successful Blue Star schools
July 2014	<p>29. Information trip to Brussels for Blue Star teachers</p> <p>30. Presentation of Report to Blue Star Steering Committee</p>

Year 3

Once schools had registered to participate in the third 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, the European Parliament Information Office in Dublin and the European Consumer Centre. 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. In addition, EM Ireland developed a comprehensive curriculum guide which has been created to support our teachers. The guideline was developed with the help of some of our previous Blue Star teachers and it includes extensive advice and in depth guidelines on all elements of the programme.

We also created an FAQ Guide which answers the most common question we get from Blue Star teachers. This has served as a useful source of information for teachers interested in participating in the Blue Star Programme. This can be viewed here: <http://www.europeanmovement.ie/blue-star-faq/>

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 certificate.

As the European Elections were taking place in May 2014, it was also decided that the third year of the Programme would put a special focus on this. In doing so, the pupils were made aware of the European elections and gained an understanding of their significance. This additional element highlighted the flexibility of the Programme which is one of its greatest strengths. Many schools held Mock Elections throughout the year which was an ingenious way to give pupils an understanding of democracy, the role of government and parliament.

As part of the Blue Star Programme, a large number of schools received official visits from the Minister of State for European Affairs and European Movement Ireland staff, as well as unofficial visits from European Ambassadors, MEPs, MEP candidates, 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 third 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, the European Commission Representation in Ireland, the European Parliament Information Office in Ireland and the Department of Education and Skills

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

The European Parliament Information Office hosted a teacher training day for participating teachers in January 2014. Teachers were addressed by staff from EM Ireland, the European Commission Representation in Ireland, the European Parliament Information office in Dublin and MEPs Mairead McGuinness, Marian Harkin and Emer Costello. We received extremely positive feedback on the day, with particular praise being paid to the teacher workshops which afforded the teachers an opportunity to share ideas and best practice.

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 third year, which is testament to the strong collaborative relationship between all partners, 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 the Programme's 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
- an official from the Department of Education and Skills
- members of staff from European Movement Ireland.

The Steering Committee met formally on three occasions throughout the third year of the Programme in order to agree parameters, roll out strategy and secure buy-in to the project from stakeholders. A number of informal bilateral ad hoc meetings were also convened as needs dictated. 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.

Expressions of Interest

EM Ireland initiated the marketing and public awareness campaign of the Programme in September 2013.

The third year of the programme was officially launched by the Taoiseach in Craggagh NS, Mayo in November 2013. MEP Jim Higgins and John O'Mahony TD also attended the launch which received coverage in both regional newspapers and on regional radio. A concerted public relations campaign was again put in place around this launch and around the programme in general, using targeted press releases and various social media promotions to increase awareness of the programme.

A Dublin launch of the programme was organized in late 2013 with Minister Donohoe in Gardiner Street National School which was covered by RTÉ News2Day and can be viewed here - <http://www.rte.ie/news/player/news2day/2013/1121/#page=13>

Around 100 schools sought information about the Programme following our outreach over the Summer and at the beginning of the school term, with 106 schools officially registered to take part in the Programme following its launch and the registration deadline.

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 European Parliament elections.

Again, we also provided participating teachers with a Curriculum Guideline document which was created in conjunction with some of our Blue Star Champion Teachers. The Curriculum Guideline served as a very useful resource for participating teachers as it outlines ways in which the teachers can integrate the programme into their curriculum.

All 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 is composed of four key modules:

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

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.

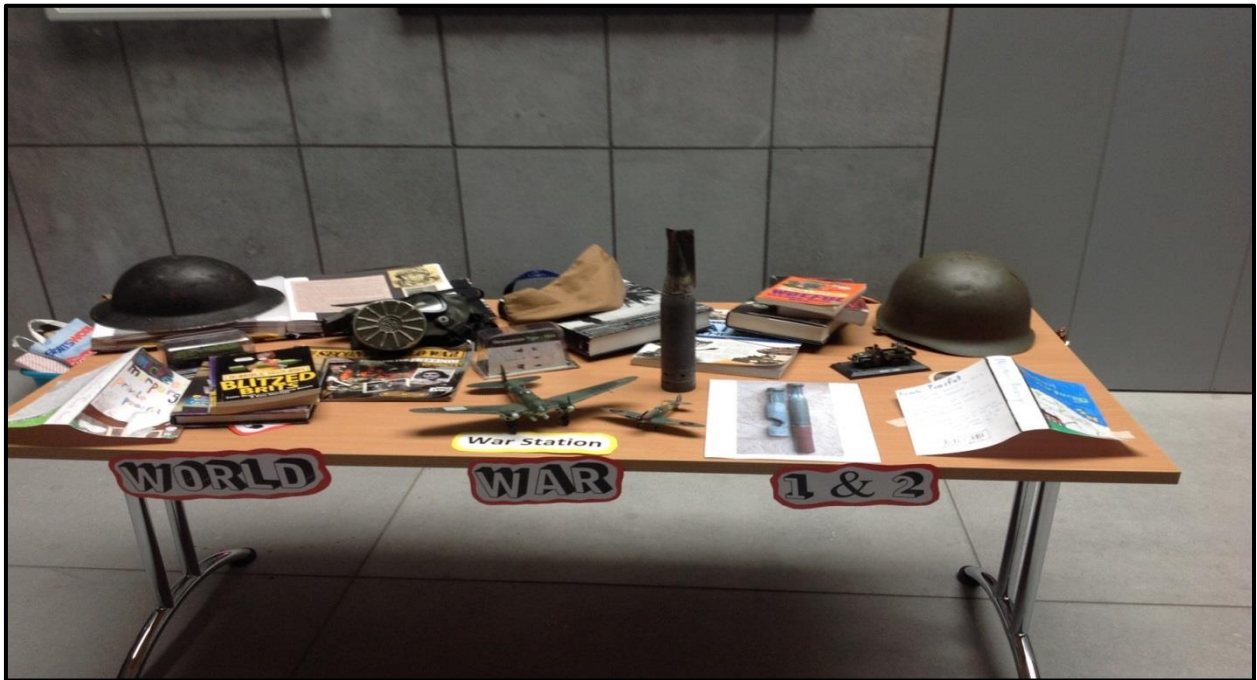
Here is our EU noticeboard, it shows each of the 28 member states and how to say 'Hello' in each language.



The Blue Star Programme featuring on the website of Clooneyquinn NS, Roscommon

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, and 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.



Historical projects from Boolavogue NS and Scoil Eoin Báiste, Wexford on display in the County Council (above) and Rathmore NS, Kildare (below) for Blue Star Europe Day celebrations



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. One school in Kildare made tourism brochures for each EU country (below), which meant that pupils were learning lots of information about each country, while also getting creative! 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 and involved the wider community in the process.



Above: Minister Donohoe and German Ambassador HE Dr. Eckhard Lübke meier view the geographical projects in Rathmore NS, Kildare.



Below: The Taoiseach views the Geographical work of the pupils from Craggagh NS, Mayo with MEP Jim Higgins and John O'Mahony TD



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, national costume design work and even some interesting takes on European Art!



Examples of the cultural and creative work completed by students in Gaelscoil Inse Chor and Gardiner St. NS, Dublin

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.



A tasty example of the Cultural & Creative Blue Star work in Wexford County Hall

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 by some teachers that this element was more suitable for senior classes, particularly 5th and 6th classes. In some cases, participating schools initiated programmes whereby older classes formed what they termed, 'Enrichment Groups' which subsequently 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.

As the European election were held in May 2014, all schools were asked to focus on these elections and this provided a great opportunity for schools to invite MEP candidates to their school.



Above: Nicker NS, Limerick encourages everyone to vote; Paul Murphy MEP visits Mary Help of Christians



MEP candidate Simon Harris visits Aughrim NS, Wicklow

Europe Week

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

Following on from the resounding success of the initiative introduced during the Irish Presidency last year, it was decided that the nationwide “Handshake for Europe” would be carried out again. 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 Minister for European Affairs, Paschal Donohoe 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. The Handshake was officially launched in the Mansion House on Europe Day when the Lord Mayor of Dublin, Oisín Quinn and Minister Donohoe shook hands with pupils from St. Brigid’s NS, the Coombe, Dublin.



Mary Help of Christians GNS Europe Day celebrations with Minister Donohoe



The “Handshake for Europe” initiative in action in the Mansion House

Other schools chose to conduct celebrations on Europe Day itself, but rather on a different day during Europe Week which was more suitable to their school calendar. Activities that took place included a joint-exhibition of Blue Star work and a food-fair in Wexford County Hall by two participating Blue Star schools from Wexford, a music and dance exhibition in Gardiner Street NS, European parades in Rathmore NS and a Geographical table quiz in Belmayne ETNS.

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 St. Brigid’s National School, the Coombe showcased their Blue Star art work.



The art exhibition was hosted by the Lord Mayor of Dublin, Oisín Quinn, and addressed by Minister for European Affairs, Paschal Donohoe TD, who spoke to the pupils and answered their questions about life as the Minister for European Affairs.

Following the art exhibition, the pupils from St. Brigid's NS walked to EU House next door where they enjoyed the Blue Star celebrations held jointly by the European Commission Representation in Ireland and the European Parliament Information Office in Dublin..



Participating Schools in 2013-2014

School Name	County
Askeaton Senior School	Limerick
Scoil Chrónáin	Dublin
Scoil Mhuire na mBráithre	Tipperary
Ardfert Central NS	Kerry
St Attractas National School	Mayo
Balbriggan ETNS	Dublin
Belmayne Educate Together National School	Dublin
Bofield NS	Mayo
Castleknock Educate Together National School	Dublin
Cloghans Hill NS	Galway
Cloneen N.S	Tipperary
Clongeen NS	Wexford
Clooneyquinn nS	Roscommon
Craughwell National School	Galway
Crecora National school	Limerick
Divine Word NS	Dublin
Doonbeg National	Clare
Drumraney NS	Westmeath
Duleek Girls NS	Meath
Eglish NS	Galway
Esker N.S	Galway
Fanore N.S	Clare
Feakle National School	Clare
Foxford National School	Mayo
Gaelscoil an Bhradáin Feasa	Meath
Gaelscoil an Choillín	Westmeath
Gaelscoil Bharra	Dublin
Gaelscoil Chluain Meala	Tipperary
Gaelscoil Inse Chór	Dublin
Gaelscoil Mhic Easmainn	Kerry
Gaelscoil Mhuscraí.	Cork
Gardenfield N.S.	Galway
Gardiner Street Primary School	Dublin
Killeen NS	Cork
Killeeneen NS	Galway
Kilmihil NS	Clare
Knockaclarig National School	Kerry
Knockconan NS	Monaghan
Knockmahon NS	Waterford
Lisnagry NS	Limerick

Lisvaird National School	Cork
Mary Help of Christians GNS	Dublin
Scoil Bhríde	Cavan
Nicker NS	Limerick
Our Lady of Mercy NS	Cork
Rathmore N.S.	Kildare
Sacred Heart N.S.	Wicklow
Scoil Áine Naofa	Galway
Scoil an Chroí Ró-Naofa	Cork
Scoil Bhailenora	Cork
Scoil Bhríde Cailíní	Dublin
Scoil Chroí Íosa	Cork
Scoil Mhuire	Kerry
Scoil Eoin Baiste	Wexford
Scoil Eoin Naofa	Tipperary
Scoil Iognáid De Rís (CBS Primary)	Kilkenny
Scoil Iósáif Naofa	Galway
School Kinaffe NS	Mayo
Scoil Mhaodhóig Poulfur	Wexford
Scoil Mhic Diarmada	Leitrim
Scoil Mhuire	Donegal
Heronstown NS	Meath
Scoil Mhuire Kilvemnon	Tipperary
Scoil na Maighdine Mhuire	Clare
Scoil Mhuire NS	Galway
Scoil Mhuire	Tipperary
Scoil Naomh Mhuire NS Staplestown	Kildare
Scoil Naoimh Treasa	Meath
Scoil Réalt na Mara	Clare
Scoil Uí Ghramhnaigh	Meath
Scoil Ursula	Sligo
St Benedict's N.S	Dublin
St Brigid's Primary School	Dublin
Scoil Naomh Fiach	Meath
St John the Baptist BNS	Tipperary
St. John's N.S.	Longford
St Joseph's Primary School	Galway
St Michael's NS	Cavan
St. Oliver's N.S.	Louth
St Paul's NS	Laois
St Raphaels N.S.	Dublin
St. Saviours	Waterford
St. Senan's National School	Clare
St Theresa's National School	Galway

St. Thomas' National School	Westmeath
St. Tola's National School	Clare
Sundays Well BNS	Cork
Tynagh NS	Galway
Scoil Cholmáin/ Whitegate NS	Cork
Fenor N.S.	Waterford
Scoil Bhríde	Longford
Waterford ETNS	Waterford
Kildangan NS	Kildare
Castlegar NS	Galway
Scoil Maria Assumpta	Cork
St Marys NS	Longford
Scoil Naomh Bríde	Mayo
Scoil Naomh Móin Ruadh	Kilkenny
Scoil Bhríde GNS	Laois
Fybough NS	Kerry
Booavogue NS	Wexford
Claddagh NS	Galway
Glenswilly NS	Donegal
Arles NS	Laois
Caherconlish NS	Limerick
St Laurence's NS	Wicklow

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 project management.

Teacher Training Day

Following on from the success of last year's training day, it was decided that another teacher training day would be held for all participating Blue Star Teachers early in the year. A training day was organised in the European Parliament Information Office for 25 January 2014 and 25 teachers from across Ireland attended the training day, with all partners in the Programme participating on the day. The timetable for the training day is outlined below.

Agenda – Blue Star Training Workshop, 25 January 2014	
Start time – 10.00am	
1.	Talk and Q&A from Marian Harkin MEP and Mairead McGuinness MEP
2.	Brief introduction and talk from Blue Star Partners: European Movement Ireland, European Parliament and European
3.	Talk and Q&A from Emer Costello MEP
4.	Insight from Blue Star Champion Teacher, Geraldine Tuohy
5.	Training Module and Best Practice Sharing focusing on the Historical and Geographical sections of the Blue Star Programme
6.	Break for lunch
7.	Training Module and Best Practice Sharing focusing on the Cultural and Institutional sections of the Blue Star Programme
8.	Wrap up and Close of Day

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 at the Blue Star training day in the European Parliament Information Office, Dublin - January 2014



School Visits

Through the course of the Programme, nearly 40 schools were visited either by members of staff from European Movement Ireland, by Minister Donohoe, by MEPs & MEP candidates, European Ambassadors or by members of the Oireachtas.

These visits took many forms and allowed schools to show off their hard work and ask questions of the visitors.



Pupils from Gardiner Street NS show off their Blue Star work to Minister Donohoe





Taoiseach Enda Kenny raises the EU flag in Craggagh NS, Mayo to acknowledge their successful participation in the Blue Star Programme

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.



Seán Kelly MEP raises the European flag in Knocknagoshel NS, Kerry



Brian Crowley MEP with a participating Blue Star pupil on a visit to Sunday's Well Boys NS, Cork

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 Committee who then presented submissions to the Minister and also to the Steering Committee.
- 3) It was decided to award the EU flag and a Blue Star certificate of achievement to schools who submitted these reports to the satisfaction of the Committee. Over 70 schools have been deemed to have successfully completed the Blue Star Programme by the end of July.

Bespoke Blue Star certificates were laminated and printed in A3 for successful schools this year along with the EU flag.

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 visits from the Minister, TDs, MEPs, etc., 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 Minister 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 great coverage from RTE's News 2 Day which is aimed at a younger audience. A flag raising ceremony and visit by Minister Donohoe to Gardiner Street NS, Dublin was a lead item on the show back in November, while the Europe Day celebrations in Wexford County Hall with Boolavogue NS and Galbally NS together was a main story on the programme on May 9. The coverage included interviews with the teachers, pupils, images of the Blue Star work and the 'Handshake for Europe.'

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.

Following on from last year, given that a number of participating Blue Star schools are active online and on social media sites, such as Twitter and Facebook, we encouraged schools to use 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 Craggagh NS, Mayo and Gaelscoil Mhuscraí, Cork who were nominated for a prestigious Eircom Junior Spider Award for their Blue Star work online.



A pupil from Wexford is interviewed by RTÉ News2Day in Wexford County Hall as part of their coverage of their Europe Day Celebrations and Handshake for Europe – RTÉ News2Day, 9 May 2014

Media Coverage Snapshot

The following is just a selection of the media coverage surrounding Year 3 of the Blue Star Programme.

Date	Publication Channel
17-Jul-13	Bray People ➤ Article about teachers meeting Mairead McGuinness MEP
16-Jul-13	Wicklow Times ➤ Article about teachers meeting Mairead McGuinness MEP
05-Oct-13	Limerick Leader ➤ Article on Minister Donohoe's visit to Caherconlish
05-Oct-13	Limerick Leader ➤ Article on Minister Donohoe's visit to Caherconlish
11-Nov-13	Mid-West Radio ➤ Blue Star 2013-2014 launch with Taoiseach
12-Nov-13	Mayo News ➤ Blue Star 2013-2014 launch with Taoiseach
11-Nov-13	Merrion Street ➤ Blue Star 2013-2014 launch with Taoiseach
11-Nov-13	OneNewsPage ➤ Blue Star 2013-2014 launch with Taoiseach
11-Nov-13	Mid-West Radio ➤ Blue Star 2013-2014 launch with Taoiseach
11-Nov-13	Business and Leadership ➤ Blue Star 2013-2014 launch with Taoiseach
15-Nov-13	Mayo Advertiser ➤ Blue Star 2013-2014 launch with Taoiseach
18-Nov-13	Western People ➤ Blue Star 2013-2014 launch with Taoiseach
21-Nov-13	RTÉ 2 News 2day ➤ Blue Star Dublin launch with Minister Donohoe
22-Nov-13	Mayo Advertiser ➤ Blue Star 2013-2014 launch with Taoiseach
27-Nov-13	The Kerryman ➤ Blue Star flag raising in Kerry
03-Dec-13	Wexford Echo ➤ Blue Star visit to Galbally NS by Spanish Ambassador

03-Dec-13	Enniscorthy Echo ➤ Blue Star visit to Galbally NS by Spanish Ambassador
04-Dec-13	The Kerryman ➤ Blue Star visit to Knocknagoshel NS with Sean Kelly MEP
10-Dec-13	Laoise Nationalist ➤ Mairead McGuinness visit to St Abban's NS, Killeen
16-Dec-13	Public Sector Times ➤ Blue Star Dublin launch with Minister Donohoe
	Irish Independent ➤ Pictures from Minister Donohoe's visit to Gardiner St NS
01-Feb-14	Westmeath Independent ➤ Pictures from Blue Star Training Day
04-Feb-14	Roscommon Herald ➤ Pictures from Blue Star Training Day
04-Apr-14	Mayo Advertiser ➤ Blue Star - Taoiseach's PR on Eircom Junior Spiders Awards
08-Apr-14	Connaught Telegraph ➤ Blue Star - EMI PR on Junior Spiders Awards
23-Apr-14	Drogheda Independent ➤ Article on Mairead McGuinness' visit to Scoil Naomh Treasa, Meath
13-May-14	West Cork Times ➤ Photo and paragraph about Europe Day
14-May-14	Northside People ➤ Photo and paragraph about Europe Day
14-May-14	Kerryman North ➤ Photo and paragraph about Europe Day
15-May-14	Kerry's Eye ➤ Photo and paragraph about Europe Day
15-May-14	Clonmel Nationalist ➤ Paragraph about Europe Day celebrations
15-May-14	Tipperary Star ➤ Paragraph about Europe Day celebrations
20-May-14	Wicklow Times ➤ Photo and paragraph about Simon Harris' visit on May 12
23-May-14	Athlone Advertiser ➤ Photo and paragraph about Mairead McGuinness' visit to Drumraney

23-May-14	Mullingar Advertiser ➤ Photo and paragraph about Mairead McGuinness' visit to Drumraney
24-May-14	Westmeath Independent ➤ Photo and paragraph about Mairead McGuinness' visit to Drumraney NS
19-June-14	Leinster Leader ➤ Photo and paragraph about Rathmore NS' Europe Day celebrations in the
02-July-14	The Argus ➤ Photo and article on St. Oliver's NS end of year celebrations – raising EU flag
03-July-14	Kerry's Eye ➤ Photo and article on Sean Kelly's visit to Ardfert NS for the raising of their EU flag
03-July-14	Northern Standard ➤ Article on Knockconan NS' Blue Star award and their EU flag presentation
08-July-14	Leinster Express ➤ Article on Scoil Bhride, Laois' flag raising celebrations
17-Jul-14	Meath Chronicle ➤ Photo and paragraph about teacher's trip to Brussels

Below: Coverage in the Western People of the Blue Star Launch with the Taoiseach in Craggagh NS, Mayo

Young students to learn more about being 'European'

Taoiseach launches new scheme in Balla

AN Taoiseach Enda Kenny TD visited pupils in Craggagh National School in Balla yesterday (Monday) for the launch of the 2013-2014 Blue Star Programme; a national primary school initiative which aims to foster better understanding and knowledge of the European Union amongst Irish primary school pupils through classroom projects and activities.

The Taoiseach was welcomed to Craggagh NS by a colourful guard of honour put on by the school's younger pupils. During his visit, the Taoiseach met with members of the school community and was treated to an exhibition of the pupils' Blue Star projects and artwork.

Following the raising of the Blue Star flag, the Taoiseach spoke to the large audience of parents, teachers and pupils, praising the hard work of all involved in the Blue Star Programme: "I am delighted to be here for the raising of the Blue

Star flag in Craggagh Primary School. The enthusiasm and hard work of the pupils, teachers and all involved in the Blue Star programme is plain to see. Ireland's membership of the European Union has been extremely positive for the country and this programme allows children to understand how the EU works and how it affects our citizens. It does this in a really creative way by encouraging schools to engage through project work, artworks, music, culture and food. I believe this

is a great way for young people to learn about being European, as well as Irish, citizens and that the knowledge gained will stand to them throughout their lives."

Speaking after the event, Principal of Craggagh National School, Danny Charlton, mentioned the positive impact the Programme has had for his pupils.

"Blue Star has been a fantastically beneficial project for the children of Craggagh. Geographically, we are on the periphery of Europe, but this project has brought us right to the heart of the EU. Through engaging with the Blue Star Programme, a wonderful sense of European citizenship has been cultivated and fostered amongst the entire school community," said Mr Charlton.

Schools around Ireland will be participating in the 2013-2014 Blue Star Programme over the coming months, culminating in a large celebration to mark Europe Day on May 6 next.



▲ **STAR PUPILS** Pictured at Craggagh National School where the Blue Star Programme for Primary Schools was launched by An Taoiseach Enda Kenny were children from Craggagh National School with Cllr Eugene Lavin, Jim Higgins, MEP and John O'Mahony, TD. Pic: Ken Wright

Below: RTÉ News2Day coverage of the 'Handshake for Europe' between Boolavogue NS and Galbally NS, Wexford



Below: Photograph and Article from the Northside People on Minister Donohoe's visit to Gaelscoil Bharra



■ Minister for European Affairs Paschal Donohoe with fifth class pupils from Gaelscoil Barra, Cabra Lauren Hughes, Bridóg Coulihan, Jodie Flynn, Moya Ryan, Sarah Kelly and Marianne Gormley. The minister was at the school last Friday to help mark Europe Day.

Local pupils celebrate Europe Day

MINISTER for European Affairs, Paschal Donohoe, paid a visit to Gaelscoil Bharra in his home constituency of Dublin Central last week as part of a series of events to mark Europe Day.

Minister Donohoe, who also visited Mary Help of Christians GNS on the Navan Road, reminded the students of the importance of European solidarity.

"The anniversary of the Schuman Declaration which led to the foundation of the European Coal and Steel Community ECSC, the forerunner of the European Union, serves to remind us of the horrors endured by the people of Europe in two world wars and of the peace and stability

we have enjoyed in recent decades," he said.

Pupils at both Northside schools are engaged in European Movement Ireland's Blue Star programme, which is designed to help foster a better understanding and knowledge of the European Union.

"The Blue Star programme is one of the ways in which we can bring the EU alive for our children and teach them of the benefits that come with being part of that

Union," the minister said.

Now in its third year, the blue Star programme, which is run by European Movement Ireland on behalf of the Department of An Taoiseach, the European Commission Representation and the European Parliament, has seen more than 120 schools and 5,500 pupils participating to date.

"I am delighted to be able to engage with the children in the classroom and beyond as we mark this anniversary and continue to raise awareness of that day more than 60 years ago when the face of Europe was changed forever," Minister Donohoe concluded.

Galbally honoured to greet Ambassador

by Anna Hayes

THE PUPILS of Galbally National School were given the great honour recently of greeting the Spanish Ambassador to Ireland when he visited Wexford as part of a European Movement Ireland event.

Javier Garrigues called to the small, rural school on his way to Wexford and spent an hour with the children and in the nearby playschool before continuing on his itinerary of events.

Arriving at around 11 a.m., Mr. Garrigues was greeted by school principal Siobhan

Doyle and three pupils, Caoimhe Monahan and Méabh Rochford, who were dressed in Irish dancing costumes and Alicia Lambert who was dressed in a Spanish dancing costume.

Ms. Doyle said that the school was delighted to welcome the ambassador: "He was very nice and very good with the kids. They seemed to relate to him."

Among those present were parents and, in particular, the school's oldest living past pupil Ned Fenlon and his grandson, the school's current youngest pupil Kyle George.

The kids provided entertainment singing songs in Irish and Spanish and performing some Irish dancing. Ms. Doyle thanked Mr. Garrigues for visiting and he, in turn, thanked the school for making him feel so welcome. Having tea and cake afterwards, he complimented one of the local parents on her wonderful dessert.

Ms. Doyle said: "It was a really enjoyable day and Mr. Garrigues seemed to really enjoy his visit. He said that he had been to lots of functions but never to a small, rural school. He said he had seen 'the real Ireland' in our school

and recognised how well the small schools worked.

"If I could get Ruairi Quinn to come down and see the same thing now, it'd be great!" she joked.



Past pupil Edward Fenlon and youngest pupil Kyle George make a special presentation to Spanish Ambassador Javier Garrigues on his visit to the Galbally N.S. Pic: Christy Farrell

Article in the Enniscorthy Echo – 3 December 2013

Caherconlish rolls out blue flag for Minister of European Affairs

DONAL O'REGAN

CAHERCONLISH National school was full of joie de vivre for the visit of Minister for European Affairs, Paschal Donohoe and Marianne Ziss, first secretary of the French Embassy.

They came to celebrate the school's success in the Blue Star Programme, which aims to foster better understanding and knowledge of the European Union and how it affects the lives of citizens through classroom projects and activities.

They got a great welcome from pupils, teachers, parents and members of the local community. Ms Ziss was even welcomed in her native tongue by junior infants.

"They said Bonjour, Ça va?" said principal and junior infants teacher, Sandra Ni Chiosoi.

"They are only four and five, they love learning new things and their interest is really piqued at that age," she added.

The children gave a guard of honour to the dignitaries and the hall was decorated with

languages, traditional foods, cultural events and much more.

Mr Donohoe said: "It is a privilege to be here and

She made special mention of Pat Hourigan and Martin O'Shaughnessy, who without being asked, cleared briars, planted flowers and shrubs and secured French and EU flags.



Chloe Curtin gave a wall plaque to Paschal Donohoe, Minister for European Affairs

witness the enthusiasm and creativity of the pupils of Caherconlish National School. Congratulations, not only to them, but also to their parents and teachers whose hard work and involvement in Blue Star make the programme such a success." Ms Ni Chiosoi said it was a wonderful community day featuring parents, members of the community and local businesses.



Matt Hogan presented a bouquet of flowers to Marianne Ziss, first secretary to the French Embassy



Finn Martin, Eve Treacy, Diarmuid Murnane and Kate Nelligan

their artwork and projects on EU countries. Children gave a presentation on all they had learned which really impressed Mr Donohoe and Ms Ziss.

"We have a huge interest in active citizenship for children and that they feel they have a role and a voice in society. It is excellent preparation for life going forward," said Ms Ni Chiosoi. Every class in the school is involved. They research, study and complete projects on populations,



Ciara Martin, Leah Carey and Scott McKeon show their colours

Article in the Limerick Leader – 05/10/13.

Drumraney NS on EU programme

MAIREAD McGuinness MEP congratulated Drumraney National School, Athlone, on its participation in the Blue Star programme, an education initiative to foster better understand-

ing and knowledge of the European Union and how it affects the lives of Irish citizens. "The Blue Star programme works because it allows children to learn about the European

Union and to ask questions about the different countries and cultures that make up the 28 member state union.

It also works because it engages children in all aspects of the EU, in-

cluding language, music, sport and food, but it would not happen without the full engagement and involvement of the teachers and parents, the MEP said.



Pictured at the seminar on the Blue Star Programme in Dublin were: Erica Feely, Clooneyquin National School, Roscommon and Laura Silke, Drumraney National School, Athlone (right) with MEPs Mairead McGuinness and Marlan Harkin.

Article in the Roscommon Herald – 04/02/14

Brussels Trip

As part of the Blue Star Programme, the European Commission Representation in Ireland kindly supported a study trip to Brussels for participating teachers from the Blue Star Programme. In all, 22 teachers from all corners of the country visited Brussels from 7 - 9 July 2014. The itinerary for this trip is outlined below:

Tuesday, 8 July 2014	
9.00	Welcome and Introduction by Mrs Isabelle VAN KEIRSBILCK
9.15	The role of the European Commission in the EU Mr Marc Corner Directorate-General "Communication"
11.00	The role of the European Union in Education Mr David Muscat Directorate-General for Education and Culture
12.00	Meeting with Máire Geoghegan Quinn Commissioner responsible for Research, Innovation and Science
15.00	The EU's regional policy with a special focus on Ireland Mr John Farrell Unit "Ireland and the United Kingdom" Directorate-General " Regional and Urban Policy"
16.15	The European Year of Citizens 2013 Mr John MacDonald Directorate-General "Communication"
17:15	End of the first day of the visit

Wednesday, 9 July 2014	
9.00	Visit to the Parliamentarium – European Parliament Interactive Visitor's Centre
10.30	Overview of the European Parliament Spinelli Building
11.00	Meeting with Irish MEPs Q&A Session – Nessa Childers, Lynn Boylan, Matt Carthy, Brian Hayes, Deirdre Clune, Sean Kelly, Mairead McGuinness and Martina Anderson.
13.00	Visit to the European Parliament Hemicycle
15.15	Visit to the Permanent Representation of Ireland to the EU Meeting and Q&A with Ambassador Kelleher

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 third 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 in 2011/2012 with 32 schools, jumping to 94 schools last year, while this year, we had 106 participating schools. This year, the Blue Star Programme had participating schools from 24 counties, the highest number yet, and each of the new European Election constituencies were well represented. The participating schools ranged from two teacher rural schools to large urban schools with hundreds of pupils. Approximately 12,000-15,000 pupils from across Ireland participated in the third year of 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 2014-2015 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 2014-2015

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 2014-2015. These potential participants heard about the Programme through the media coverage, social media sites and from teachers who are currently participating in the Blue Star Programme.

Recommendations & Observations

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.

Below is a verbatim extract of the feedback we asked teachers in Year 3 to provide, based on their experience teaching the Blue Star Programme in 2013/2014:

- *“I found the Blue Star Programme a very worthwhile project to undertake with the 6th class.”*
- *“The scope of the project facilitated wonderful curricular integration. In particular it incorporated SESE, Visual Art, Drama, Music and English – all strands (oral language, reading and writing). It gave meaning to the children’s learning. They were engaging in the activities for a reason and were highly motivated. Most importantly from a teacher’s perspective, participating in the project did not really add to the workload of the curriculum but rather provided a theme for curricular integration.”*
- *“Would definitely participate again, but an impetus for second year participation must be looked at. A CPD Summer course on EU affairs for teachers could be looked at in conjunction with education centres.”*
- *“Children’s social skills were developed. Much of the work of the programme involved collaborative activities. Children had to work together co-operatively to achieve a common goal. This meant planning together, compromising on differences of opinion, communicating efficiently and in the process maintaining positive relationships with their classmates.”*
- *“The computer skills of the children were developed unrecognisably! From initially being able to type an essay in Microsoft Word, the children graduated to a level of technological competence that would merit a certificate! They are now competent at independently researching a topic online, they are able to download pictures, sounds and animations. Familiarity with PowerPoint has equipped them with the ability to utilise PowerPoints’ animation features to create a clever educational presentation.”*
- *“It is challenging to think of ways in which the programme could be improved upon. Perhaps a day where there is the opportunity of participating schools to present sample of work to other schools. I guess I found the children put so much into the work, the recognition is very valuable.”*
- *“Public Speaking and Confidence were enhanced in the process. The children all had opportunity to present their work to a variety of audiences. Practice enabled them to feel confident communicating their learning and the positive response and enthusiasm benefited the children’s confidence greatly.”*

- *"I found this to be a very worthwhile experience. I am not very good at sticking to rigid plans and found that some of my original plans changed, to be replaced with a different idea...but this was one aspect I liked about the programme. The children found it very interesting and it helped to give purpose to their history and geography curriculum. It amazed me how well read the children were in the "war" books and novels and we had great discussions."*
- *"The only downside I felt was that the bulk of the work appeared to be geared more for the senior classes and with all the other projects and work that needed to be done I struggled to complete on all four topics. Maybe focussing on one topic a year might be a good idea. I tended to focus this year's work on the culture of the E.U. as a lot of work last year was done on the institutional strand. Overall, I think that the Blue Star programme is of great benefit to national school pupils."*
- *"I thought it was an excellent programme and the children learned so much from the activities. The integration of ICT helped immensely, as it allowed the children the freedom to become responsible for their learning. I would definitely recommend it to any school to take it on board, as it covers the entire primary curriculum."*
- *"This is a particularly good programme for our school as many of the activities we are involved in anyway fulfill the criteria for the flag. Nevertheless the fact that we were working towards getting the flag, focussed people's minds specifically on Europe and Europe related events. Therefore, Europe had a higher profile than it would otherwise have had because of our participation. We would be very interested in participating again although perhaps on subsequent occasions of participation, schools could get a wall plaque or some other emblem rather than another flag."*
- *"The beauty of this programme for us was that it afforded all our families the opportunity to celebrate our diversity, learn about and enjoy our cultural differences and understand where we've come from. We received fantastic support from all our parents and students. Our Polish families revelled and taught us so much of their backgrounds, foods, interests, families and hopes. It is the first initiative that really has incorporated the entire school community and the feedback from it was fantastic. It is our hope that it will remain a permanent fixture on our school calendar."*

For the first time, this year, we also asked participating pupils for their feedback on the programme and I have included some examples of this below.

- *"If I meet anybody canvassing I have plenty questions for them."*
- *"I really enjoyed working on our Blue Star Project. I loved learning about the culture of Germany and how different it is to Ireland. I enjoyed working with my group and would love to do something like this again."*
- *"I had lots of fun learning all about Greece. I loved using the computers and making our project; it was much more enjoyable than writing notes in a copy!!"*
- *"It was great to get a break from using our books all the time. I really enjoyed the group work. I can't wait for our Europe Day to dress up and taste all the food from the different countries."*
- *"It was really cool, I loved learning about the different landmarks of Belgium especially the Mannekin Pis and I loved making the Atomium."*

- *“I’d love to participate again because when we made the dresses we started off with nothing but made so much. I love being creative!”*
- *“We made videos and that was the first time we ever got to be that creative for a project. It was brilliant.”*
- *“It was a great experience in 6th class to meet so many people, also to work closer together as a class and in the future hopefully it’ll bring us closer together with our classmates.”*
- *“I would recommend this to other schools because it is very entertaining and enjoyable to be part of.”*
- *“I don’t think it can be made any better and I think they got it spot on.”*
- *“It’ll be an experience we will never forget.”*
- *“Our class had learned about the EU before but this experience made us more interested because we did stuff that was fun for our age and stuff that we were interested in. I’d definitely recommend it to other schools.”*

European Movement Ireland Response / Recommendations

It is absolutely vital that the Blue Star Programme remains curriculum friendly in order to continue the increase in the number of participating schools. As the National Coordinator for the first three years of the programme, we have dealt first-hand with the participating teachers and are consciously aware that the ease of integration of the programme into the existing curriculum is a critical factor at the start of the year when schools are deciding what programmes to undertake.

EM Ireland feels that the four main elements of the programme, i.e. historical, geographical, cultural and creative, and institutional; as well as the topical additional elements and the Europe Day celebrations every year, have worked extremely well over the pilot phase of the programme from 2011-2014, and this is highlighted by the huge increase in participation over this period. These four elements represent the foundation blocks of the Blue Star Programme, and they should be cemented as a constant throughout the life of the programme.

The additional elements/civic society elements added to the programme each year are another major strength of the initiative and have been highlighted by some teachers as the reason they repeat the programme for a second or third time. In 2012/2013, when Blue Star pupils learned about the Irish Presidency of the Council of the EU, and in 2013/2014 when they explored the European elections, the electoral process and the importance of elections, it allowed them to actively engage with the political, social and moral issues that concern them by giving them the opportunity to engage in creative exercises.

The feedback has been very positive for the additional civic society elements as pupils genuinely appreciated the different learning methods associated with these elements.

In the future, EM Ireland would recommend exploring the possibility of allowing some schools, mainly smaller, rural schools, to enter into a four year cycle of the Blue Star Programme, whereby they would focus their attention on one element per year, as opposed to all four. This would also work for larger schools that are just involving one or two classes in the Programme.

Repetition of material year on year can present itself as a problem for the type of schools mentioned above, and this would allow schools to explore completely new elements each year if they wish.

Regarding school visits, EM Ireland would propose to invite all programme partners to visit at least 5 schools per year, which would afford a lot more schools the opportunity to showcase their work from the year. If the above option of a four year cycle for some participating schools was introduced, visits from all programme partners would allow schools progress to be reviewed, similar to the Green Flag programme - <http://www.greenschoolsireland.org/about-us/renewing-the-award.290.html>

EM Ireland also proposed to introduce alternative awards for repeat Blue Star schools, as an incentive for them to continue participating. Some ideas for these alternative awards are:

- Different colour certificates
- Website badges
- Visits to Leinster House with their local TDs or the Minister for European Affairs
- Visits to EU House
- Additional competition element for the best school in each EU constituency – perhaps a debate could be organised between schools

EM Ireland would also encourage all Irish schools to explore eTwinning, which is a platform that allows Irish teachers to communicate, collaborate, develop projects and share ideas with teachers in other European countries. Teachers from all participating schools can register and use the eTwinning online tools to find each other, meet virtually, team up in Groups, learn together and engage in online-based projects. It would really bring all elements of the programme to life.

The above observations for the future of the Blue Star Programme are based on EM Ireland's experience of coordinating the Programme over the last three years and could be introduced to complement the current delivery strategy already in place.

European Movement Ireland is delighted to have been the organisation managing the third year of this Programme and to have witnessed the Programme go from strength to strength. 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.

The logo features a central blue star with a thick outline, surrounded by several smaller yellow stars with thin outlines. The background is light blue with faint, larger blue stars scattered around. At the bottom of the page, there are several curved, overlapping bands of color: dark blue, orange, red, and yellow.

Blue Star

Programme