



# Blue Star Programme Year 10 Report

**2020-2021**

July 2021



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### Executive Summary - 2020-2021

In its role as the National Implementation Body for the Blue Star Programme, European Movement (EM) Ireland is pleased to submit this report to the Department of Foreign Affairs for the 2020 – 2021 school year. This report has several different goals and objectives, namely:

- *To provide a full review of the tenth year of the Blue Star Programme to the Department of Foreign Affairs and other stakeholders.*
- *To outline the learning objectives and achievements of the participating schools and pupils.*
- *To analyse the outcomes and accomplishments of the tenth year of the Programme.*
- *To document media coverage of the Programme.*
- *To suggest observations and recommendations for the Programme in the future.*

The Programme benefitted greatly from strong working relationships with the Department of Foreign Affairs, the Office of the Minister of State for European Affairs, the European Commission Representation in Ireland, the European Parliament Liaison Office in Ireland and the Department of Education. Their engagement is much appreciated by EM Ireland and is vital in supporting the National Implementation Body deliver on its Blue Star Programme work.

The idea of the Blue Star Programme is simple: to encourage primary school pupils in Ireland to get creative about Europe. The hope is that through the Blue Star Programme, pupils will foster a better understanding and knowledge of the European Union and how it affects our lives. This is achieved through classroom-based projects, activities and tasks centred around several different themes and concepts, culminating in events to mark Europe Day on or around 9 May each year.

Over the course of the 2020-2021 school year, as in previous years, the Blue Star Programme introduced participants to the EU, what it means and how it works. Year-on-year, the Programme succeeds in fostering a sense of EU citizenship and of 'belonging' within participating schools, extending also beyond the school walls into the wider local communities. At the heart of the Programme also, is how the Programme helps pupils embrace the ever-increasing cultural diversity in the Irish classroom.

The tenth year of the Blue Star Programme saw 238 primary schools participate. This, for the fourth year running, was above the agreed SLA target of 180 schools. Almost half of the 238 schools were first-time participant schools, striking a good balance between repeat schools doing the Programme year-on-year and the inclusion of new first-time schools, that have become aware of the Programme due to the successful promotional campaign during August and September. For the seventh year in a row, all 26 counties in Ireland were represented by participating schools on the Programme. There was also an increase in the number of both Gaelscoileanna and DEIS schools taking part this year, 16 Gaelscoileanna and 49 DEIS schools.

47 schools from around the country have now taken part in the Programme for five or more years. We were delighted to honour 13 of these schools with a specially commissioned trophy for reaching this milestone during Year 10. This year also marked the 10-Year Anniversary of the Blue Star Programme. As part of the 10-Year Anniversary celebrations, we were delighted to present three schools with a once-off 10-Year Legacy Award, for taking part in all 10 years of the Programme thus far.

Undoubtedly, there were considerable challenges during the 2020-2021 school year, with all primary schools in the country closing from January to March and indeed pupils learning from home intermittently throughout the year, due to the Covid-19 pandemic. This posed difficulties most notably for classes in relation to completing their project work and in terms of VIP visits

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taking place. To mitigate against these challenges and to ensure that there was not a decrease in the number of schools continuing with their Programme work until the end of the year, the Blue Star Programme Team put in place a number of new initiatives – most notably the introduction of the online ‘Element Quizzes’, and the VIP ‘Pen-Pal’ system – to ensure that the Programme could still be completed successfully by all schools, even while remote learning was taking place. These new initiatives will be discussed in more detail later in this Report. It was important to the team that all of these new initiatives were accessible to all schools and so we worked to ensure all new resources and activities were available to all in a variety of formats (e.g. trí Ghaeilge, on and offline).

As the National Implementation Body for the 2019-2020 year of Programme during the Covid-19 pandemic, a key takeaway for us had been to ensure that the Programme had a greater digital presence going forward. This was achieved during the 2020-2021 academic year by creating numerous digital resources and worksheets for teachers’ and pupils’ use. This proved particularly useful during January – March 2021 when schools were closed and pupils and teachers were learning and teaching from home.

Europe Week celebrations were also affected by the ongoing restrictions with schools adopting a hybrid approach of both in-person and virtual events. The highlight of the virtual Europe Week celebrations was an online event, with schools from across the country tuning in live to watch Minister of State for European Affairs, Thomas Byrne TD, answer pupils’ questions.

At the time of writing, 119 schools have taken part in the Element Quizzes and/or submitted their Blue Star Programme Report, and therefore successfully completed the Blue Star Programme 2020-2021. This is the highest ever completion rate of schools in one academic year. Each of these schools have been awarded Blue Star Programme Certificates of Achievement, in both English and Irish. Based on the information given by the participating schools, we estimate that approximately 15,000 pupils from across Ireland participated in Year 10.

EM Ireland is delighted to have been the National Implementation Body for this tenth year and is proud to have played its part in ensuring that the Programme continued through such challenging circumstances. EM Ireland welcomes the opportunity to continue developing the potential of the Programme even further into the future.



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**Noelle O Connell**

*CEO of European Movement Ireland  
July 2021*



## **Background to the Programme**

### **Initial Concept**

The Blue Star Programme seeks to inform young people in Ireland about Ireland's engagement with Europe. The Programme aims to foster better understanding and knowledge of the European Union among primary school pupils in Ireland through classroom projects and activities. At the heart of the Programme, is how it helps pupils embrace the ever-increasing cultural diversity in the Irish classroom.

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

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

In addition, schools are required to organise an event to celebrate Europe Day on or around 9 May.

Throughout the year, teachers are required to ensure that the four key areas of the Programme, as well as the Europe Day activities, are carried out through projects and events. This year, for the first time, the online 'Element Quizzes' were also introduced as a new initiative for schools. There were four quizzes, one based on each of the four key areas of the Programme.

To successfully complete the Programme, schools either had to take part in all four of the 'Element Quizzes' and/or to submit a Blue Star Programme Report, detailing all of the work they had done throughout the year under each of the four key headings of the Programme. All successful schools are awarded two specially commissioned Blue Star Programme Certificates of Achievement. One of the Certificates of Achievement is in English and the other in Irish, with both signed by Minister of State for European Affairs, Thomas Byrne TD, and CEO of EM Ireland, Noelle O Connell. Successful schools also receive an EU flag, which were kindly provided by the European Commission Representation in Ireland.

### **Steering Committee**

The Blue Star Programme was implemented for the tenth year by EM Ireland on behalf of the Department of Foreign Affairs and the Minister of State for European Affairs. The Steering Committee, established in the pilot year of the Programme, continued to play an instrumental role in the tenth year. As in previous years, the Steering Committee decided the initial strategy and marketing plan of the Blue Star Programme, monitored its progress and offered counsel to EM Ireland on the Programme's implementation and delivery. The Programme benefitted greatly from strong working relationships at all levels with the Department, the Minister's Office, as well as the European Commission Representation in Ireland, the European Parliament Liaison Office in Ireland and the Department of Education.

Good partnerships with all Blue Star Programme Steering Committee members were vital for navigating the challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic, such as ensuring that teaching resources could still be sent to schools in October, that the teacher training workshops could still be held, and in holding the virtual Europe Day celebrations. The Minister of State for European

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Affairs took part in a special online event to virtually mark the celebration of Europe Day. All 238 participating schools were invited to tune into this live event. The European Commission Representation in Ireland continued to provide much of the resource material which was extremely important as teaching supports and information for the participating schools.

The members of the Steering Committee included:

- *Minister of State for European Affairs and officials from the Minister's Office.*
- *Officials from the Department of Foreign Affairs.*
- *Officials from the European Commission Representation in Ireland.*
- *Officials from the European Parliament Liaison Office in Ireland.*
- *Officials from the Department of Education.*
- *Members of staff from EM Ireland.*

The Steering Committee convened in July 2020 to launch the new year of the Programme. The full Steering Committee also met formally in February 2021 to discuss the progress of the 2020-2021 year of the Blue Star Programme. Both meetings were held online due to public health guidelines. At these meetings, parameters and targets were agreed, and buy-ins to the project from key stakeholders were secured.

Several informal bilateral meetings were also held as needed. In addition, EM Ireland continued to provide the Committee with regular updates by email and phone, ensuring that the organisation remained true to the overall goals and objectives of the Programme's successful delivery.



## Implementation of Year 10, Year 2020-2021

### Work Programme Timetable

EM Ireland divided the work programme for Year 10 into several different phases and implemented changes to the school year calendar in an attempt to maximise our outcomes, for example, this year we extended the registration phase of the Programme for an extra week. There were further changes implemented also during the school term, in order to react to the school closures from January - March, and consideration was continually given to the best ways to ensure the completion of the Programme for 2020-2021.

The timetable below was based on EM Ireland's experience over previous years of successfully running the Blue Star Programme and was agreed and signed off by the Steering Committee. The work programme this year included one significant change from previous years in the form of the introduction of the online Element Quizzes in April.

Dates	Action	Lead
July - August 2020	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Update Blue Star Programme and EM Ireland websites with latest information, material and graphics</li> <li>2. Meeting of the Blue Star Programme Steering Committee / Agree strategy and implementation plan with the Steering Committee</li> <li>3. Incorporate and finalise proposed changes from the Steering Committee</li> <li>4. Communicate with all primary schools in the Republic of Ireland inviting them to participate in the Programme</li> <li>5. Contact teacher publications and online platforms to publicise the Programme</li> </ol>	<p>EMI</p> <p>ALL</p> <p>EMI</p> <p>EMI/DES</p> <p>EMI</p>
September 2020	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>6. Contact Irish MEPs, Oireachtas Members and European Ambassadors encouraging them to promote the Programme and to make themselves available for VIP visits throughout the year</li> <li>7. Point of contact for all school queries, including with regard to what's involved in undertaking the Programme</li> <li>8. Ongoing media campaign to promote the Programme, through local newspaper articles and radio interviews</li> <li>9. Registration of participating schools, collating of responses and filing of all registration forms</li> </ol>	<p>EMI/MoS</p> <p>EMI</p> <p>EMI</p> <p>EMI</p>

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October 2020	10. Send out resource packs with Programme teaching materials to all participating schools along with the Curriculum Guide	EMI/ECR
November 2020	11. Collect Media Consent Forms from participating schools 12. Point of contact for all school queries 13. Identification of 5-Year Achievement Schools and 10 Year Legacy Schools and notification to Blue Star Programme Coordinators 14. First teacher training workshop for participating Blue Star Programme teachers	EMI EMI EMI EPLO/EMI
November-December 2020	15. Begin coordinating VIP visits with the office of the Minister of State for European Affairs, Irish MEPs, Oireachtas Members and European Ambassadors, etc. 16. Point of contact for all school queries, including regarding engagement with media and commencement of projects 17. Begin monthly newsletters for participating schools	EMI/MoS EMI EMI
January - March 2021	19. Point of contact for all school queries, including in relation to VIP visits 20. Meeting of the Blue Star Programme Steering Committee 21. Second online Teacher Training Workshop	EMI All EPLO/EMI
April 2021	22. New 'Element Quizzes' - one quiz released each week throughout the month of April 23. Communications push regarding Europe Day on 9 May, including the 'Handshake for Europe' initiative 24. Contact Irish MEPs, Oireachtas Members and European Ambassadors encouraging them to make themselves available for VIP visits on and around Europe Day	EMI EMI/MoS EMI



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	<p>25. Point of contact for all school queries, including in relation to Europe Day</p> <p>26. Meeting of the Blue Star Steering Committee</p> <p>27. Record submission of Blue Star Programme Reports</p> <p>28. Record submission of participation in all four of the 'Element Quizzes'</p>	<p>All</p> <p>EMI</p> <p>EMI</p> <p>EMI</p>
May 2021	<p>29. Europe Day events on or around 9 May with the 'Handshake for Europe'</p> <p>30. National Blue Star Programme Europe Day event with the 'Handshake for Europe' - along the lines of hugely successful events that have previously taken place with the Minister of State for European Affairs</p> <p>31. Point of contact for all school queries, especially regarding completion of the Programme and submission of Blue Star Programme Reports</p> <p>32. Record submission of Blue Star Programme Reports</p> <p>33. Record submission of participation in all four of the 'Element Quizzes'</p>	<p>EMI</p> <p>EMI/MoS/DFAT</p> <p>EMI</p> <p>EMI</p> <p>EMI</p>
June - July 2021	<p>34. Send out Certificates of Achievement and EU flags to successful schools</p> <p>35. Point of contact for all school queries, including in relation to completing the Programme</p> <p>36. Organise virtual trip for teachers to Brussels to visit the European Commission and European Parliament</p> <p>37. Submit Report and Review of the Tenth Year of the Blue Star Programme to the Minister of State for European Affairs and the Department of Foreign Affairs</p> <p>38. Meeting of the Blue Star Programme Steering Committee</p>	<p>EMI</p> <p>EMI</p> <p>ECR/EPLO/EMI</p> <p>EMI</p> <p>All</p>

### Registration Phase

EM Ireland initiated the marketing and public awareness campaign of the Programme in August 2020. All primary schools in Ireland (approximately 3,200) were contacted about the Blue Star Programme. This was done by sending them an email inviting them to register and participate in the Programme. This campaign included targeted emails to all Gaelscoileanna in the country through Irish. EM Ireland also followed up with some schools by phone, targeting schools in counties with traditionally lower levels of participation in the Programme, as well as sending bespoke invitations to schools who previously participated in the Programme.

We also reached out to bespoke primary school websites such as *Seomra Ranga* and *Schooldays.ie* to publicise the Programme, some of whom featured articles on the Programme.

In addition, EM Ireland contacted Irish MEPs as well as European Ambassadors to request support in making schools around the country aware of the Programme and encouraging them to take part. As a result of this, Maria Walsh MEP sent a letter to all primary schools in the country encouraging them to take part in the Programme. Other Oireachtas Members also contacted local schools about the Programme and promoted it across their social media platforms, demonstrating the great political support for the Blue Star Programme.

Also during the registration phase, on September 15, EM Ireland held a webinar about the Blue Star Programme, where teachers who were interested in participating this year could tune in to learn more about the Programme and what their school would gain from participating in it. This webinar also included a live Q&A session with the Blue Star Programme Manager.

Finally, a concerted public relations campaign was once again carried out by the EM Ireland communications team at national, regional and local level around the registration drive. Targeted press releases, which received media coverage in newspapers and on radio, and various social media promotions helped to further increase awareness of the Blue Star Programme around the country. Press content was also made available *trí Ghaeilge* and issued to a list of Irish language media contacts which led to a series of features on Irish language media throughout the year.

In order to improve administration of the Blue Star Programme, every school that takes part in the Programme is issued a unique 'BSP Number' when they register. This improves the National Implementation Body's ability to monitor registration and determine which schools are due to receive which materials.

As a result of this structured and coordinated outreach, the 2020-2021 year of the Blue Star Programme reached above the agreed SLA target of 180 schools, with 238 schools registering to take part. Almost half of the 238 registrations were first-time schools, striking a good balance between repeat schools doing the Programme year-on-year and first-time schools. We also reached the agreed SLA target of 500-700 schools within the first two years of the current tender (2017-2020). This target has now been exceeded and a total of 929 schools have taken part over the past four years.

For the seventh year in a row, all 26 counties in Ireland were represented, with many achieving their highest ever participation figures to date.

Due to the restrictions in place as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, it was decided that an official National Launch of Year 10 of the Blue Star Programme could not take place as usual in October, but instead had to be postponed. EM Ireland were delighted that An Taoiseach, Micheál Martin, and the Minister of State for European Affairs, Thomas Byrne TD, were instead able to take part in an online event to celebrate 10 years of the Blue Star Programme during Europe Week on May 7.

### Teaching Resources and Media Consent Forms

Once schools had registered to participate in the tenth year of the Blue Star Programme, they were provided with a special resource pack with materials kindly supplied by the European Commission Representation in Ireland. These colourful materials included textbooks, wall-charts, DVDs, EU country guides, maps, story books, and more.

In addition, all schools were supplied with EM Ireland's comprehensive Curriculum Guide, which was developed in conjunction with Blue Star Programme Champion Teachers. The Curriculum Guide includes advice and recommendations on all elements of the Programme. Together, the resource packs offer ideas and tips on projects pupils can undertake, and guidance for teachers regarding how best to support the pupils and integrate the Programme into their curriculum. These resource packs and curriculum guides were sent out to all participating schools on Monday 19 October 2020, giving teachers ample time to begin the Blue Star Programme work as early in the school year as possible.

In general, feedback from teachers on the resource packs was extremely positive. Participating teachers were also invited to visit the bespoke Blue Star Programme website for information, advice and material: [www.bluestarprogramme.ie](http://www.bluestarprogramme.ie). Launched in 2014 and updated regularly by EM Ireland, alongside the monthly newsletter, it provides a means by which all participants can be easily updated. The website also serves as a useful source of information for schools interested in taking part in the Programme.

For the 2020-2021 year, EM Ireland created a new section of the designated Blue Star 'Corner' on the website specifically for 'Digital Teaching Resources'. This was as a direct result of our experience of implementing the Programme during the Covid-19 pandemic, we wanted to ensure that the Programme had a sufficient level of digital resources and could be carried out from home as well as in the classroom. This new page of the website provided teachers with access to all the necessary teaching resources such as downloadable activity worksheets, wordsearches, recipes for pupils to try at home, PDF versions of the different textbooks, quizzes and much more. Participating teachers needed a password to access the 'Digital Teaching Resources' and the Blue Star 'Corner' pages of the website and this gave exclusivity to participating schools.

Participants were also encouraged to interact with the bespoke Blue Star Programme Twitter account [@bluestarprog](https://twitter.com/bluestarprog), which was launched in October 2018. Given the increase in social media activity among primary schools, the dedicated Twitter account gives schools a direct online contact to share their work and thoughts as they work through the Blue Star Programme. This year, 49 schools engaged with the Blue Star Programme account on Twitter, an increase from previous years. Further to this, EM Ireland responded to school queries daily by phone and through the dedicated email address: [bluestar@europeanmovement.ie](mailto:bluestar@europeanmovement.ie).

The Blue Star Programme also issued Media Consent Forms when schools registered, to allow for permission to share photos or videos of the pupils and their work. EM Ireland is committed to practices which protect children from harm. We also recognise that good child protection policies and procedures are of benefit to everyone involved in the Blue Star Programme.

### VIP Visits & Cross Programme Integration

VIP visits are a longstanding tradition of the Blue Star Programme where the Minister of State for European Affairs, Irish MEPs, Oireachtas Members and European Ambassadors (and many more!) visit participating schools and speak to the pupils about their work in relation to Europe.

The National Implementation Body regularly receives feedback that VIP visits are a great opportunity for pupils to showcase their Blue Star Programme work and to learn about the EU in a practical, personable way. Many schools have said that they consider these visits to be the highlight of their Blue Star Programme experience, and the best way to teach pupils about the institutional section of the Programme.

Due to the Covid-19 restrictions in place throughout the 2020-2021 school year, the opportunity for schools to host school visits with VIP guests was severely impacted. As a result of this, the Blue Star Programme team introduced an alternative initiative in the 'VIP Pen-Pals', where we encouraged schools to reach out to Ambassadors and MEPs, with written questions from the pupils based on their project work. EM Ireland provided schools with a Questionnaire template form which they could send to VIPs, and we also provided all participating teachers with all the Irish MEPs and EU Ambassadors' contact details. Throughout the year, schools also made use of new technology such as the Zoom platform, to host virtual VIP visits.

Blue Star Programme schools were still asked to submit a form when a visit, whether virtual, in-person, or through the Pen-Pal system, took place. This allowed EM Ireland to keep track of all visits. Below is a selection of some of the VIP visits which took place over the course of the year, as showcased on social media:

- *Frances Fitzgerald virtually visited Stanhope Primary School, Dublin 7 on 13 May 2021.*
- *Seán Kelly MEP visited Loughfouder N.S., Co. Kerry on 11 June 2021. This marked one of the first in-person VIP visits since the Covid-19 lockdown.*
- *Barry Andrews MEP visited Rathmichael N.S., Co. Dublin on 11 June 2021.*
- *Maria Walsh MEP visited Tooreen N.S., Co. Mayo via 'Zoom' for a Q&A session on 17 June 2021.*



*Seán Kelly MEP visiting Loughfouder N.S., on his first in person VIP Visit in a year.*

In terms of the number of VIP visits that took place during the 2020-2021 Programme, due to school closures as a direct result of Covid-19, the majority of VIP visits this year took place remotely, either through the Blue Star Programme's 'Pen-Pal' initiative or as a virtual visit using an online platform. At least 10 schools took part in the 'Pen-Pal' initiative while a further 7 schools held



virtual visits from local MEPs. Undoubtedly, the number of school visits that were able to take place this year was severely affected by the schools being closed from January – March 2021. However, towards the end of the 2020-2021 school year, there were over 6 in-person VIP Visits. Overall, despite the challenges, there was a total of more than 20 VIP visits.

This year, EM Ireland continued to encourage schools to broaden the scope of potential VIP visits to include student teachers from other EU countries through the eTwinning programme, as well as the involvement of past pupils and parents whose work is related to Europe. In the future, EM Ireland would encourage schools to also explore the potential for such visits to facilitate foreign language learning through presentations from native speakers from other EU countries.



EM Ireland is also exploring the possibility of linkages with other programmes, including the European Commission 'Back to School' scheme with thanks to the European Commission Representation in Ireland for their assistance in this regard. EM Ireland is also keen to explore the potential relationship with Active Flag, who have elements of their programme that schools incorporate easily alongside their Blue Star Programme work.

## Blue Star Programme Year 10 National Launch

Due to the restrictions that were in place as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, it was decided that an official National Launch of Year 10 of the Blue Star Programme could not take place in-person as usual in October.

EM Ireland were delighted that An Taoiseach, Micheál Martin, and the Minister of State for European Affairs, Thomas Byrne TD, were instead able to take part in an online event to celebrate 10 years of the Blue Star Programme during Europe Week on May 7.

## 5-Year Achievement Award

47 schools from around the country have now taken part in the Blue Star Programme for five or more years. During Year 10, we were delighted to honour the 13 schools who reached the five-year milestone this year with a specially commissioned 5-Year Achievement Award trophy. Given the restrictions due to Covid-19, EM Ireland sent the trophies directly to the award-winning schools and encouraged them to hold a ceremony in their own schools, as it was not possible to host a central event in Dublin.

An initiative of EM Ireland since 2016, the 5-Year Achievement Award has become an important part of the Programme in rewarding schools which participate year-on-year. Next year, there will potentially be 39 more schools eligible to receive the 5-Year Achievement Award.

The 13 schools that received the 5-Year Achievement Award for 2020-2021 were:

*Barefield National School, Co. Clare*  
*Whitegate National School, Co. Cork*  
*Scoil Náisiúnta Ghort a Choirce, Co. Donegal*  
*Cloughfin National School, Co. Donegal*  
*St. Brigid's Primary School, The Coombe, Dublin 8*  
*Holy Spirit Senior Primary School, Dublin 12*  
*Moyderwell Mercy Primary School, Co. Kerry*  
*Castledrum National School, Co. Kerry*  
*Scoil Chaitlín Naofa, Co. Kerry*  
*Camross National School, Co. Laois*  
*Tavneena National School, Co. Mayo*  
*Knockconan National School, Co. Monaghan*  
*St. Mary's Primary School, Strokestown, Co. Roscommon*

## 10-Year Legacy Award

This year marked the 10-Year Anniversary of the Blue Star Programme. Since the inception of the Blue Star Programme in 2011, there have been over 1,000 schools in the country that have taken part in the Programme and many of them have participated again and again. However, there have only ever been three schools who have taken part in the Programme every single year, from 2011- 2021.

To celebrate this milestone, EM Ireland decided to recognise these three schools with a special, once-off 10-Year Legacy Award. This award acknowledged the tremendous dedication and commitment of these three schools in taking part in the Programme year after year and making it such an important part of their daily classroom life.

To celebrate this award, each of these three schools were invited to take part in a special event with Minister Thomas Byrne TD during Europe Week 2021. Pupils from the three Legacy Schools recorded questions for Minister Byrne and Minister Byrne answered their questions during a live event on 7 May. Each of these three schools also received a special EU flag with their school's name and crest embroidered on it to mark their achievement.

The three schools in receipt of the 10-Year Legacy Award were:

*Scoil na Maighdine Mhuire, Co. Clare*  
*Gardiner Street Primary School, Dublin 1*  
*St. Thomas' National School, Co. Westmeath*

## Blue Star Programme Content

### Programme Content

The Blue Star Programme is composed of four key areas of European knowledge:

#### 1. Historical

### 2. Geographical

### 3. Cultural and Creative

### 4. Institutional

While researching their projects, pupils were encouraged to use all means available to them, including online resources. Many projects were presented using interactive tools such as PowerPoint, videos and websites. The use of technology among participating schools was impressive, highlighting the success of the Blue Star Programme in increasing the use of technological resources in the classroom and bringing the goals of the Programme to life in a technological sense. We are pleased that the high level of engagement of pupils with online resources, and the creativity demonstrated when using these tools, continued in 2020-2021.

### 1. Historical

For this module, pupils picked an event, time or person pivotal to European history and completed a project on this topic. These projects were researched in books, Blue Star Programme resources and child friendly search engines. Projects focused on a range of areas including the formation of the European Union, World War II, Women in History, Ancient Greece, the Renaissance, the Berlin Wall and the Vikings, among many others.

The broad scope of the Blue Star Programme meant that pupils were able to focus on a historical theme appropriate to their age and class. In this way, the Programme afforded teachers the necessary flexibility to adapt it to suit their requirements and curriculum. Additionally, due to school closures this year, the availability of Blue Star Programme resources online allowed pupils to continue working on their projects while they were schooling from home. Many teachers mentioned that the availability of these resources online afforded them the opportunity to complete the Programme this year as it was possible for pupils to continue their work at home when it was needed. Finally, pupils completed the 'Historical Element Quiz' which was a new initiative introduced by the Blue Star Programme Team for the 2020-2021 school year.



*Pupils from Scoil na Maighdine Muire gan Smál Co. Galway received a visit from a local historian who showed them some impressive World War II memorabilia.*

### 2. Geographical

For the geographical section of the Blue Star Programme, many pupils prepared projects on different European countries. The projects focused on a number of topics, including the countries' flags, populations, capital cities, and famous landmarks. Many projects saw pupils drawing comparisons between their chosen country and Ireland.

This section of the Programme was particularly successful as pupils with links to other European countries were encouraged to share their knowledge of these countries with classmates. This helped to further integrate them into the school community, as well as increasing awareness and knowledge of different nationalities and cultures among participating schools. In addition, parents were sometimes invited to present to classes virtually or in person and some pupils corresponded with their classmates' relatives in other European countries. This in turn helped to make Europe a more tangible concept for the pupils and involved the wider community in the pupils' learning process.

For this module, some schools also used interactive maps and technology to learn about the capital cities of European countries; we were pleased to see this continued integration of technological teaching resources to aid pupils' learning. Additionally, pupils completed the 'Geography Element Quiz'.



*Pupil from Cloughfin N.S., Co. Donegal with her Geography project on Germany.*

### 3. Cultural and Creative

In this module, pupils explored the music, food, literature, culture and art of Europe. Classroom activities included preparing and tasting food from different European countries and learning about the cultural differences between their lives and pupils in other European countries.

This module led to some interesting and high-quality submissions ranging from learning basic phrases in European languages to pupils' excellent interpretations of European art, including that of Pablo Picasso and Leonardo da Vinci. Feedback from teachers was very positive regarding this module. A number of participants said that the Cultural and Creative element allowed teachers to include the whole school in the Blue Star Programme and also provided an opportunity for pupils from other European backgrounds to showcase their own cultures. This part of the Programme also helped to engage the wider community as parents were invited to contribute to the Programme by, for example, assisting their children in putting their projects and performances together. Pupils also completed the 'Cultural and Creative Element Quiz'.





*Pupils at St. Patrick's N.S., Co. Wicklow enjoying the cultural element of the Programme*

#### **4. Institutional**

In the Institutional section of the Blue Star Programme, pupils learn about how the EU works, how the different institutions cooperate with each other and the impact that these institutions have on the daily lives of EU citizens. Many of the pupils created group projects on one of the European Institutions and then presented their chosen institution to their classmates.

Pupils also engaged with public representatives to learn about European politics. A number of Irish MEPs, Oireachtas Members and European Ambassadors visited schools to speak about Europe and answer pupils' questions on their work. Due to Covid-19, a lot of these visits took place online with the return of some in-person visits appearing towards the end of the 2020-2021 school year. Schools also utilised the 'Pen-Pal' initiative where pupils sent questions their MEPs, Oireachtas Members and European Ambassadors, in order to complete this section of the Programme. Similar to the previous three elements, participating pupils also completed the 'Institutional Element Quizzes'.



*Maria Walsh MEP virtually visiting Tooreen N.S., Co. Mayo to answer pupils' questions regarding her work.*

## Europe Day

To successfully complete the Blue Star Programme, all participating schools are also asked to mark the celebration of Europe Day. Over the past 10 years of the Programme, there have been many wonderful Europe Day events, such as food fairs, school Eurovision competitions, art exhibitions inspired by famous European artists, and so much more. Due to the ongoing restrictions on events and gatherings, this year, the Blue Star Programme team adopted a hybrid approach to celebrating Europe Week. This meant that we asked schools to celebrate both in person and online, as appropriate.

As all schools had returned to the classroom by May, we encouraged teachers to mark Europe Day in some way with their pupils in the classroom in a manner that was safe and in line with all public health guidelines. Schools did this by holding outdoor events, such as holding the 'Air Handshake for Europe' in their school yards, in line with social-distancing. The traditional 'Handshake for Europe' remained the 'Air Handshake for Europe' from last year, symbolising the solidarity among European citizens, and celebrating the diversity of a strong and inclusive Union. Schools also held a variety of other events, such as 'Dress-Up Days' where pupils were asked to dress up in European-themed outfits.

In addition to these classroom events, we encouraged schools to engage with our online initiatives throughout Europe Week. The highlights of the online initiatives included:

- Hundreds of pupils and teachers from across the country taking part in the 'Air Handshake for Europe' initiative.
- Following on from last year's virtual Europe Week celebrations, EM Ireland also held the '27 for 27 Challenge' for the second time. This initiative challenged Blue Star Programme pupils to send in an interesting fact about one of the 27 EU Member States. Pupils across the country shared their favourite fun facts and these facts were collated and published on the Blue Star Programme website [here](#). The final '27 Facts' were shared on the Blue Star Programme social media channels on Europe Day, giving credit to the pupil who had submitted them.
- The Great European Bake-Off - for the first time, we challenged Blue Star Programme pupils to take part in the 'Great European Bake-off' and to get creative with their European-inspired baking and cooking! Throughout Europe Week we received fantastic photos of European-inspired masterpieces - from cakes in the colours of the EU flag, to Lithuanian

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bulviniai blynai (potato cakes). All photos we received as part of the Great European Bake-Off were featured on the media gallery of the Blue Star Programme website or on our social media.

- A live event with Minister of State for European Affairs, Thomas Byrne TD. All 238 participating Blue Star Programme schools were invited to tune in to watch Minister Byrne answer questions that were posed to him by pupils from the 10-Year Legacy schools. Schools were also able to watch the event back on the EM Ireland YouTube channel at a time that suited them. This was a special event that celebrated both Europe Day and also the 10-Year Anniversary of the Blue Star Programme.



*Pupils at Kilcoe N.S., taking part in this years' 'Air Handshake for Europe' initiative.*



*Pupils at Lurga N.S., dressing up in traditional clothes from stated countries as part of their Europe Week celebrations.*



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*Pupils from various primary schools across Ireland taking part in the 'Air Handshake' in their school yards in solidarity and unity with each other.*



*The Great European Bake-Off!*



### Assessment

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

1. *Participating teachers were asked to send a Blue Star Programme Report (in hard or soft copy), including evidence of projects and events carried out during the year covering the four key areas of EU knowledge and Europe Day.*
2. *These submissions were reviewed and then assessed.*
3. *Two Blue Star Programme Certificates of Achievement – one in English and the other in Irish – were awarded to schools who submitted these Blue Star Programme Reports to the satisfaction of the team.*

Due to our experience of implementing the Programme during the Covid-19 pandemic, EM Ireland, with the agreement of all other key stakeholders, agreed on changes to the criteria for assessment for completion of the Programme for the 2020-2021 year. The aim of these changes was to make the Programme easier to complete during the school closures, that the Programme was digitally and home-schooling friendly, and to ensure that as many schools as possible were able to complete the Programme this year.

The main change was the introduction of the 'Element Quizzes' as a means of completing the Programme. In previous years, schools could only complete the Programme by submitting a Blue Star Programme Report. In the Report, schools had to outline what they did under the headings of the four key elements of the Programme: History, Geography, Culture and Creativity and Institutional. This year for the first time, EM Ireland introduced the 'Element Quizzes' as an alternative means of completing the Programme. There were four quizzes, one based on each of the four key elements of the Programme - History, Geography, Culture and Creativity and Institutional – and schools had to complete all four of the quizzes to be deemed to have successfully completed the Programme. There were Junior and Senior versions of the quizzes so that pupils from all age groups could participate. The quizzes could be played online on an interactive platform or they were also available to download and print as a worksheet. The quizzes were available in both English and Irish.

We received very positive feedback from teachers regarding the addition of the 'Element Quizzes' to the Programme this year. The feedback said that they were a brilliant method of testing the pupils' knowledge of what they had learnt through the Programme. All teachers that completed the Programme through their participation in the four Element Quizzes were still encouraged to submit a Blue Star Programme Report as well – because the report provided a means of giving extra details and feedback regarding their work for the year. However, this was not compulsory, and completion of the Element Quizzes alone sufficed for completion of the Programme.

At the time of writing, 119 schools have been deemed to have successfully completed the Blue Star Programme 2020-2021, either through their participation in all four of the Element Quizzes and/or through their submission of a Blue Star Programme Report. Each of these schools who were deemed to have successfully completed the Programme for 2020-2021 have been awarded their Blue Star Programme Certificates of Achievement and an EU flag.

2021-2022 saw the highest ever percentage in terms of the number of schools that completed the Blue Star Programme. This success is a clear validation of the National Implementation Body's decision to introduce the Element Quizzes and to increase the Programme's digital output throughout the academic term.

It should be noted that a couple of schools did not complete the Blue Star Programme 2020-2021 due to the challenges posed by Covid-19 and the related difficulties in completing classwork remotely with their pupils. Despite regular contact and support from the Blue Star Programme team, a handful of schools decided that they unfortunately, but understandably, did not have the

capacity to complete all elements of the Programme this year. Instead, EM Ireland gave these schools the option to defer their Programme work until next year and so these schools will instead complete the Programme with the 2021-2022 cohort of schools.

### The Challenges Posed by Covid-19

Due to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, there were some additional challenges in implementing the Blue Star Programme this year.

From the beginning of the school year in September 2020, there were additional measures in place to help prevent the spread of Covid-19. All pupils and students, from pre-school to third level were urged to practice social distancing, and to minimise physical contact with each other, this meant that some group activities in the classroom, which would normally play a key part of the Programme, instead had to be carried out as individual projects or in smaller groups. It also meant that certain events or gatherings, such as the National Launch of the Programme, the teacher training workshops and a national event to celebrate Europe Day could not be carried out in person this year.

From the beginning of the school year, EM Ireland was very conscious of following best practice based on the advice coming from the National Public Health Emergency Team, and the Department of Education with regard to primary schools in particular and were ready and able to adapt plans in accordance with changing public health guidelines.

Following our experience of implementing the Programme last year, EM Ireland, as the National Implementation Body, was also very conscious of increasing the level of online resources available and ensuring that plans were in place so that the Programme could be completed satisfactorily whether in the classroom or through remote-learning. To this end, the Blue Star Programme team conceived of a number of new initiatives, most notably the introduction of the 'Element Quizzes' as a means of completing the Programme and the Pen-Pal system in the place of in-person VIP Visits.

At the Steering Committee meeting on 14 July 2020, the Blue Star Programme Team presented these recommendations to the full committee with the outlook that they would help to ensure that the Programme would be as adaptable and flexible as possible as we faced into an uncertain year of the Programme with regard to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic and the possibility of further school closures. The new initiatives were discussed and approved by the Steering Committee for the 2020-2021 year.

Furthermore, the Blue Star Programme Team also spent time throughout July and August 2020 updating the range of digital resources that were available on our website. To this end, we ensured that this year we provided enough online teaching resources to ensure that the Programme could be completed remotely, if needed. These teaching resources included eight Activity Worksheets which correspond with the four key elements of the Programme, new downloadable wordsearches, recipe cards and much more. This meant that when all primary schools in the country closed in January 2021 until March 2021, the Blue Star Programme team were sufficiently equipped to ensure that participating schools were able to continue to carry out their Blue Star Programme work throughout this time period and ultimately it meant that there was no drop-off in completion rates of the Programme this year.

### Providing Digital Resources

As a direct response to the school closures, EM Ireland produced new online resources to support teachers working on the Programme remotely. Before the beginning of the 2020-2021 school

year, the Blue Star Programme team fully updated the 'Digital Teaching Resources' section of the Blue Star Programme website to ensure that the Programme could be carried out remotely if necessary. The update to the website included a number of new resources such as PDF versions of popular textbooks, interactive quizzes, downloadable wordsearches and much more.

These new resources also included a range of 'Do-It-At-Home' Activity Worksheets which correspond closely with the key learning objectives of the Programme. There are eight worksheets in total - two for each element. Irish language versions of all eight activity worksheets are also available, having been translated by the team. These worksheets can be downloaded from the Blue Star Programme website and completed by pupils in their own homes. They can also be printed by teachers and given out to pupils to complete in the classroom. As such, this additional resource, conceived by the team during challenging times for schools in Ireland, provides flexibility to teachers and pupils and is adaptable for schools of different levels of advantage and Gaelscoileanna. According to teachers' feedback, the activity worksheets were very easily accessible and greatly aided teachers in allowing them to complete their Blue Star Programme work remotely.

Also, following consultation with teachers regarding how best to adapt the Programme for remote learning, the Blue Star Programme published a number of simple European-inspired recipes that pupils could follow at home. These recipes were shared with teachers who, in turn shared them with pupils and encouraged them to make a European-inspired dish at home, where possible. Feedback from teachers indicated that this became a highlight for many pupils this year and that it was an exceedingly popular component of the virtual Europe Week celebrations and culminated in the 'Great European Bake-Off' challenge which hundreds of pupils around the country participated in.

### Element Quizzes

Based on the experience and the challenges faced by schools during the Covid-19 pandemic it was agreed with all key partners to adapt the completion requirements for the Programme for the 2020-2021 year. The aim of these changes was to make the Programme easier to complete during the school closures, to ensure that the Programme was digitally and remote-learning friendly, and to ensure that as many schools as possible were able to complete the Programme this year.

This led to the introduction of the 'Element Quizzes' as a means of completing the Programme. There were four quizzes, one based on each of the four key elements of the Programme - History, Geography, Culture and Creativity and Institutional - and schools had to complete all four of the quizzes to be deemed to have successfully completed the Programme. We released one quiz per week throughout the month of April. Schools were given from 12 April - 14 May to complete all four quizzes. Schools were given the flexibility to decide for themselves how and when they completed the quizzes during this time period.

There were Junior and Senior versions of the quizzes so that pupils from all age groups could participate. The quizzes could be played online on an interactive platform. Alternatively, they were also available to download and print as a worksheet. The quizzes were available in both English and Irish. This meant that the quizzes catered to all levels of pupils and to the differing needs of schools.

### Teacher Training Workshops

At the beginning of the 2020-2021 year, it was clear that, due to the ongoing Covid-19 restrictions, the teacher training workshops would have to be held online. This posed new challenges as the workshops were traditionally a very interactive, in-person event. However, since March 2020, EM Ireland has adapted to the remote working environment and has gained much experience in hosting a number and range of online events, workshops and meetings. This meant that we were well equipped to host the workshops on the online platform, 'Zoom', and to still ensure that they were engaging and interactive for teachers.

Furthermore, the European Parliament Liaison Office in Ireland kindly offered to still support the online workshops and arranged for an MEP guest speaker to address the teachers.

EM Ireland, as the National Implementation Body of the Programme, successfully held two online workshops during the 2020-2021 year - one in November and one in January. As a result of the workshops being online, they were equally accessible to teachers from all counties in Ireland and so the attendance numbers were higher than in any previous year. In future, the EM Ireland would recommend building on its success of holding the teacher training workshops online this year and continuing to do so in the future to facilitate the maximum number of participating teachers throughout the country.

### VIP Visit Alternatives

Due to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, the Blue Star Programme Team introduced a number of alternatives to the long-standing VIP Visits. Due to the school closures and ongoing Covid-19 restrictions throughout the 2020-2021 school year, in person VIP Visits were very limited. In place of this, the 'VIP Pen-Pal' initiative and 'Virtual VIP Visits' were introduced as alternative options.

For the VIP 'Pen-Pal' initiative, participating Blue Star Programme schools were encouraged to actively engage with Ambassadors and MEPs by sending them written questions from their pupils. Coordinating teachers were provided with a special Blue Star Programme questionnaire template form as well as the contact details of all Irish MEPs and EU Ambassadors.

Both alternatives have received overwhelmingly positive feedback from participating teachers. By sending questions to VIPs of choice, the institutional element of the Programme was brought to life in a Covid-19 compliant way. From these positive experiences, one of the learnings from the Covid-19 pandemic is to utilise these initiatives in the future. Particularly the 'pen-pal' initiative which could be used in conjunction with in-person VIP visits. The 'pen-pal' initiative proved very worthwhile in the sense that schools could send their questions to a number of their chosen VIPs. For example, one participating Blue Star Programme school sent questions to several VIPs such as the Minister of State for European Affairs and the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

### Teachers' Brussels Trip

In previous years, it has been an annual feature of the Blue Star Programme that a small group of participating teachers are brought on a weekend-long trip to visit the European Commission and Parliament buildings in Brussels, kindly sponsored by the European Commission Representation. However, this year, due to the Covid-19 pandemic and the ongoing travel restrictions, a decision was made with colleagues in the European Commission Representation and the European

Parliament Liaison Office to provide an alternative opportunity for teachers by moving the annual trip online in 2020-2021.

This first ever 'Virtual Teachers' Trip to Brussels', took place on Monday 5 July from 9.00am - 4.00pm. As the Brussels Trip is always a very informative weekend for participating teachers, the Blue Star Programme Team, in collaboration with the European Commission Representation and European Parliament Liaison Office worked to ensure that this one-day virtual trip would be a positive experience for all involved. A total of 27 Blue Star Programme teachers attended the trip which allowed for interactive and engaging sessions.

The day involved a morning session which comprised of a virtual visit to the European Commission from 9.00am - 12pm. This was followed by an afternoon session with a virtual visit to the Parliament from 2.00 - 4.00pm. Both sessions involved a range of presentations and workshops on topics such as relevant teaching resources, the EU Green Deal, the opportunities for teachers available through Erasmus+ and much more. There was also an exclusive Q&A session with Irish Commissioner, Mairead McGuinness and four of the Irish MEPs. Teachers were able to ask questions directly throughout these presentations and Q&A sessions.

In terms of administration, a 'Participant Briefing Pack' was emailed to all registered teachers in advance of the day and on the day of the virtual trip, two members of the Blue Star Programme Team were online throughout the sessions to ensure the smooth running of the day and answer any queries that the teachers had.

The Blue Star Programme's first ever 'Virtual Trip to Brussels' was a successful alternative to the in-person trip with many teachers expressing they had learnt a lot from the day of events.

## Europe Week Celebrations

The final element of the Programme that was affected by the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic this year was the Europe Week Celebrations. Due to the ongoing restrictions on gatherings and advice regarding social distancing and hand hygiene, EM Ireland had to make some adaptations to the usual plans for celebrating Europe Week.

Firstly, following on from last year, the traditional symbol of the 'Handshake for Europe' was kept as the re-branded version the 'Air Handshake for Europe' and pupils and teachers were encouraged to keep their distance and cross their arms in a symbolic version of the 'Handshake'. Schools from across the country then sent in photos and videos of their 'Air Handshake' taking place safely and remotely. Schools were also encouraged, through the monthly newsletter and social media posts, to send in as many photos as possible of their Europe Week celebrations. This content was shared online throughout Europe Week, 4 - 9 May.

In place of large-scale events in the schools and local communities, such as food fairs and exhibitions, virtual events and challenges such as the Great European Bake-Off and the '27 For 27' Challenge were also organised for this week. The Blue Star Programme teachers were made aware of these alternative Europe Week plans by March to ensure that they had plenty of time to plan ahead for their hybrid celebrations. There were multiple follow up emails sent containing guidance on what the week's celebrations would entail and how best to get involved and take part in each event.

Finally, in place of an in-person national Europe Day event in Dublin, EM Ireland were delighted to be joined by Minister of State for European Affairs, Thomas Byrne TD, for a unique online event. The Taoiseach, Micheál Martin, also contributed a video message to the event. All 238 participating schools from around the country were invited to tune in to watch Minister Byrne answering pupils' questions live. This offered a unique opportunity for all participating schools to



“attend” the online event and was a successful alternative to the traditional in person event in Dublin, where only a handful of schools would be able to attend.

Speaking about this event, Minister of State for European Affairs, Thomas Byrne TD said:

*“Blue Star is an exciting project that allows our primary schools to learn about, and get creative on, our European identity and culture. I am pleased to see this learning and creativity, over a long number of years, being recognised with the 10-Year Legacy Award. I would like to say a big thank you to the three schools who have stayed with the programme over the last decade, and to all the schools participating this year.*

*“As Minister for European Affairs I am honoured to support the Blue Star Programme and have seen at first hand the enthusiasm that our young people are bringing to the programme. I want to commend the work of European Movement Ireland who manage this excellent programme and I am really hoping to visit some participating schools in person as soon as it is safe to do so.”*

## Participating Schools 2020-2021

Carlow Educate Together NS, Carlow  
Tynock NS (Scoil Treasa Naofa), Carlow  
Rathoe NS, Carlow  
Holy Family G.N.S, Carlow  
St Michael's NS, Cavan  
Carrigabruise NS, Cavan  
Scoil Naomh Brid, Cavan  
Butlersbridge NS, Cavan  
Moveen NS, Clare  
St Flannan's NS, Clare  
Scoil na Maighdine Mhuire, Clare  
Barefield NS, Clare  
Feakle National School, Clare  
St. Cronan's NS, Clare  
Gaelscoil Uí Choimín, Clare  
St. Cuan's NS, Clare  
Inch National School, Clare  
Doonaha National School, Clare  
Cahermore N.S., Cork  
St Michael's Church of Ireland NS, Cork  
Scoil Mhuire agus Eoin, Cork  
Grange National School, Cork  
Carrigaline ETNS, Cork  
Ballygown NS, Cork  
St Colman's BNS (Kanturk BNS), Cork  
Carrigboy National School, Cork  
Knockskeagh National School, Cork  
Drimoleague National School, Cork  
Scoil Mhichil Naofa, Cork  
Shanballymore National School, Cork  
Gaelscoil Pheig Sayers, Cork  
Gaelscoil Uí Drisceoil, Cork  
St. Brendan's N.S., Cork  
Ballyhass National School, Cork

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Kilcoe NS, Cork  
Caheragh National School, Cork  
Scoil Cholmáin/ Whitegate NS, Cork  
Darrara NS, Cork  
Belgooly National School, Cork  
Bweeng NS, Cork  
Ballyvongane NS, Cork  
Baltydaniel National School, Cork  
Ballymoney National School, Cork  
Fermoy ETNS, Cork  
Scoil Mhuire Araglin, Cork  
School of the Divine Child, Cork  
Scoil Bhailenora, Cork  
Scoil Bhríde Eglantine, Cork  
St. Mary's N.S., Donegal  
St Baithin's N.S., Donegal  
Scoil Cholmcille Drumman, Donegal  
St Mary's (Castlefinn NS), Donegal  
Scoil Naisiúnta Ghort a Choirce, Donegal  
S.N. An tSratha Mhóir, Donegal  
Cloughfin NS, Donegal  
S.N. Mhín Tine Dé, Donegal  
Scoil Cholmcille/ Murroe NS, Donegal  
Ballymore National School, Donegal  
Portlean NS, Donegal  
Creevy NS, Donegal  
Ballyboughal NS, Dublin  
Holy Spirit Senior Primary School, Dublin  
Holy Family School for the Deaf, Dublin  
St. Christopher's PS, Dublin  
Gaelscoil Choláiste Mhuire, Dublin  
Markievicz's Polish School, Dublin  
Gardiner Street Primary School, Dublin  
Holmpatrick NS, Dublin  
Scoil Moibhi, Dublin  
Belmayne Educate Together National School, Dublin  
Scoil Bhríde Cailíní, Dublin  
Holy Spirit Boys NS, Dublin  
St. Joseph's CBS, Dublin  
St. Laurence's NS, Dublin  
Sharavogue Junior School, Dublin  
Canal Way ETNS, Dublin  
Firhouse Educate Together N.S., Dublin  
St Francis Xavier SNS, Dublin  
St Louis Infant School, Dublin  
St David's BNS, Dublin  
Griffen Valley ETNS, Dublin  
Stanhope Street Primary School, Dublin  
St Patrick's GNS Hollypark, Dublin  
Inchicore NS, Dublin  
St. Columbanus National School, Dublin  
Scoil Chrónáin, Dublin  
Ballyroan Boy's National School, Dublin  
Rathmichael National School, Dublin  
St Brigid's Primary School, The Coombe, Dublin  
Letterfrack NS, Galway  
Scoil Bhriocain, Galway  
Claregalway NS, Galway  
St. Annin's National School, Galway

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Glinsk NS, Galway  
Mercy Primary School, Galway  
Northampton NS, Galway  
St Thomas NS, Galway  
Scoil na Maighdine Muire gan Smál, Galway  
Scoil Mhuire Naofa, Galway  
Creggs NS, Galway  
Tuam ETNS, Galway  
Killeen NS, Galway  
Kilglass NS, Galway  
Scoil Naomh Chuan, Raheen, Galway  
Scoil Íde, Galway  
Williamstown National School, Galway  
Lurga NS, Galway  
Scoil Mhuire Clarinbridge, Galway  
Scoil Mhuire, Ardeevin, Galway  
Killury NS, Kerry  
Castledrum NS, Kerry  
Loughfouder NS, Kerry  
Scoil Chorp Chríost, Kerry  
Scoil Chaitlín Naofa, Kerry  
St Oliver's NS, Listowel, Kerry  
Knockaclarig National School, Kerry  
SN Léana Mhóir, Kerry  
Scoil Mhuire (Knocknagoshel NS), Kerry  
St. Oliver's National School, Killarney, Kerry  
Dromclough NS, Kerry  
Raheen NS, Kerry  
Moyderwell Mercy Primary School, Kerry  
Caherleaheen NS, Kerry  
Scoil Diarmada, Kildare  
Scoil na Naomh Uilig, Kildare  
St David's NS, Kildare  
Scoil Íde Naofa, Kildare  
Brannoxtown Community National School, Kildare  
Coill Dubh NS, Kildare  
St. Patrick's NS, Kilkenny  
St Patricks De La Salle BNS, Kilkenny  
St. Aidan's National School, Kilkenny  
St. Colmcille's, Kilkenny  
St. Michael's N.S., Kilkenny  
St John's Senior School, Kilkenny  
Ringville NS, Kilkenny  
St Colmcille's N.S., Laois  
Camross NS, Laois  
St Paul's NS, Laois  
Paddock NS, Laois  
Four Masters NS, Leitrim  
St Mary's BNS, Limerick  
Gaelscoil Chaladh an Treoigh, Limerick  
Convent of Mercy NS, Limerick  
St. Nicholas' N.S., Limerick  
Glengurt NS, Limerick  
St. Fergus NS, Limerick  
Knocklong N.S., Limerick  
Kilbehenny National School, Limerick  
Ahane National School, Limerick  
St. Patricks NS, Longford  
Bellurgan NS, Louth

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Scoil Mhuire na nGael, Louth  
Scoil San Nioclas, Louth  
St. Peter's National School, Louth  
Monksland National School, Louth  
St Paul's Senior National School, Louth  
St. Ita's Special School, Louth  
Scoil Mhuire, Louth  
Gaelscoil na gCeithre Maol, Mayo  
Tavneena NS, Mayo  
Balla NS, Mayo  
Midfield NS, Mayo  
Cloonliffen National school, Mayo  
Kilmovee NS, Mayo  
Aghamore N.S., Mayo  
Claremorris BNS, Mayo  
Scoil Naomh Bríd, Mayo  
Kilbride National School, Meath  
St. Andrew's National School, Meath  
Le Chéile Educate Together, Meath  
Kilskyre NS, Meath  
St Enda's NS, Monaghan  
St. Brigid's National School, Monaghan  
Scoil Bhlaithin Iosa, Monaghan  
Deravoy N.S., Monaghan  
Knockconan NS, Monaghan  
Roscomroe National School, Offaly  
Daingean NS, Offaly  
Gaelscoil na Laochra, Offaly  
Scoil Charthaigh Naofa, Offaly  
Mount Talbot NS, Roscommon  
Scoil Mhuire, Brusna, Roscommon  
Ballyfeeney NS, Roscommon  
Scoil Cill Ronain, Roscommon  
St. Patrick's N.S., Roscommon  
Tibohine NS, Roscommon  
St Attracta's Ballaghaderreen, Roscommon  
St. Mary's Primary School, Roscommon  
Threen NS, Roscommon  
Athleague NS, Roscommon  
Cloverhill NS, Roscommon  
Kilteevan National School, Roscommon  
St Edward's NS, Sligo  
St. Joseph's NS, Sligo  
Owenbeg NS, Sligo  
St. Teresa's N.S., Sligo  
St Brendans NS, Sligo  
Scoil Naomh Bhríde/ Carns NS, Sligo  
St Mary's NS, Tipperary  
St. Patrick's Senior N.S., Tipperary  
Scoil Íosagáin, Upperchurch National School, Tipperary  
Killusty National School, Tipperary  
Rearcross N.S., Tipperary  
Cloneen N.S., Tipperary  
St Mary's Convent Primary School, Tipperary  
Golden NS, Tipperary  
The Monastery Primary School, Tipperary  
Fenor N.S., Waterford  
Waterford ETNS, Waterford  
Mullingar Educate Together NS, Westmeath

Drumraney NS, Westmeath  
Emper N.S., Westmeath  
Clonbonny NS, Westmeath  
Scoil Phádraig Naofa, Westmeath  
Kilcrumreragh N.S., Westmeath  
St Thomas' NS, Westmeath  
St Anne's, Rathangan, Wexford  
St Patrick's NS, Wexford  
Gorey Central School, Wexford  
Ballycullane National School, Wexford  
St. Joseph's NS, Wexford  
Our Lady of Lourdes NS, Wexford  
St Fintan's NS, Wexford  
Davidstown NS, Wexford  
Ballyduff NS, Wexford  
Kilrane National School, Wexford  
Scoil Naomh Bríd, Wicklow  
Jonathan Swift NS, Wicklow  
St Patrick's National School, Wicklow  
Carysfort NS, Wicklow  
Gaelscoil Ui Cheadaigh, Wicklow  
Ballycoog NS, Wicklow  
Gaelscoil Chill Mhantain, Wicklow  
St. Marys N.S, Wicklow  
Scoil San Eoin, Wicklow  
St Patrick's NS, Greystones, Wicklow  
Scoil Chaoimhín Naofa, Wicklow

## Mentoring & Support

As in previous years, EM Ireland carried out a significant role in mentoring and supporting all the participating teachers and the wider school community during the 2020-2021 year of the Blue Star Programme.

### School Queries

This entailed providing advice and guidance to teachers looking for additional information and resources, as well as responding to school queries on a daily basis by phone, through the dedicated email address ([bluestar@europeanmovement.ie](mailto:bluestar@europeanmovement.ie)) and Twitter account (@bluestarprog) throughout the year. All EM Ireland staff members were regularly briefed on the Programme, to ensure that queries could be dealt with efficiently and accurately by the whole EM Ireland team. In addition, despite not being in the office setting for much of the year, the Blue Star Programme team set up a designated mobile phone number so that regular phone contact was maintained with the schools.

Other key elements of EM Ireland's mentoring and support role were providing advice and support to help schools continue their Programme work during the school closures from January - March, ensuring that schools were ready for their Europe Day celebrations, and providing guidance in relation to submitting Blue Star Programme Reports and successfully completing the Programme.



### Teacher Training Workshops

It was agreed among stakeholders at the Steering Committee meeting in July that there would be three workshops this year – one in September that would be in a webinar format, giving interested teachers more information about the Programme during the registration phase. There would then be two interactive workshops for teachers taking part in the Programme – one in November and one in January. Normally, the European Parliament Liaison Office hosts at least one of these workshops in Dublin. However, it was decided early in the year that, due to the ongoing Covid-19 restrictions, both teacher training workshops would have to be held online. The European Parliament Liaison Office in Ireland kindly offered to still support the online workshops and arranged for an MEP guest speaker to address the teachers.

The first interactive workshop was held on Tuesday 26 November and there were 40 teachers in attendance. The teachers, who joined the workshop from all across the country, were addressed by officials from the European Parliament and Maria Walsh MEP. Staff from EM Ireland then presented on various relevant topics including ideas for projects and media training to provide teachers with the skills to reach out to local media directly as part of the Programme. Teachers were given the opportunity to ask any questions that they had about the Programme and to share ideas for projects with other teachers in attendance.

The second workshop was held on Tuesday, 26 January and 60 participating teachers registered for this workshop. Again, the participants came from all corners of the country. The fact that the workshop was online made it much more accessible to teachers from all 26 counties.

As in previous years, the workshops were greatly welcomed by the teachers involved, who found it to be a useful forum to share ideas regarding best practice and problem-solving techniques.

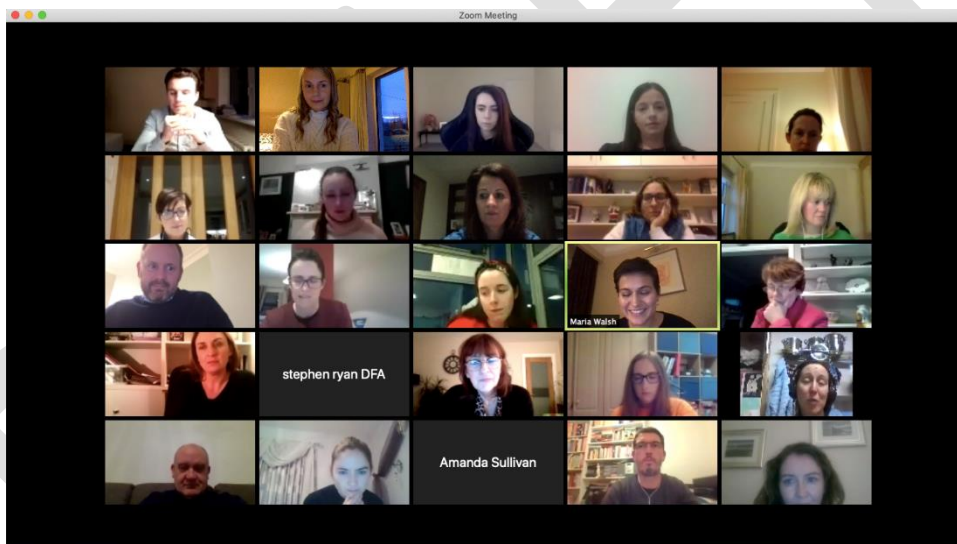
From EM Ireland's perspective, the ongoing flexibility and support the organisation receives from its Steering Committee partners is invaluable as it enables EM Ireland to proceed with the successful delivery and management of this training and all other elements of the Programme. This could clearly be seen this year as the workshops moved from in-person to online seamlessly with the support of the EPLO. Holding the workshops online actually meant that more participating teachers than ever before were able to join the workshops, from all over Ireland. Teachers also gave positive feedback regarding the timing of the workshop – it suited them better to have it on a weekday evening rather than on a Saturday morning. On this basis, EM Ireland, as the National Implementation Body, would recommend that the teacher training workshops stay in an online format going forward so that the most possible number of participating teachers are able to benefit from it.



Members of the Blue Star Programme Team gave a presentation to participating teachers during the teacher training workshops in November and January.



Maria Walsh MEP addressing teachers during the teacher training workshop on 26 November 2020.



Teachers taking part in the interactive teacher training workshops held in both November and January.

## Brussels Trip

The annual trip to Brussels is always a standout event for participating Blue Star Programme teachers and it provides a fantastic insight into the work of both the European Commission and European Parliament. This knowledge really stands to teachers when participating in future years of the Blue Star Programme. It offers them the opportunity to interact with Irish MEPs and other VIP guests on the day. Teachers always express the positive experience they have on this trip and gather useful information to implement into the classroom when teaching about the EU.

While this year's Brussels trip was a virtual one, it was scarcely different from previous in person visits to Brussels. Participating teachers gained a lot of information from the day by attending a range of interactive and engaging sessions. The availability of the Brussels trip online this year made it more accessible for teachers to attend as opposed to needing to travel. In addition, this allowed the Blue Star Programme Team to offer the trip to a wider range of participating teachers.

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A particular highlight of the online trip was the question-and-answer session with Commissioner Mairead McGuinness who gave an insightful presentation into her work while also allowing questions and comments from participants.

The European Commission's Session hosted the morning session from 9.00am - 12.00pm and the European Parliament held their session in the afternoon from 2.00pm - 4.00pm.

The full outline of the day can be seen below:

Time	Morning Session: Virtual Visit to the European Commission
9.00am	<b>Welcome and virtual introduction:</b> by the European Commission Visitors' Service
9.15 -10.00am	<b>Presentation: Introduction to the European Green Deal</b> - the environmental priorities of the European Green Deal and how it can be taught to primary school pupils.  <i>Speaker:</i> Ms Katarzyna Wolos, Directorate-General for Environment
10.00 - 10.40pm	<b>Meeting with Ireland's EU Commissioner, Mairead Mc Guinness</b>  Commissioner for Financial Services, Financial Stability, and Capital Markets Union
10.40-12.00pm	<b>Presentation: The European Commission Learning Corner</b> - a practical guide to the European Commission's educational resources for primary school teachers.  <i>Speakers:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mr Alessandro Lentini &amp; Ms Anne-Sophie Fabry, Directorate-General for Communication</li> <li>• Mr Hugh Cronin, Irish Member of the Teachers' Testing Panel - providing an 'on the ground perspective' for Irish teachers</li> </ul>
12.00 - 2.00pm	Lunch Break
Time	Afternoon Session: Virtual Visit to the European Parliament
2.00 - 2.30pm	<b>Virtual introduction</b> to the European Parliament with hosts: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nicolai Hartvig, Visitors Administrator and Lecturer at the European Parliament in Brussels</li> <li>• Jack Moloney, Press Officer at the European Parliament Liaison Office in Ireland</li> </ul>
2.30 - 3.30pm	<b>Q&amp;A session with Irish MEPs:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ciarán Cuffe</li> <li>• Grace O'Sullivan</li> <li>• Maria Walsh</li> <li>• Barry Andrews</li> </ul>
3.30 - 3.45pm	<b>Presentation: The EU and Education</b>

	This presentation will focus on opportunities for teacher exchanges and opportunities for teachers to train abroad through the Erasmus+ programme. It will also outline the Erasmus KA2 programme, where school classes are involved in exchanges/projects together.
3.45 - 4.00pm	<b>Workshop: Teaching the EU to pupils</b>  This workshop will outline the things that the EU currently does that might make for the most pupil-friendly teaching, and a session exploring ideas and successes that the teachers have already had.
4.00pm	Virtual Brussels Trip ends

The Blue Star Programme's first ever 'Virtual Trip to Brussels' was a success with many teachers expressing the positive experience they had.

## Clár na Réalta Goirme agus an Ghaeilge

Maidir le tacaíocht a sholáthar do gach scoil atá ag déanamh an Chlár, táimid an-bhródúil i nGluaiseacht na hEorpa in Éirinn as a bheith in ann Clár na Réalta Goirme a chur ar fáil go hiomlán trí Ghaeilge chomh maith leis an mBéarla. Teastaíonn uainn go mbeidh gach scoil in Éirinn in ann páirt a ghlacadh go cothrom sa Chlár, na gaelscoileanna go léir san áireamh. Ina theannta sin, mar theanga oifigiúil de chuid an Aontais Eorpaigh, tuigimid go bhfuil sé rithabhachtach go bpléitear agus go n-úsáidtear an Ghaeilge in aon chomhrá faoi thodhchaí na hEorpa, agus Éire mar chuid de - d'ionadaíocht na n-Éireannach san Eoraip mar chuid de stráitéis úr an rialtais i leith poist san AE agus i réimsí éagsúla eile.

Mar sin, i rith na bliana arís chuireamar leis an rannóg iomlán de shuíomh gréasáin an Chláir atá ar fáil i nGaeilge (<https://www.bluestarprogramme.ie/clar-na-realta-goirme/>), roinneamar eolas trí Ghaeilge go minic faoin gClár, chuireamar achmhainní uile an Chláir ar fáil i nGaeilge, chuireamar nuachtlitir an Chláir amach go dátheangach agus bhí ár bhfoireann i gcónaí ar fáil chun gach teagmháil/cumarsáid a dhéanamh le scoileanna trí Ghaeilge. Bhí an rogha ag scoileanna rannpháirteacha an Fhoirm Clárúcháin, an Tuarascáil Deiridh, Foirm Toilithe Meán agus na foirmeacha go léir eile a líonadh amach go hiomlán trí Ghaeilge más é sin a rogha freisin. An bhliain seo, chuireamar na ceithre Trath na gCeist Eilimint agus na h-ocht Bileoga Oibre nua ar fáil i nGaeilge chomh maith leis an mBéarla.

## Communications & PR

### PR & Media Coverage

The Blue Star Programme 2020-2021 received significant coverage across local, regional and national print and broadcast media, in both English and the Irish language media, particularly around the registration drive.

From the outset, participating schools were encouraged to publicise their participation in the Programme to highlight the work they were doing.

Most notably, *RTÉ News2Day* featured a segment on the Blue Star Programme during the registration phase of the Programme in September 2020. As part of this recording, RTÉ



News2day went to Rathkenny National School in Co. Meath, that had successfully completed the Programme last year in 2019-2020 during the Covid-19 pandemic, and interviewed pupils there about what they had learnt. Minister Thomas Byrne TD also visited the school that day and spoke to RTÉ News2day about the importance of the Blue Star Programme.

Furthermore, during the registration phase of the Programme, European Movement Ireland ran a broad publicity campaign across our social media platforms, including Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. We received several high-profile re-tweets, shares and mentions from Irish public representatives and media accounts, which played an important role in further promoting the Programme. We also interacted with a number of Irish language accounts such as Gaeloideachas to increase our profile among the Irish language speaking community and Gaelscoileanna in Ireland.

Throughout the school year, we then encouraged schools to use social media, most notably Twitter, to highlight their participation in the Programme and to promote their Europe Day activities. EM Ireland were pleased to see a high level of online engagement with regard to the Programme as more and more schools use such platforms.

This year, EM Ireland also issued a press release to highlight the 10-Year Anniversary of the Blue Star Programme. This press release was issued to all local and national media contacts on the morning of the event on 7 May that celebrated the 10-Year Anniversary of the Programme during Europe Week.

### **Blue Star Programme social media and website**

During the 2020-2021 school year, we continued using the Blue Star Programme Twitter account @bluestarprog, which was officially started in October 2018. Given the increase in social media activity among primary schools, the dedicated Twitter account gives schools a direct contact to share their work and thoughts as they work through the Blue Star Programme.



## **Blue Star Programme**

@BlueStarProg

The Blue Star Programme is an education initiative for primary school students across Ireland. Let's get creative about Europe! ❤️🌟

📍 Ireland 🔗 [bluestarprogramme.ie](https://bluestarprogramme.ie) 📅 Joined July 2018

**352** Following   **472** Followers

From January to June 2021, the Blue Star Programme's Twitter account following increased by approximately 15%, from 406 followers to 472. Since the annual report last year, the Blue Star Programme's following has increased by approximately 30% from 362 to 472. As the National Implementation Body running this account, we showcased the ongoing work of Blue Star Programme schools on a daily basis, tagging in all relevant Steering Committee partners. Teachers were encouraged through the monthly newsletter to send in photo or video examples of the Blue Star Programme work their pupils were doing, as well as tagging the Blue Star Programme account in work they are tweeting online.

As was the situation last year, The Blue Star Programme's Twitter reach greatly increased during the month of May due to the 2020-2021 Europe Week celebrations with over 47.8k impressions throughout the month of May as pupils' Europe Week celebrations were shared on the platform.

Media Coverage Snapshot

<b>Title</b>	<b>Channel / Publication</b>	<b>Medium</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Link (where available)</b>
Minister Byrne announces Blue Star Programme 2020/21 open for registration	MerrionStreet.ie DFA.ie	Government website	Opening of school registration period	19 Aug	<a href="http://merrionstreet.ie/en/News-Room/Releases/Minister_Byrne_announces_Blue_Star_Programme_2020_21_open_for_registration.html">http://merrionstreet.ie/en/News-Room/Releases/Minister_Byrne_announces_Blue_Star_Programme_2020_21_open_for_registration.html</a>  <a href="https://www.dfa.ie/news-and-media/press-releases/press-release-archive/2020/august/minister-byrne-announces-blue-star-programme-202021-open-for-registration.php">https://www.dfa.ie/news-and-media/press-releases/press-release-archive/2020/august/minister-byrne-announces-blue-star-programme-202021-open-for-registration.php</a>
2020-2021 Blue Star Programme is now open	SchoolDays.ie	Teachers' website	Opening of school registration period	26 Aug	<a href="https://www schooldays.ie/education-news-item/Registration-for-the-2020-2021-Blue-Star-Programme-is-Now-Open-and-its-Time-to-get-Creative-about-Europe">https://www schooldays.ie/education-news-item/Registration-for-the-2020-2021-Blue-Star-Programme-is-Now-Open-and-its-Time-to-get-Creative-about-Europe</a>
European Blue Star programme now open to Waterford primary schools	Waterford Live	Local Newspaper	Opening of school registration period	26 Aug	<a href="https://www.waterfordlive.ie/news/home/569126/european-blue-star-programme-now-open-to-waterford-primary-schools.html">https://www.waterfordlive.ie/news/home/569126/european-blue-star-programme-now-open-to-waterford-primary-schools.html</a>
Primary schools in Donegal encouraged to take part in Blue Star Programme	Donegal Live	Local Newspaper	Opening of school registration period	26 Aug	<a href="https://www.donegallive.ie/news/news/569005/primary-schools-in-donegal-encouraged-to-take-part-in-blue-star-programme.html">https://www.donegallive.ie/news/news/569005/primary-schools-in-donegal-encouraged-to-take-part-in-blue-star-programme.html</a>
European Blue Star programme now open to Longford primary schools	Longford Leader	Local Newspaper	Opening of school registration period	26 Aug	<a href="https://www.longfordleader.ie/news/local-news/569162/european-blue-star-programme-now-open-to-longford-primary-schools.html">https://www.longfordleader.ie/news/local-news/569162/european-blue-star-programme-now-open-to-longford-primary-schools.html</a>
Schools urged to take part in Blue Star Programme	The Nenagh Guardian	Local Newspaper	Opening of school registration period	26 Aug	<a href="https://www.nenaghguardian.ie/news/roundup/articles/2020/08/26/4190431-schools-urged-to-take-part-in-blue-star-programme/">https://www.nenaghguardian.ie/news/roundup/articles/2020/08/26/4190431-schools-urged-to-take-part-in-blue-star-programme/</a>
European Blue Star programme now open to Offaly primary schools	Offaly Express	Local Newspaper	Opening of school registration period	26 Aug	<a href="https://www.offalyexpress.ie/news/home/569121/european-blue-star-programme-now-open-to-offaly-primary-schools.html">https://www.offalyexpress.ie/news/home/569121/european-blue-star-programme-now-open-to-offaly-primary-schools.html</a>
Kerry Schools Encouraged To Take Part In Blue Star Programme	Tralee Today	Local Newspaper	Opening of school registration period	26 Aug	<a href="https://www.offalyexpress.ie/news/home/569121/european-blue-star-programme-now-open-to-offaly-primary-schools.html">https://www.offalyexpress.ie/news/home/569121/european-blue-star-programme-now-open-to-offaly-primary-schools.html</a>

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European Blue Star programme now open to Laois primary schools	Leinster Express	Local Newspaper	Opening of school registration period	26 Aug	<a href="https://www.leinsterexpress.ie/news/local-news/569340/european-blue-star-programme-now-open-to-laois-primary-schools.html">https://www.leinsterexpress.ie/news/local-news/569340/european-blue-star-programme-now-open-to-laois-primary-schools.html</a>
News bulletin notice + Text piece on website	Ocean FM	Local Radio Station	Opening of school registration period	27 Aug	<a href="http://www.oceanfm.ie/2020/08/28/north-west-schools-urged-to-take-part-in-euro-blue-star-programme/">http://www.oceanfm.ie/2020/08/28/north-west-schools-urged-to-take-part-in-euro-blue-star-programme/</a>
The Chatroom	Community Radio Castlebar	Local Radio Station	Opening of school registration period	28 Aug	
Blue Star Programme: Meath primary schools asked to get creative about Europe	Meath Chronicle	Local Newspaper	Opening of school registration period	30 Aug	<a href="https://www.meathchronicle.ie/2020/08/30/blue-star-programme-meath-primary-schools-asked-to-get-creative-about-europe/">https://www.meathchronicle.ie/2020/08/30/blue-star-programme-meath-primary-schools-asked-to-get-creative-about-europe/</a>
News2Day	RTÉ	National TV station	Programme participation	16 Sept	<a href="https://www.rte.ie/player/series/news2day/SIO000001219">https://www.rte.ie/player/series/news2day/SIO000001219</a>
Registration for the 2020-2021 Blue Star Programme is now open to all Louth & Meath primary schools.	LMFM	Local Radio Station	Opening of school registration period	30 Aug	<a href="https://www.lmfmm.ie/news/scene-and-heard/registration-for-the-2020-2021-blue-star-programme-is-now-open-to-all-louth-and-meath-primary-schools/">https://www.lmfmm.ie/news/scene-and-heard/registration-for-the-2020-2021-blue-star-programme-is-now-open-to-all-louth-and-meath-primary-schools/</a>
One week left for Donegal primary schools to register for the Blue Star Programme	Donegal Live	Local Newspaper	Opening of school registration period	2 Oct	<a href="https://www.donegalive.ie/news/news/577826/one-week-left-for-donegal-primary-schools-to-register-for-the-blue-star-programme.html">https://www.donegalive.ie/news/news/577826/one-week-left-for-donegal-primary-schools-to-register-for-the-blue-star-programme.html</a>
Current Affairs breakfast Show	Connemara Community Radio	Local Radio Station	Opening of school registration period	6 Oct	
EDUCATION: Primary schools learn about EU in 'Blue Star Programme'	TheCork.ie		Opening of school registration period	2 Oct	<a href="http://www.thecork.ie/2020/10/02/education-one-week-left-for-cork-primary-schools-to-register-for-the-blue-star-programme-to-learn-more-and-get-creative-about-europe/">http://www.thecork.ie/2020/10/02/education-one-week-left-for-cork-primary-schools-to-register-for-the-blue-star-programme-to-learn-more-and-get-creative-about-europe/</a>
The Way it Is  (Interviews with Minister of European Affairs and Mr. Niall	KCLR FM	Local Radio Station	Programme participation	20 Nov	<a href="https://kclr96fm.com/documentary/what-has-europe-ever-done-for-education/">https://kclr96fm.com/documentary/what-has-europe-ever-done-for-education/</a>

O'Flaherty, teacher in a participating Blue Star Programme School, St Patricks De La Salle, Kilkenny)					
Wolfhill NS accepting enrolments for 2021 and beyond	Laois Today	Local newspaper	Programme participation	30 March	<a href="https://www.laoistoday.ie/2021/03/30/wolfhill-ns-accepting-enrolments-for-2021-and-beyond/">https://www.laoistoday.ie/2021/03/30/wolfhill-ns-accepting-enrolments-for-2021-and-beyond/</a>
Blue Star Programme Celebrates 10-year Anniversary	Schooldays.ie	Teachers' website	The Blue Star Programme 10-Year Anniversary	7 May	<a href="https://www.schooldays.ie/education-news-item/Blue-Star-Programme-Celebrates-10-year-Anniversary-on-9th-of-May">https://www.schooldays.ie/education-news-item/Blue-Star-Programme-Celebrates-10-year-Anniversary-on-9th-of-May</a>
Minister Thomas Byrne congratulates primary schools celebrating 10 years promoting EU in classrooms	Gov.ie	Government website	The Blue Star Programme 10-Year Anniversary	7 May	<a href="https://www.gov.ie/en/press-release/f7158-minister-thomas-byrne-congratulates-primary-schools-celebrating-10-years-promoting-eu-in-classrooms/">https://www.gov.ie/en/press-release/f7158-minister-thomas-byrne-congratulates-primary-schools-celebrating-10-years-promoting-eu-in-classrooms/</a>
Newmarket-on-Fergus one of three schools in the country to receive a legacy award.	Clare Echo	Local Newspaper	The Blue Star Programme 10-Year Anniversary / Programme participation	25 May	<a href="https://www.clareecho.ie/newmarket-on-fergus-school-one-of-three-in-the-country-to-get-legacy-award-from-blue-star-programme/">https://www.clareecho.ie/newmarket-on-fergus-school-one-of-three-in-the-country-to-get-legacy-award-from-blue-star-programme/</a>

## Teacher Feedback

As part of the Blue Star Programme Report, teachers were asked to give feedback to the National Implementation Body about their impressions of the Programme. We are pleased to report that the general concept of the Programme was again extremely well received by teachers, principals and pupils, with many appreciating how compatible it is with the school curriculum. There are also clear signs of appreciation for the Programme's adaptability and suitability during the Covid-19 pandemic. There were many specific references to the Element Quizzes and what a great addition to the Programme they were this year.

Particular reference to the Element Quizzes was the predominant trend throughout this years' feedback with many teachers referring to them as the highlight of the year. The phrase "curriculum-friendly" once again featured heavily in many of the teacher responses to the Programme this year. Overall, the feedback indicates that both teachers and pupils thoroughly enjoyed this Programme. Many applauded the online availability of the resources which the Blue Star Programme Team created in order to adapt to the Covid-19 pandemic. As well as this being an adaptation for the Covid-19 pandemic, the availability of online resources this year answers last years' teachers request for more online resources.



Below is a verbatim sample of the feedback provided by teachers, based on their experience of the Blue Star Programme in 2020-2021:

*This Programme was thoroughly enjoyable. A lot of the activities naturally integrated with our class curriculum. Following our work on WWII the children were fascinated with this part of history and asked to read Anne Frank as their class reader. Unfortunately, we had to complete this element during remote teaching and learning but the children very much gained an experience through their engagement. Europe week was very enjoyable. We only completed the activities for 3 days as school was closed on Monday and Friday of the week. The quiz elements were fantastic - it really consolidated the learning and was a fun way to wrap up the project. I would very much recommend participating in the Programme and hope to take part again.'*

### Donegal Primary School

*'Great programme overall. The children really enjoyed it. It is particularly suited to our school due to the diverse population attending. Children take great pride in showcasing their home countries' culture, history, geography and language and enjoy gaining an undertaking of the 'bigger picture' of what they are a part of in the EU. The quizzes were excellent and provided a great focal point for children's learning.'*

### Waterford Primary School

*I can't overstate how delighted we are with this programme. It fits so easily into the curriculum and it's brilliant for the children to complete their various tasks and projects with the goal of achieving an award at the end of it. I will certainly be doing this programme again!*

### Meath Primary School

*The Kahoot quizzes were brilliant. The children loved them and looked forward to doing the different one each week. It was great how each one was separated in the different elements. It was a brilliant way to consolidate their prior knowledge and also to learn some new facts. We would definitely participate again. The children are all so much more knowledgeable about Europe and the EU. It has given them a much stronger sense of unity and understanding of Ireland's place in the EU. The programme is great as it is so broad in the different elements, it allows for endless opportunities for exploration. It also helped improve their IT skills as they were using the website for the games and using google to do project research.*

### Cork Primary School

*'Well done on a successful programme during these Covid times, The kids really enjoyed the Kahoot Quiz element of the Programme and that maybe something you should consider keeping going forward.'*

### Roscommon Primary School

*'A wonderful opportunity for the children of Ireland and around Europe to learn more about our neighbours and friends from other countries. A very worthwhile programme.'*

### Cavan Primary School

*'My class thoroughly enjoyed participating in the Blue Star Programme this year. Although they missed out on some areas due to Covid and Home Learning for Term 2, they made a huge effort and learned a lot about the 4 areas of the programme. The quizzes were a big hit in my room, and they enjoyed seeing the success of their learning here! I will definitely be participating in this programme again.'*

### Meath Primary School

*'The children and I thoroughly enjoyed the Programme. They learned very important information on our EU neighbours and the institutions that make it up. The resources available were excellent and a great resource for teaching the finer points of the EU. That allowed to differentiate classwork easily. I'm looking forward to working on the programme again next year.'*

### Sligo Primary School

*'We really enjoyed working on this project. It had a huge cross-curricular impact: It linked in very nicely with so many areas of the curriculum. It created a wonderful feelgood factor among the students. It allowed them to excel in their areas of strength and creativity. Students loved working as a team and promoted collaborative working practices. Students loved the worksheets and really enjoyed doing the on-line quizzes.'*

### Cork Primary School

*'We love this programme on our School. We have completed it for many years now and each time the children learn something new. It is a project they look forward to each year. This year we loved the addition of the quizzes. All classes thoroughly enjoyed them. They are a fantastic addition to the programme.'*

### Mayo Primary School

*'I believe the Blue Star Programme integrates very well with the Primary School Curriculum. The emphasis on creativity, project work, collaborative work and activity is particularly good. The support from the Blue Star team has been incredible- all emails and communications to them have been promptly answered, with useful direction on the questions posed. The Quiz was a great addition to the programme. The monthly newsletter also helps to keep focus. I would certainly participate again.'*

### Kerry Primary School

*'We really enjoyed learning about the EU as a class. The material sent was very beneficial to myself and the children. I found the online resources excellent as I could put some of the resources on the whiteboard for everyone to see. The quizzes at the end were really fun, especially the Kahoot quizzes. We did some of them twice we enjoyed it so much. I would definitely recommend any school or class to do this Programme.'*

Tipperary Primary School

*'The children really enjoyed taking part. This was our first year completing the programme and we will definitely take part again next year.'*

Louth Primary School

*'We really enjoyed the programme this year and taking part. The Kahoot quizzes really were so entertaining, and the class loved them. It also helped take the pressure off when the schools were closed there for so long! I would definitely recommend this Programme going forward to other teachers.'*

Dublin Primary School

*'It was a valuable experience and we really enjoyed it. IT was used throughout for research and to explore the digital games and activities and some children used Google Slides to create presentations on countries.'*

Westmeath Primary School

*I would just like to take this opportunity again to say how much I absolutely love this programme. I find it so easy to navigate your website, the training course was just fantastic with Maria Walsh MEP and in fact I realised very quickly that we fulfil so many of the requirements year in year out anyway and this was a brilliant way to tie it all together and get the children some recognition for all their hard work!*

Meath Primary School

### Conclusion & Recommendations

This Report and Review has enabled EM Ireland to assess and evaluate the success of the tenth year of the Blue Star Programme in our role as its National Implementation Body.

Against the backdrop of the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, the Programme needed to be adapted in new and innovative ways to allow school communities to get the most out of their Blue Star Programme experience.

The tenth year of the Blue Star Programme was successful in terms of number of participating schools exceeding the SLA target. The pilot programme began in 2011-2012 with 32 schools. In 2020-2021, this number had increased to 238 schools. The participating schools ranged from two-teacher rural schools to large urban schools with hundreds of pupils. Approximately 15,000 pupils from across Ireland participated in the tenth year of the Programme.

Undoubtedly, the Blue Star Programme is an exceptional way of promoting Ireland's engagement with Europe in a curriculum-friendly manner that reaches beyond the participating primary school pupils and teachers into wider school and local communities.

EM Ireland is proud to have been continuously associated with the Programme from its inception and we would wholly welcome the opportunity to continue driving and developing the potential of the Programme even further into the future. In terms of our recommendations for future years of the Programme, we will now outline a number of suggestions both in relation to the content and administration of the Programme.

In relation to the content, it is vital that the Blue Star Programme remains curriculum-friendly in order to continue the high level of interest in the Programme. As the National Implementation body, EM Ireland has dealt first-hand with the participating teachers on a daily basis and is aware that the ease of integration of the Programme into the existing curriculum is a critical factor. This is a particularly significant consideration at the start of the school year when principals and teachers are deciding what programmes to undertake over the year.

The four key areas of EU knowledge (Historical, Geographical, Cultural and Creative, and Institutional) and the Europe Day celebrations continue to work extremely well as the main elements of the Programme. This is highlighted by the high levels of participation, including repeat participation, over the ten years of the Programme, and is borne out in positive teacher feedback. These four elements represent the foundation blocks of the Blue Star Programme, and they should be cemented as an ongoing, constant feature of the Programme.

One of the growing trends of the Blue Star Programme is the Programme's ability to harness discussion on cultural diversity within the EU, and as a result, the Irish classroom. Participating schools have used the Blue Star Programme as an opportunity to showcase multiculturalism in their lives to their classmates and to the wider community, which is something, as National Implementation Body, EM Ireland is committed to seeing continue.

As part of the Blue Star Programme, additional elements related to active citizenship and political awareness are also suggested to be addressed by participating schools. This is something that EM Ireland has promoted during the ten years of the Programme, particularly so from 2012 onwards. Our recommendations for possible additional civic society elements for the coming years include:

- *The Conference on the Future of Europe and how young people in Ireland can help shape the future of the EU*
- *The EU Green Deal and Climate Action*
- *The consequences of Brexit and our new relationship with the UK*
- *Tackling racism and celebrating multiculturalism in the EU*

- *The importance of voting, participation in EU democracy, the EU Parliament Elections 2024*

In addition, in relation to the content of the Programme, we would also recommend building on the Cultural and Creative section and incorporating an extra emphasis on language learning into the Programme. This could be in line with the Department of Education's new 'language sampler module' which will introduce foreign languages to primary schools on a pilot basis from the 2021-2022 school year onwards. We recommend increasing the emphasis placed on the learning of basic phrases of different European languages in the Cultural and Creative element of the Programme. This could be done by providing schools with simple teaching resources and encouraging school visits with a guest speaker who could introduce pupils to basic phrases and pronunciation.

In relation to the administration of the Programme, EM Ireland's first recommendation is in relation to the Teacher Training Workshops. Based on the experience regarding remote working during the Covid-19 pandemic, EM Ireland proposes that the teacher training workshops would be held fully online in future years. EM Ireland proposes that holding two teacher training workshops online during the academic year – one in November and one in January – would be the best option for facilitating the maximum number of participating teachers throughout the country. This recommendation is based on the feedback from participating teachers and also the clear increase in the number and geographical spread of those attending as opposed to when we hosted the events in person. We recommend that the workshops are still run along the similar lines of the previously successful Teacher Training Workshops with support and collaboration from Steering Committee partners, including involvement from MEPs and 'Champion Teachers'.

The next recommendation is to keep the 'Element Quizzes' as a permanent feature of the Programme. EM Ireland is dedicated to increasing annual completion rates of the Blue Star Programme, as well as making sure it has a strong digital component. The implementation of the Element Quizzes will facilitate both of these objectives for the Programme going forward. EM Ireland recommends that for the month of April, four online quizzes will be made available for each school to participate in, all age appropriate and all available to download also. Completion of all four Elements Quizzes will suffice for that school to achieve their Blue Star Programme Certificate of Achievement. This recommendation is based on the strong feedback from participating teachers that the 'Element Quizzes' were a brilliant addition to the Programme this year and also the evidence that they helped to increase the completion rate to record levels.

Additionally, we would recommend continuing to build on the provision of digital resources from the past two years. The Programme should continue to increase the level of digital material available and continue to create new material such as the Activity Worksheets (which would include recipes, crosswords, word searches etc.). The National Implementation Body could work with all key stakeholders and colleagues in developing more appropriate digital teaching resources.

Finally, based on our experience from the past two years of implementing the Programme through Covid-19, we recommend maintaining a virtual component to the VIP visits. Over the past two years, schools have gained skills and experience in using online platforms such as Zoom and Google Classroom and we want to encourage them to continue to use these new technologies in beneficial ways within the Programme. We believe that broadening the definition of the 'VIP Visit' to include virtual visits as well as VIP Pen-Pal correspondence will help to increase engagement with MEPs, EU ambassadors and others. Undoubtedly VIP Visits are a cornerstone and highlight of the Blue Star Programme, in particular when it comes to the Institutional element. The aim of this recommendation is to help the greatest possible number of schools achieve an eventual visit (in person or virtual), or achieve correspondence with a VIP, should the school in question not have the necessary IT equipment.

The above observations for the future of the Blue Star Programme are based on EM Ireland's experience in coordinating the Programme over the last ten years and could be introduced to complement the current delivery strategy. The challenge, as ever, will be to match the undoubted



growth potential of the Blue Star Programme at a national level, while keeping within the budget and resources allocated to the Programme.

EM Ireland is delighted to have been the organisation which implemented this year of this Programme and to have helped the Programme go from strength to strength again over the past 12 months and indeed ten years. We are proud to have been associated with the Programme from its inauguration and we welcome the opportunity to continue working closely and successfully with the Steering Committee and our Programme partners to drive and develop the potential of the Programme even further throughout the country going forward.

DRAFT



# Blue Star

## Programme

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