



Blue Star Programme

Blue Star Programme

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

**European Movement Ireland
August 2015**

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Executive Summary – Year 4 2014-2015

In its role as National Implementation Body for the Blue Star Programme, European Movement Ireland is pleased to have the opportunity to submit this report reviewing the fourth year of the programme. This report has a number of different goals and objectives, namely:

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

The programme benefitted greatly from strong working relationships at all levels with the Department of the Taoiseach, the office of the Minister of State for European Affairs and Data Protection, the European Commission Representation in Ireland, the European Parliament Information Office in Ireland and the Department of Education and Skills.

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

Over the course of the 2014-2015 school year, the Blue Star Programme introduced participants (pupils, teachers, parents and the wider community) to the EU, what it means and how it works, including an overview of its different Institutions. It's no exaggeration to say that, year on year, the programme succeeds in fostering a strong sense of citizenship and knowledge of Europe among its participants - be it a small, rural 20 pupil school in Westmeath or a 600 pupil school in Wicklow - and that this sense of 'belonging' and knowledge extends far beyond the school walls into the wider local communities.

The 2014-2015 Blue Star Programme saw 175 schools register to participate in the programme over the course of the registration period. At the time of submitting this report to the Department, 108 schools have successfully completed the programme, and each has been awarded two Blue Star certificates and an EU flag, following approval from the programme Steering Committee. We expect a number of additional reports to be submitted in September 2015. Based on average pupil numbers across the different participating schools, we estimate that approx. 15,000 pupils from across Ireland participated in the programme in Year 4. European Movement Ireland is delighted to have been the organisation managing the fourth year of this programme and is proud to have witnessed the programme continue to go from strength to strength. EM welcomes the opportunity to continue driving and developing the potential of the programme even further into the future.



Noelle O Connell
Executive Director
August 2015

Background to Programme

Initial Concept

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

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

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

In addition, schools are required to stage an event or series of events to celebrate Europe Day on 9 May. There is usually also a civic society element that acts as an overarching theme for the work of the pupils. In 2012-2013 this was the Irish Presidency of the Council of the EU, in 2013-2014 it was the European Parliament elections and this year, 2014-2015, it was the European Year of Development.

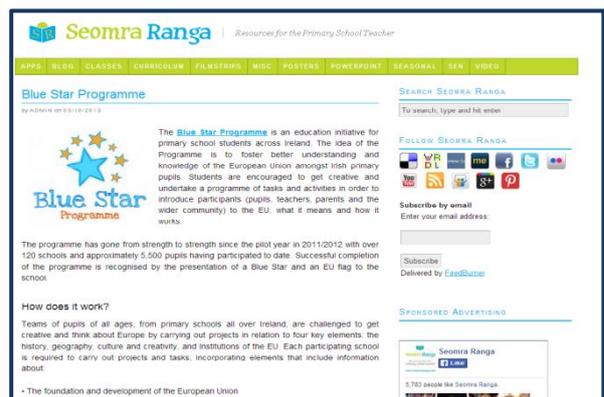
Timeline

The level of interest and success the programme has enjoyed in previous years, combined with the positive feedback received from pupils, teachers and the programme partners, led to a national continuation of the programme in autumn 2014. EM Ireland was delighted to once again act as the Blue Star National Implementation Body for the 2014-2015 academic year following public tender.

Work began in September 2014, when the Steering Committee was reconvened, composed of the new Minister of State for European Affairs and Data Protection, Dara Murphy TD, and officials from the Department of the Taoiseach, the European Commission Representation in Ireland, the European Parliament Information Office in Dublin and the Department of Education and Skills. The Committee agreed and signed off on targets, the implementation process and marketing plan. September 2014 saw EM Ireland reach out to every primary school in the Republic of Ireland (approx. 3,500 schools), inviting them to register and participate in the programme. We also sent bespoke invitations to all schools that had participated in Year 1, 2 or 3 of the programme, inviting them to take part again.

In order to continue to grow the number of registered schools, all MEPs and Oireachtas members were asked to nominate schools in their constituencies to participate and these schools were then targeted with bespoke invitations.

In addition to this, primary school resource websites, such as www.scoilnet.ie and www.seomraranga.com were leveraged to increase the programme's profile. As in Year 3, this significantly increased awareness and promoted the programme among the specific target market.



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

For the first time, *In Touch*, the Primary Teacher’s magazine, covered the Blue Star Programme in a half page spread and many teachers contacted the office as a result of this.

EM Ireland divided the work programme for Year 4 into a number of different phases and grouped the work activities in this regard in order to maximise and plan around the school year calendar. The below draft timetable was based on our experience over previous years of successfully running the programme.

Draft Timetable of Activities and Deadlines

Phase 1	Action
September and October 2014	1. Work with the Department of Education and Skills to communicate with all primary schools in the state (approx. 3,500) inviting them to participate
	2. Contact all MEPs, Oireachtas members and European Ambassadors encouraging them to engage with schools in their constituency and to make themselves available for school visits throughout the year
	3. Meeting of the Blue Star Steering Committee
	4. Finalise programme changes
	5. Agree format of collateral and material with all programme partners
	6. Organise an official launch of the programme with An Taoiseach, Enda Kenny TD; Jan O’Sullivan TD, Minister for Education and Skills and the Minister of State for European Affairs and Data Protection, Dara Murphy TD

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 7. Contact www.scoilnet.ie and www.seomraranga.com to advertise Blue Star Programme in their newsletter and on their website respectively 8. Contact the INTO's magazine, InTouch, to include an article on the Blue Star Programme 9. Deal with school queries in relation to undertaking the programme and the workload involved 10. Collate responses from schools and file all registration forms 11. Register participating schools
November	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 12. Organise a regional launch of the programme with Minister for European Affairs, Dara Murphy TD, in Cork 13. Launch of the new Blue Star website (at Cork regional launch if possible) 14. Send out Blue Star Action Plan template to all participating schools along with Teacher's Curriculum Guide prepared in cooperation with previous Blue Star Champion Teachers 15. Mail out resource packs with programme materials to all participating schools 16. Provide in-house assistance to schools with the preparation of their action plans 17. Update the FAQ section on the Blue Star website, developed with the help of Blue Star Champion Teachers, to provide assistance to new teachers
Phase 2	
November	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 18. Begin coordinating school visits with the office of the Minister for European Affairs, Oireachtas Members and European Ambassadors 19. Provide hands-on support and advice to schools regarding engagement with local media 20. Offer in-house assistance to schools starting their projects

January/February 2015	<p>21. Host in-service training day at the European Parliament Information Office for participating Blue Star teachers</p> <p>22. Schedule Steering Committee update session</p> <p>23. Provide on-going support to schools regarding visits of MEPs, Oireachtas Members and staff members of EM Ireland</p>
April 2015	24. Issue final reminder/communications push re: Europe Day on 9 May
Phase 3	
May 2015	<p>25. Coordinate Europe Day/Europe Week Events. A national Blue Star Europe Day event will be organised along the lines of the hugely successful Handshake for Europe/Blue Star Art Exhibition that previously took place in the Mansion House with the Minister for European Affairs and the Lord Mayor of Dublin</p> <p>Final Report Submissions:</p> <p>26. Teachers are required to provide proof of the completion of the programme through photos, videos, voice recordings and also project work completed using online tools.</p> <p>27. Final Steering Committee meeting</p>
Phase 4	
June 2015	28. Successful schools notified. EU Flag and Blue Star Certificate presentation ceremonies (to be attended by the Minister if possible or by a local politician/celebrity)
July 2015	29. Subject to confirmation of funding by EC Representation in Ireland, host study trip for teachers to Brussels to visit the European Commission, Irish Perm Rep and European Parliament (similar to previous three years)
August 2015	<p>30. EM Ireland to write report of the fourth year of the programme, incorporating participants feedback and recommendations for the future of the project and report to Minister for European Affairs</p> <p>31. Presentation of report to Minister and the Department of the Taoiseach</p>

Year 4 2014-2015

Once schools had registered to participate in the fourth year of the programme, they were provided with a resource pack and resource materials from a variety of programme partners. These included wall-charts and EU country guides to offer tips on the types of projects the pupils could undertake and to help guide the teachers in how best to facilitate the pupils. In addition, all schools were supplied with EM Ireland's comprehensive Curriculum Guide, which was developed with the help of previous Blue Star participant teachers (our 'Champion Teachers') and includes extensive advice and recommendations on all elements of the programme.

Blue Star participants were also invited to visit the FAQ page on the bespoke new Blue Star Programme website which answers the most common question submitted by teachers. Updated regularly, this serves as a useful source of information and advice for schools taking part in the programme: www.bluestarprogramme.ie/faq/.

Throughout the year, teachers are required to ensure that the four pillars of the Programme, and the Europe Day activities, are carried out. It was agreed that at the end of the school year all successful schools would be awarded an EU flag and two Blue Star certificates.

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

Bespoke Blue Star Website

In September 2014, EM Ireland undertook the development of a new bespoke Blue Star Programme website. Working with JamJo web designers, their brief was to create a clean, fresh site that would be easy and enjoyable to use and access by teachers and pupils alike.

The new site, www.bluestarprogramme.ie, went live at the end of September and was officially launched by Minister Murphy at Gaelscoil Uí Drisceoil in Glanmire, Cork. It has received very positive feedback from users. It offers a centralised source of information for all Blue Star participants and allows schools to see what their peers are working on and be inspired and motivated by Blue Star activities, events and projects from around the country. It also provides a means by which all participants can be easily updated on deadlines, registration dates, etc. by EM Ireland staff.

The site continues to be updated on a regular basis, both with practical information and tips for participants and with news of success stories and media coverage of the programme occurring nationwide.

Implementation of the Programme

Partnerships

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

The programme benefitted greatly from strong working relationships at all levels with the Department, the Minister's private office, the European Commission Representation in Ireland, the European Parliament Information Office in Ireland and the Department of Education and Skills.

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



Blue Star Steering Committee

The Steering Committee that had been established in the pilot year of the programme was continued in the fourth year. As in previous years, the Steering Committee decided the initial strategy of the Blue Star Programme, monitored its progress and offered counsel to EM Ireland in the Programme's implementation and delivery.

The members of the Steering Committee included:

- members of staff from the private office of the Minister of State for European Affairs and Data Protection
- officials from the Department of the Taoiseach, EU Division
- officials from the European Commission Representation in Ireland
- officials from the European Parliament Information Office in Ireland
- an official from the Department of Education and Skills
- members of staff from European Movement Ireland

The Steering Committee met formally twice over the course of the 2014-2015 programme in order to agree parameters, roll out strategy and secure buy-in to the project from stakeholders. A number of informal bilateral ad hoc meetings were also convened as needs dictated. In addition, EM Ireland continued to provide both the Minister and the Committee with regular updates and progress reports so as to ensure that the organisation remained true to the overall goals and objectives of the Programme's successful delivery.

Expressions of Interest

EM Ireland initiated the marketing and public awareness campaign of the Programme in September 2014.

The fourth year of the programme was officially launched by the Taoiseach, Minister O’Sullivan and Minister Murphy on 1 October 2014 with pupils from Gardiner Street National School, Dublin. The launch received excellent national and regional media coverage, including on RTÉ News 2Day. A concerted public relations campaign was put in place by the EM Ireland communications team around this launch and around the programme in general, using targeted press releases and various social media promotions to increase awareness of the programme.

On the 11 November 2014, Minister Murphy visited Gaelscoil Uí Drisceoil in Glanmire, Cork to kick off the school’s participation in the Blue Star Programme and to officially launch the programme’s new website, www.bluestarprogramme.ie.

As a consequence of this coordinated outreach, 175 schools officially registered to take part in the 2014-2015 Blue Star Programme following the registration deadline.

Resource Packs

A designated information resource pack for teachers was developed by EM Ireland. This was also accompanied by background material and collateral for pupils in order to help stimulate ideas and provide guidance on suitable projects.

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

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

Training Day

The European Parliament Information Office hosted a teacher training day for participating teachers on 24 January 2015. Teachers were addressed by staff from EM Ireland, the European Commission Representation, the European Parliament Information Office and Mairead McGuinness MEP, Vice-President of the European Parliament. As in previous years, this day was much welcomed by the teachers involved, who found it to be a useful forum to share ideas, best practice and problem solving techniques.

From European Movement Ireland’s perspective, the on-going flexibility and support the organisation receives from its partners must be commended as it enables EM Ireland to proceed with the successful delivery and management of this training, and all other elements of the Programme.

European Parliament Citizen’s Prize

Following a nomination in 2014 by Ireland South MEP, Mr. Sean Kelly, hundreds of Irish national school teachers who are involved in the Blue Star Programme were made joint Irish winners of the prestigious European Parliament’s European Citizen’s Prize, at an awards ceremony in Brussels in February 2015.

The Citizen's Prize medal is given in recognition of exceptional achievements in promoting better mutual understanding and closer integration between citizens of the Member States, or day to day activities giving concrete expression to the values entailed in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union. At EM Ireland we were proud and delighted that the programme received this level of recognition at an EU level.

The Brussels award ceremony took place on the 25 February in the European Parliament. EM Ireland's Executive Director, Noelle O Connell, represented the Blue Star Programme teachers on the day. The European Citizen's Prize will be taken on all school visits in the future in an effort to showcase the medal to as many teachers and pupils as possible.

The Irish award ceremony took place in Askeaton Senior School, Limerick on Wednesday, 4 February 2015 with MEP Seán Kelly visiting the school. The school were presented with a certificate to mark the occasion.



Blue Star Programme

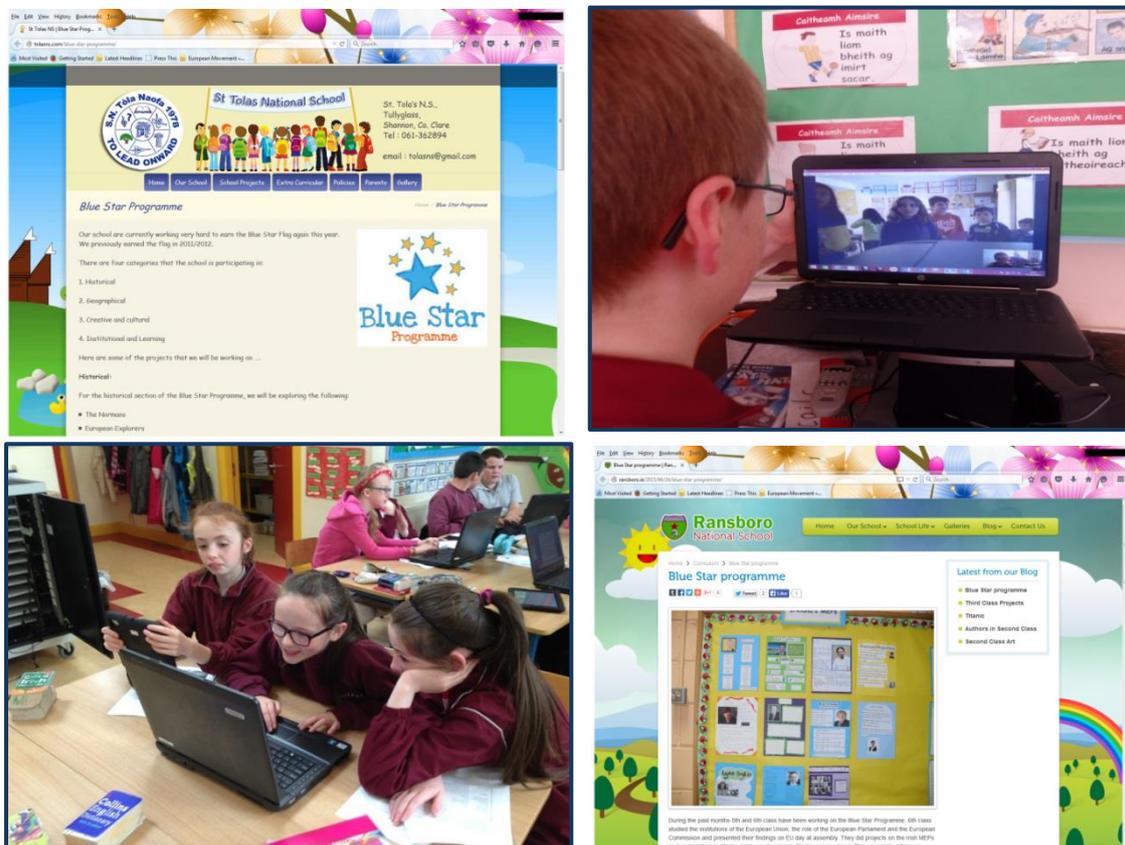
Programme Content

The Blue Star Programme is composed of four key modules:

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

When researching their projects, pupils were encouraged to use all means of technology available to them, including online resources. Many projects were presented using interactive tools such as Power Point, video clips, audio clips, blogging sites and school websites. The use of technology amongst the different schools was extremely impressive and brought the goals of the programme to life in a technological sense. At the start of 2014, four Irish primary schools participating in the Blue Star Programme were nominated for eircom Junior Spider Awards for their outstanding achievements online. We are pleased that the high level of engagement of pupils with online resources, and the creativity demonstrated when using these tools, continued in 2014-2015.

For the 2014-2015 programme, teachers were asked to give special attention to the theme of the European Year of Development.



1. Historical

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



Students with historical projects from Balla NS, Mayo (above) and War of Independence Medals from Banteer NS, Cork (below)



2. Geographical

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

This section of the programme was one of the most successful aspects. Pupils from outside Ireland were encouraged to share their knowledge of their home countries with classmates which helped integrate non-Irish pupils amongst the school population in addition to increasing awareness and knowledge of different nationalities and cultures amongst all participating schools. In addition, parents were often invited to present to the different classes. This in turn helped to extend the programme to something beyond an abstract concept in the classroom and involved the wider community in the process.



*Flags of Europe from Clohanbeg NS, Clare and a geographical project on Germany from Kilglass NS, Galway (above)
Geographical projects from Kinaffe NS, Mayo and Scoil an Duinnigh, Dublin (below)*



3. Cultural and Creative

In this module, pupils explored the places, food and art of Europe. Pupils experienced food from different European countries, for example, or developed a play, dance or song about the different peoples and countries of Europe. This module led to some interesting and high quality submissions ranging from renditions of Ode to Joy, national costume design work and even some interesting takes on European Art!



Gardiner Street NS, Dublin produce a highly creative model of London's Tube (above)!



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

What's more, this part of the programme further engaged the wider community as parents were invited to assist their children in putting together their projects and contributing in any other way they felt would be interesting and beneficial for the Blue Star participants.



A pupil from St Maelruains, Dublin demonstrates his musical skills (left) and parents and pupils admire a cultural project in Scoil Lua Naofa, Tipperary (above left)

4. Institutional

Under 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. Pupils completed projects on 'A Day in the Life of an MEP'. In many cases, pupils wrote to MEPs asking them a series of questions as well as inviting them to speak to their school. A number of MEPs, TDs and Senators visited schools to speak about Europe and their general work as public representatives.



Scoil Thomáis, Dublin welcome their visiting MEP (above)



Pupils at Gaelscoil Uí Drisceoil, Cork put their questions to Minister Dara Murphy TD (above)

Europe Week

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

Following on from the resounding success of the initiative introduced during the Irish Presidency in 2013, it was decided that the nationwide "Handshake for Europe" would be carried out again. All Blue Star schools were encouraged to take part in this initiative and pupils were asked to wish each other a "Happy Europe Day!" as they joined together in a group handshake. This handshake aimed to acknowledge the diversity and solidarity that exists amongst the classmates who are ultimately all connected together as citizens of the EU. All schools were provided with a press release for Europe Day which outlined the theory behind the handshake. The handshake proved to be a popular initiative with the schools across the country and received significant press coverage, details of which are provided in the press section of this report.

Over 100 schools with almost 15,000 pupils, in communities across Ireland participated in their own Europe Day events. Representing all of them at the Mansion House were pupils from Gardiner Street National School, Dublin. With Minister of State for European Affairs, Dara Murphy, TD and Lord Mayor of Dublin, Councillor Christy Burke, the pupils formed a handshake chain to celebrate Europe and their own participation in the Blue Star Programme.



Blue Star celebrations in the Mansion House, May 2015 (above)



St Michael's School, Galway (left) and Kilglass NS, Galway (right) mark Europe Day with their own unique celebrations

Art Exhibition in Mansion House

As part of the Blue Star Europe Day celebrations, an Art Exhibition was held in the Mansion House in Dublin where Gardiner Street National School showcased their Blue Star artwork. This event was filmed by RTÉ News 2Day and broadcast on the programme.

The art exhibition was hosted by Lord Mayor Christy Burke, and addressed by Minister Dara Murphy TD, who spoke to the pupils and answered their questions about life as the Minister for European Affairs.

Following the art exhibition, the pupils walked to EU House next door where they enjoyed the Europe Day celebrations held jointly by the European Commission Representation in Ireland and the European Parliament Information Office in Dublin.



Participating Schools in 2014-2015

School	County
Scoil Cholmáin Whitegate NS	Co. Cork
St Cronan's NS	Co. Clare
Knockmahon NS	Co. Waterford
St Patrick's NS	Co. Meath
Scoil Mhuire	Co. Galway
Scoil an Duinnínigh	Co. Dublin
St Joseph's NS	Co. Cork
St Maelruain's Church of Ireland School	Co. Dublin
St Mary's National School	Co. Longford
St Mary's Boys National School	Co. Kildare
Holy Trinity NS	Co. Tipperary
Spa NS	Co. Kerry
Scoil na Maighdine Mhuire	Co. Clare
St Michael's NS	Co. Carlow
Rathmore NS	Co. Kildare
St John the Baptist BNS	Co. Tipperary
St Patrick's National School	Co. Wicklow
St Thomas' NS	Co. Westmeath
St Michael's BNS	Co. Galway
St Patrick's NS	Co. Roscommon
St. Paul's Senior Girls' Primary School	Co. Dublin
Walterstown NS	Co. Cork
Ballyleague NS	Co. Roscommon
Bunscoil Rinn an Chabhlaigh	Co. Cork
Castleiney NS	Co. Tipperary
Gardiner Street NS	Co. Dublin
Kilmacthomas NS	Co. Waterford
Little Flower NS	Co. Tipperary
RMDS	Co. Dublin
SN An tSratha Mhóir	Co. Donegal
Scoil Barra Naofa	Co. Cork

School	County
Scoil Bhríde Lisdowney NS	Co. Kilkenny
Scoil Iognáid De Rís	Co. Kilkenny
Scoil Mhuire	Co. Donegal
St Augustine's School	Co. Dublin
St Brigid's GNS	Co. Dublin
St Patrick's NS	Co. Limerick
Drumraney NS	Co. Westmeath
Gaelscoil Liatroma	Co. Leitrim
Kilrane NS	Co. Wexford
Scoil Naomh Bríd	Co. Mayo
Balla NS	Co. Mayo
Banteer NS	Co. Cork
Clohanbeg NS	Co. Clare
Cloneen National School	Co. Tipperary
Crinkle NS	Co. Offaly
Danescastle National School	Co. Wexford
Divine Mercy SNS	Co. Dublin
Donagh NS	Co. Donegal
Fanore NS	Co. Clare
Gaelscoil Uí Drisceoil	Co. Cork
Glynn National School	Co. Wexford
Jonathan Swift NS	Co. Wicklow
Kilgarvan Central School	Co. Kerry
Killeen NS	Co. Galway
Killeeneen National School	Co. Galway
Limerick Educate Together	Co. Limerick
Loughglynn NS	Co. Roscommon
Rahara National School	Co. Roscommon
Sacred Heart Presentation Primary School	Co. Kerry
Scoil Bhriocáin	Co. Galway
Scoil Mhuire	Co. Galway
Scoil Naomh Lorcáin	Co. Kildare

School	County
Scoil Naomh Sheosaimh	Co. Galway
Scoil San Eoin	Co. Wicklow
Scoil Thomáis	Co. Dublin
St Baithin's NS	Co. Donegal
St Joseph's NS	Co. Mayo
St Ursula's Primary School	Co. Waterford
Tavneena NS	Co. Mayo
Wicklow Educate Together NS	Co. Wicklow
Killocrim National School	Co. Kerry
Askeaton Senior National School	Co. Limerick
Belgrove Senior Girls National School	Co. Dublin
Burgess NS	Co. Tipperary
Burnchurch NS	Co. Kilkenny
Camcloon National School	Co. Westmeath
Crecora National School	Co. Limerick
Holy Family Special School	Co. Cavan
Kilcolman NS	Co. Limerick
Kinaffe NS	Co. Mayo
Moyderwell Mercy Primary School	Co. Kerry
Piercestown National School	Co. Wexford
Ransboro NS	Co. Sligo
Scoil an Chroí Ró Naofa	Co. Cork
Scoil Chlochair Mhuire	Co. Cork
Scoil Lua Naofa	Co. Tipperary
Scoil Mhuire	Co. Kerry
Scoil Mhuire	Co. Meath
Scoil Mhuire	Co. Galway
Scoil Naomh Bríd	Co. Louth
Scoil Naomh Pádraig	Co. Galway
Tubber National School	Co. Clare
Cloonliffen National School	Co. Mayo
St Patrick's BNS	Co. Donegal

School	County
St Joseph's NS	Co. Mayo
Kilglass NS	Co. Galway
Screen NS	Co. Wexford
Scoil Íosagáin Infant School	Co. Cork
Scoil Bhríde	Co. Longford
St Mary's National School	Co. Dublin
Waterford Educate Together NS	Co. Waterford
Urbleshanny NS	Co. Monaghan
St Joseph's NS Miltown Malbay	Co. Clare
St Joseph's Girls National School	Co. Cork
St Aidan's NS	Co. Mayo
Scoil Mhuire Naofa Boys School	Co. Cork
Edeninfagh NS	Co. Donegal

Mentoring & Support

As in other years, EM Ireland's role in mentoring and supporting the participating teachers and responding to their queries was on-going during the 2014-2015 programme. This constituted providing advice and guidance to teachers looking for additional information and resources as well as fielding a range of questions posed by teachers, either over the phone, via email or in person.

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

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

Teacher Training Day

Following on from the success of last year's training day, it was decided that another teacher training day would be held for all participating Blue Star teachers early in the year. A training day was organised in the European Parliament Information Office for 24 January 2015. 33 Blue Star teachers from across Ireland attended. The timetable for the training day is outlined below:

Blue Star Training Workshop, 24 January 2014	
1.	Brief Introduction from Blue Star Partners European Movement Ireland, European Parliament and the European Commission
2.	Training Module and Best Practice Sharing Focus on the Historical and Geographical sections of the Blue Star Programme
3.	How to Maximise Media Opportunities Frances Byrne, European Movement Ireland
4.	Roundtable Discussion and Q&A Mairead McGuinness MEP, Vice-President of the European Parliament
5.	Training Module and Best Practice Sharing Focus on the Cultural and Institutional sections of the Blue Star Programme

It was very useful for us as National Implementation Body to hear from teachers in a non-school environment on their recommendations for the Blue Star Programme as it develops.





Teachers with Mairéad McGuinness MEP and Frances Byrne at the Blue Star training day in the European Parliament Information Office, Dublin, January 2015

School Visits

Over the course of the Programme, over 40 schools were visited either by members of staff from European Movement Ireland, by Minister Murphy, by MEPs, European Ambassadors or by members of the Oireachtas.



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

Seán Kelly MEP celebrates the awarding of the prestigious European Citizen's Prize to Blue Star teachers with pupils in Askeaton NS, Limerick (left), while EM Ireland visits pupils in Gardiner Street, NS (below)





Pupils in Askeaton NS (above), Scoil Barra Naofa, Cork; Balla NS, Mayo and St Augustine's, Dublin (below) enjoy school visits from a garda, Deirdre Clune MEP, Micheál Martin TD, Minister Dara Murphy

Assessment

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

- 1) Participating teachers were asked to send through a comprehensive report document including evidence of projects and events by either hard or soft copy
- 2) These submissions were reviewed in-house by the EM Ireland Blue Star Programme Team
- 3) It was decided to award the EU flag and a Blue Star certificate of achievement to schools who submitted these reports to the satisfaction of the team

108 schools have been deemed to have successfully completed the Blue Star Programme by the end of July 2015.

Two bespoke Blue Star certificates were awarded to successful schools this year along with the awarding of an EU flag.

Communications & PR

Programme Collateral



PR & Media Coverage

The Blue Star Programme 2014-2015 received extensive coverage across all media.

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

Due to the project being run in primary schools, it received great coverage from RTÉ's News 2Day, which is aimed at a younger audience. The programme covered the Europe Day celebrations in Gardiner Street NS, Dublin on 8 May. TG4 also afforded Blue Star some excellent airtime over the course of the 2015-2016 programme; Glenties NS, Donegal were visited by a TG4 crew on 1 May whose coverage included interviews with the teachers, pupils, images of the Blue Star work and the 'Handshake for Europe.'

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

Following on from last year, given that a number of participating Blue Star schools are active online and on social media sites, such as Twitter and Facebook, we encouraged schools to use social media to highlight their participation in the programme and promote their Europe Day activities. Given the high level of recognition four Blue Star schools received in 2014 with their nominations for Eircom Junior Spider Awards, we were pleased to see a high level of online engagement and creativity with regard to the programme again this year.



An RTÉ cameraman covers a Q&A session between Minister Dara Murphy and pupils of Gardiner Street NS at Blue Star Europe Day celebrations in the Mansion House, 8 May 2015

Media Coverage Snapshot

The following is just a selection of the media coverage surrounding Year 4 of the Blue Star Programme:

Date	Publication
01-Oct-14	TheJournal.ie ➤ Blue Star Launch 2014/15 with An Taoiseach
02-Oct-14	Irish Independent ➤ Blue Star Launch 2014/15 with An Taoiseach
02-Oct-14	Irish Examiner ➤ Blue Star Launch 2014/15 with An Taoiseach
02-Oct-14	Irish Times ➤ Blue Star Launch 2014/15 with An Taoiseach
02-Oct-14	Irish Independent ➤ Blue Star Launch 2014/15 with An Taoiseach
06-Oct-14	Greystones Guide ➤ Blue Star for Wicklow schools
06-Oct-14	Wicklow Voice ➤ Blue Star for Wicklow schools
22-Oct-14	Drogheda Independent ➤ Blue Star visit and flag raising
31-Oct-14	MidWest Radio ➤ Blue Star registration deadline
31-Oct-14	Sligo Today ➤ Blue Star deadline extension
02-Nov-14	Clare Champion ➤ Blue Star deadline extension
11-Nov-14	Wexford People ➤ Blue Star visit and flag raising
12-Nov-14	NZ Foreign Affairs ➤ Blue Star website Cork launch
14-Nov-14	Wicklow Voice ➤ Blue Star deadline extension
18-Nov-14	Plus Media Solutions ➤ Blue Star website Cork launch
06-Feb-15	Clare Champion ➤ Blue Star Teacher Training Article
03-Feb-15	Wicklow Times ➤ Blue Star Teacher Training Article

11-Feb-15	Drogheda Independent ➤ Blue Star Teacher Training Article
19-Feb-15	Vale Star/Mallow Star ➤ Blue Star Citizen's Prize
26-Feb-15	CRC FM ➤ Blue Star Citizen's Prize
02-Mar-15	Irish Examiner ➤ Blue Star Citizen's Prize
27-Mar-15	Clare Champion ➤ Blue Star visit
01-May-15	TG4 ➤ Coverage of Blue Star pupils & teachers
08-May-15	Business & Leadership ➤ National 'Handshake for Europe'
08-May-15	CRC FM ➤ National 'Handshake for Europe'
08-May-15	RTÉ TV ➤ Europe Day celebrations
08-May-15	Waterford Today ➤ National 'Handshake for Europe'
11-May-15	Radio Kerry ➤ Europe Day celebrations
16-May-15	Wicklow People ➤ National 'Handshake for Europe'
26-May-15	Wexford People ➤ National 'Handshake for Europe'
06-Jun-15	Shannonside FM ➤ Blue Star visit
18-Jun-15	Merrion St.ie ➤ Blue Star visit
25-Jun-15	The Corkman ➤ Blue Star visit
30-Jun-15	Wexford People ➤ Blue Star award
08-Jul-15	The Kerryman ➤ Blue Star visit
16-Jul-15	The Southern Star ➤ Blue Star trip to Brussels



Coverage of the Blue Star 2014-2015 launch in the Irish Examiner, October 2014 (above)



Coverage of the Blue Star 2014-2015 launch on the cover of the Irish Independent and on page 2 of the Irish Times, October 2014 (above)

Wexford People

Wexford People (Ireland)

May 26, 2015

Edition 1;

National Edition

Estonian ambassador helps school celebrate Europe Day

BOYS and girls in 6th class at Piercestown National School hosted a special event last week as part of their participation in the Blue Star programme, which involves a study of the European Union, the children were holding their Europe Day celebrations.

The date was moved to coincide with the opportunity to host Estonian Ambassador Kristi Karelsohn who was joined by Cllr. Tony Dempsey and former senator Lisa McDonald.

The children learned a lot from a presentation by the ambassador including such nuggets of information that Skype was invented in Estonia.

Ambassador Karelson also spoke about a traditional festival called the mid-summer night on June 23 when bonfires are lit and parties are held.

The children impressed their parents and invited guests with introducing themselves in the language of their chosen country that they studied and by announcing an interesting fact.

The room was decorated in blue and yellow, the colours of the European Union flag, and the works of the children produced over the course of the year ranging from projects on the countries, to essays on 'We are lucky to live in Europe' and traditional recipes from the various countries.

The ambassador was very impressed to see the recipe for Estonian soda bread.

The afternoon also saw the 'Handshake for Europe' being passed around the room, symbolising the day on May 9, 1950, when the then French Foreign Minister Robert Schuman extended the hand of friendship to old enemy Germany, to put war behind them and to forge a peaceful continent.

The children further entertained their audience with rendition of the European National Anthem 'Ode to Joy' on the recorder and a lovely performance of the song 'Frere Jacques' in rounds. Not forgetting our own country in the middle of this study, the afternoon was completed by the audience standing to their own national anthem 'Amhrán na bhFiann'.

The highlight of the afternoon, however, was the last part of the event 'The Taste of Europe'. This involved the children researching and preparing a dish from their chosen country. The guests were delighted to explore the 'Taste of Europe' and satisfied their hunger of everything from savoury dishes such as German Bratwurst and sweet dishes such as delicious Belgian Chocolate cake.

Coverage of Blue Star school visits in the Wexford People, May 2015 (above) and The Kerryman, June 2015 (below)

The Kerryman

Kerryman (Ireland)

July 8, 2015

Edition 1;

National Edition

Killoccrim NS raises its first Blue Flag

SCHOOL'S out at Killoccrim National School in Listowel, but this year the end of term will be remembered for a very special reason, as the school received its first ever blue flag.

Before finishing up for the summer last Friday, pupils and teachers welcomed a very special guest to raise the flag - Kerry's own MEP and former GAA president, Sean Kelly.

The flag was awarded to the school following their successful participation in the Blue Star Programme, which aims to foster better knowledge and understanding of the European Union and how it affects our lives amongst Irish primary pupils through classroom projects and activities. The Programme introduces pupils, teachers, parents and the wider community to the EU, what it means and how it works. The goal of the Programme is to foster a strong sense of citizenship and leadership among participants that goes far beyond the school walls and into the wider community.

Helping oversee the project was fifth and sixth class teacher, Niamh O'Sullivan, who said she was delighted to have been involved in the school's first Blue Flag. The school was also thrilled to welcome MEP Sean Kelly to Killoccrim.

Brussels Trip

As part of the Blue Star Programme, the European Commission Representation in Ireland kindly supported a study trip to Brussels for select participating teachers. In all, 24 teachers from all corners of the country visited Brussels from 30 June to 2 July 2015. The itinerary for this trip is outlined below:

Wednesday, 1 July 2015	
	<u>WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION</u> Mrs Isabelle VAN KEIRSBILCK
9.00	<u>THE ROLE OF THE COMMISSION AS THE EXECUTIVE OF THE EUROPEAN UNION</u> Mr. Jo VANDERCAPPELLEN Directorate-General for Communication
10.45	<u>THE EUROPEAN YEAR OF DEVELOPMENT</u> Mr Christos MARAZOPOULOS Directorate-General for International Cooperation and Development
11.45	<u>THE ROLE OF THE EUROPEAN UNION IN EDUCATION</u> Mr. David MUSCAT Directorate-General for Education and Culture
12.45	<u>WORKING LUNCH</u> Mr. Peter POWER Head of Cabinet of Commissioner HOGAN Mr. Shane SUTHERLAND Member of Cabinet of Commissioner HOGAN
15.30	<u>MEETING WITH IRISH OFFICIALS</u> Mrs Mary Teresa MORAN Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations Mrs Sarah IRONSIDE Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion Mr John WALSH Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy
17.00	<u>MEETING WITH Mr. Seán KELLY, MEP</u>

Thursday, 2 July 2015	
9.00	<u>VISIT Parliamentarium</u> European Parliament Visitors' Centre
10.30	<u>BRIEFING BY Richard FREEDMAN</u> European Parliament Visitors Service

11.00	<u>Q&A ROUNDTABLE WITH Irish MEPs</u>
14.15	Departure to Permanent Representation of Ireland to the EU
14.30	<u>VISIT TO PERMANENT REPRESENTATION OF IRELAND TO THE EU</u> Ambassador Tom HANNEY Deputy Permanent Representative

Conclusions & Recommendations

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

The fourth year of the Blue Star Programme saw a significant jump in terms of the number of participating schools from last year. The pilot programme began in 2011/2012 with 32 schools. In the 2014-2015 year this number had jumped: the Blue Star Programme had 175 registered schools with 108 of these schools awarded their flags and certs by the end of the school year. We anticipate this number will rise again in September 2015. 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 fourth year of the Programme. Perhaps the most impressive result of this year's programme is that we had schools participating from every county in the Republic of Ireland, with the exception of Co. Laois this year.

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

From its humble beginnings, it is no exaggeration to say the Blue Star Programme continues to grow in its successes, both in terms of numbers and in terms of impact. Already schools are contacting EM Ireland to enquire about getting involved in the 2015-2016 Programme. EM Ireland is proud to have been associated with the programme from its inauguration and would welcome the opportunity to continue driving and developing the potential of the programme even further.

Expressions of Interest for 2015-2016

We have received expressions of interest from numerous schools who would like to participate in the Blue Star Programme 2015-2016. These potential participants heard about the programme through the media coverage, social media sites and from teachers who are currently participating in the Blue Star Programme. We have also already had commitments and expressions of intent from current Blue Star teachers to enrol their school in the programme again next year as they found it to be so beneficial and enjoyable.

Teacher Feedback

As part of the final report pack, teachers were asked to give feedback to the National Coordinator about their impressions of the programme, in particular focusing on where they felt it could be improved. We are pleased to report that the general concept of the programme was extremely well received by teachers, principals and pupils with special appreciation of how compatible it was with the school curriculum. The phrase, "very curriculum friendly," again featured in many of these teacher surveys this year. Overall the responses indicate that both teachers and pupils had a huge amount of fun with this programme. The main challenge mentioned by some teachers was in managing their time to successfully complete all aspects of the Programme, maintain momentum and organise a Europe Day celebration. This is something we will seek to work with teachers and pupils on in future years of the programme.

Below is a verbatim sample of the feedback provided by teachers, based on their experience teaching the Blue Star Programme in 2014/2015:

- *“I can honestly say that we found this project to be school-friendly. While there is a lot involved, it is very clearly set out and allows schools to bring together a lot of existing practice in a way that focuses pupils on their roles as members of Europe and the European Union. Along with clear guidelines, regular communication was a positive feature of the project.”*
- *“Every day schools are swamped by new initiatives, many of which promise to be ‘curriculum-friendly’. This programme also promised this incentive and I can honestly say it was fantastic. The pupils in our school from junior infants to sixth class all benefitted from being part of the Blue Star Programme. Each and every one learned many valuable lessons. It offered a fantastic opportunity for cross-curricular links and also linkage across senior and junior levels encouraging extra, much-appreciated collaboration between classes... I also found that support from the office was never far away and received a swift reply whenever necessary.”*
- *“Was brilliant! Children said it was ‘the highlight’ of sixth class, ‘best experience ever’...!”*
- *“Our pupils really enjoyed taking part in the Blue Star – it was particularly meaningful for our small school as we have such a diverse representation of pupils. It was a way of showcasing their countries of origin and involving their parents in the school community.”*
- *“This was a fantastic experience and one that all staff have really enjoyed. The only difficulty that we encountered was the aspect of Institutional Element. The pupils in the school have a vast range of difficulties including concentration levels, speech and behaviour. This aspect was difficult to differentiate for the younger pupils and even for the older ones. We planned as a staff on how this could be covered.”*
- *“I felt that it was a very beneficial project for all children. I feel that the children really learned a huge amount particularly in the Historical and Geographical sections. It is fantastic that children are made more aware of the EU countries and the links that exist between them. Children can now look at a map and name all of the 28 EU countries which I feel is fantastic.”*
- *“It would not have been uncommon to see clusters of girls from the different classes gathered together at lunch time chatting and discussing various aspects of the project. This in turn had the effect of inspiring all children in the school community...”*
- *“The magic of the day extended beyond the classrooms and we embraced the wider community with ease. Children learned how to improve their ICT skills, how to use PowerPoint, search the internet for relevant information, and use a range of electronic equipment such as iPads and laptops.”*
- *“Watching over 50 children deliver their speeches on why they wanted to be an MEP was enlightening, they were all so eager and confident as they stood up before a crowded room.”*
- *“We equally liked the flexibility of this programme and how we were able to adapt to suit our two teacher school... The pupils were enabled to express and present what they had learned in a wide variety of ways e.g. through IT, art, music, drama etc. and it was also fantastic to see the natural link with home which occurred throughout the process. We would highly recommend this programme to other schools.”*
- *“Compliments to the Blue Star Programme for the quality of the resources made available to schools. They are invaluable.”*

- *“The children had plenty of creative opportunities and they found it to be a worthwhile and fun experience. As teachers, we were constantly learning and we feel it has been challenging and a fantastic teaching tool...Our Europe Day celebration was a culmination of months of hard work, and the children were eager to show off all they had learned. We were very impressed with the Programme, and would definitely participate again.”*
- *“We look forward to being part of the Blue Star Programme again next year and trying new ideas.”*
- *“Looking forward to next year already!”*

European Movement Ireland Response & Recommendations

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

EM Ireland feels that the four main elements of the programme (Historical, Geographical, Cultural and Creative, and Institutional), as well as the topical civic society elements and the Europe Day celebrations every year, have worked extremely well and this is highlighted by the huge increase in participation over the last four years of the programme. These four elements represent the foundation blocks of the Blue Star Programme, and they should be cemented as a constant throughout the life of the programme.

The additional civic society elements added to the programme each year are a major strength of the initiative and have been highlighted by some teachers as the reason they repeat the programme for a second or third time. In 2012/2013, Blue Star pupils learned about the Irish Presidency of the Council of the EU, and in 2013/2014 they explored the European elections, the electoral process and the importance of elections. The 2014-2015 Blue Star teachers were asked to give particular attention to the European Year of Development. This allows both teachers and pupils to actively engage with the political, social and moral issues that concern these additional civic elements by giving them the opportunity to engage in creative exercises. EM Ireland looks forward to working with our partners on the Steering Committee to identify an appropriate civic society element for the 2015-2016 programme.

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

EM Ireland recommends exploring the possibility of allowing some schools, mainly smaller, rural schools, to enter into a two year cycle of the Blue Star Programme, whereby they would focus their attention on two elements per year, as opposed to all four. This would also work for larger schools that are just involving one or two classes in the Programme. Repetition of material year on year can present itself as a problem for the type of schools mentioned above, and this would allow schools to explore completely new elements each year if they wish.

Regarding school visits, EM Ireland would propose to continue to invite all programme partners to visit at least 5 schools per year, which would afford a lot more schools the opportunity to showcase their work from the year. If the above option of a longer cycle for some participating schools was introduced, visits from all programme partners would allow schools progress to be reviewed, similar to the Green Flag

programme: <http://www.greenschoolsireland.org/about-us/renewing-the-award.290.html>. Consideration might be given to particularly encouraging school visits in those schools with a Blue Star 'Champion Teacher'. This may serve as an incentive for teachers and as a reward for those who really excel in their delivery of the programme.

EM Ireland also proposes to explore the possibility of introducing alternative awards for repeat Blue Star schools, as an incentive for them to continue participating. Some ideas for these alternative awards are:

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

EM Ireland would continue to encourage all Irish schools to explore eTwinning, which is a platform that allows Irish teachers to communicate, collaborate, develop projects and share ideas with teachers in other European countries. Teachers from all participating schools can register and use the eTwinning online tools to find each other, meet virtually, team up in groups, learn together and engage in online-based projects. It would really bring all elements of the programme to life. The possibility of funding being available for the eTwinning activities of schools under the Europe for Citizens programme could also be explored by schools.

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

European Movement Ireland is delighted to have been the organisation managing the fourth year of this programme and to have witnessed the programme go from strength to strength again over the past 12 months. EM Ireland is proud to have been associated with the programme from its inauguration and would 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.



Blue Star

Programme

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