

IMMIGRATION EMIGRATION RACISM AND SECTARIANISM SCHOOLS PROJECT

Year One report (September 2006-June 2007)

Participating schools

| SCHOOL | ADDRESS | TYPE |
|---------------------------|---|--|
| Group One | | |
| Cullybackey High School | 44 Pottinger Street, Cullybackey Co Antrim BT42 1BP | Controlled Secondary (state, mainly Protestant) |
| St Louis Grammar School | Cullybackey Road Ballymena, Co Antrim BT35 5DW | Catholic Voluntary Grammar |
| Dundalk Grammar School | Dundalk, Co Louth | Secondary (Protestant management) |
| St Mary's College | Dundalk, Co Louth | Secondary (Catholic management) |
| Group Two | | |
| Ballysally Primary School | 52 Daneshill Road, Coleraine Co Londonderry BT52 2QU | Controlled Primary (state, mainly Protestant) |
| St John's P.S. | Carnlough, Co Antrim BT44 0HJ | Maintained Primary (Catholic) |
| Model National School | Monaghan | Protestant Primary |
| St Patrick's N.S. | Clara, Killybrone, Emyvale, Co Monaghan | Catholic Primary |
| Group Three | | |
| Antrim P.S. | 31 Station Road, Antrim BT41 4AB | Controlled Primary |
| St Mary's P.S. | 182 Glenravel Road, Cargan, Co Antrim BT43 6RB | Maintained Primary |
| St Nicholas N.S. | Nicholas Street, Dundalk | Protestant Primary |
| Louth N.S. | Louth Village, Co Louth | Catholic Primary |

FIRST YEAR REPORT

The 12 participating schools – four secondary and eight primary – have been clustered into three groups of four, with a state (mainly Protestant) school and a Catholic school in Northern Ireland grouped with a Protestant and Catholic school in the Republic of Ireland. Around 280 children aged 9-14 from upper primary and lower secondary are involved. The schools were recruited to the IERS Schools project between June and August of 2006, following the award of £223,000 from the EU Peace II (extension) programme for the two years 2006-2008. The first year of the project concentrated on

‘getting to know you’ and skills-based activities; the second year will deal more closely with the sensitive topics of racism and sectarianism.

During September and October 2006 the principals from the three clusters met and were briefed by the project co-ordinator, Marie Hoeritzauer from the Centre for Cross Border Studies. The format for the teacher guidance notes and pupil workbooks for the project evolved from these three meetings.

By December Marie had completed, produced and distributed the learning materials on emigration and immigration in the form of teacher guidance notes and pupil workbooks for use in the classroom (*see pdf below*).

Letter Writing and Workshops

One of the most popular and successful elements of the first period was the letter writing between pupils in the linked primary schools in each jurisdiction (each school was linked with a neighbouring school from the other religious community – e.g. in Co Louth or Co Antrim – in preparation for the four-school cross-border cluster meeting at the annual ‘residential’). As well as fulfilling curricular requirements, this exchange served to strengthen the human link between the participating schools and to prepare teachers and pupils for the next stage of cross-community school workshops: between December 2006 and March 2007 24 of these were delivered by a variety of expert tutors. The aim of these was to:

1. Further develop cross-community ‘pen pal’ contacts
2. Develop new skills among the pupils

Among the themes of the cross-community school workshops were: following the Emigration Trail at the Ulster-American Folk Park in Omagh; archery, team games, construction techniques and Indian crafts (led by Nisha Tandon) at Ballymena Showgrounds; design and drawing at the Antrim board centre; and music and dance (including African traditional dancing and drumming led by Tura from Artfrique) at Redeemer Family Resource Centre in Dundalk.

Nisha Tandon and her colleague were a particular hit with the pupils of Ballysally P.S. and St John’s P.S., who were able to dress up in saris, to perform Indian dance and to make beautiful designs using coloured rice. These two schools, having held separate craft workshops, then met for team building games at the Corrymeela Community in Ballycastle.

This group’s Monaghan counterparts – the Model N.S. and St Patrick’s N.S. – met at Tanagh Outdoor Centre near Rockcorry for a range of activities including canoeing and tackling an assault course. A second workshop in Monaghan offered skills in puppet making, willow weaving and textile crafts. By the end of the day huge willow structures had been created and decorated glasses and cards were being jealously guarded by their proud creators.

One school principal commented: “These activities were fantastic because they fed directly into our curriculum in art and physical education. They covered areas like Outdoor and Adventure Activities in PE and Fabric and Fibre, Painting, Construction and Designing and Making in Art. Cross-border school activities need to be structured

in this way so they are not an 'add on' but link directly with the various curricula. Time well spent!"

Three 'Residentials'

In March, after the cross-community school workshops, it was time for more teacher planning meetings to prepare for the three cross-border 'residential' between April and June. The objectives of the two day 'residential' were:

1. to promote cross community and cross border links and friendships
2. to develop new skills

The realisation of these objectives was enhanced by ensuring that each activity group was composed of pupils from all four schools. The goodwill of the class teachers and the school principals combined with the excellent facilitators at the Share Holiday Village and the Ulster American Folk Park ensured successful outcomes from the three 'residential'.

The first of these – bringing together Antrim P.S., St Mary's P.S. Cargan, St Nicholas N.S. and Louth N.S. – took place at the Share Holiday Village on the banks of Upper Lough Erne in Fermanagh on 19-20 April.

The following week (26-27 April) the secondary school cluster – Cullybackey High, St Louis, St Mary's and Dundalk Grammar – also came together at the Share Holiday Village. Pupils (and teachers) could choose between land-based and water-based activities: go-karts, climbing, orienteering, teeshirt printing, canoeing, wind surfing, banana boats, dinghy sailing and big boat sailing. The Armagh Rhymers entertained participants in the evening before a 10 pm disco. Comments from teachers included: "a fabulous experience for all"; "everyone mixed very well"; "we had a brilliant time and every single pupil got a huge amount of benefit from the two days."

The third 'residential' on 7-8 June (with Ballysally P.S., St John's P.S., Model N.S. and St Patrick's N.S.) was held at the Ulster-American Folk Park outside Omagh and had a rather different theme: migration to America. Pupils learned the crafts of the emigrants of those times: candlemaking, weaving, printing, leatherworking, nail making and beading. In the evening there was 'crossroads dancing', country games and quizzes. Local musician Tom Sweeney finished the evening to thunderous applause. The second morning, a hot one, completed the workshops.

Project evaluator Peter McEvoy commented: "Having observed the programme of joint activities during the two-day residential at the Share Village in Lisnaskea, I thought that the atmosphere of the participants in sharing new experiences and collaborating together was really excellent - probably because it was all so natural and 'non-contrived'."

In April and May three first year review meetings were held in Dundalk and Monaghan with teachers (who were joined for the secondary school meeting – hosted by Dundalk Grammar School – by the principals). These were facilitated with the assistance of Simon O'Hare from the North-South Exchange Consortium. The principals were particularly keen to have an end-of-project event that would involve parents, governors and local community representatives. Both teachers and principals

agreed that the project was helping their pupils both to develop an understanding of difference, and fulfil their statutory requirements in both jurisdictions in areas of Personal Development, Citizenship, Intercultural Learning, Social Personal and Health Education, and Civic Social and Political Education.

Some feedback

One Northern Ireland teacher commented:

“The organisation and running of this project was excellent and both I, as the teacher, and the children in my class benefited enormously from the whole experience. The workbook was a very valuable resource, which the class could use to look at various aspects of emigration and immigration, and which then provided a springboard into further work in certain areas of particular interest to us. In the light of the Revised Curriculum, this is certainly a resource which we will be able to use again and again in the future.

The letter writing was of great value in class, with the class writing for a purpose and thoroughly enjoying the experience. The exchange of letters allowed the children to gain some knowledge of one another before they met, and then encouraged them to look for their own pen pals upon meeting up with the different schools.

The workshops allowed the children to meet children from another school from the North but of a differing religious background. Right from the outset of the first workshop the children mixed and cooperated extremely well (especially when they were trying to find their pen pals).

The highlight of the entire project must certainly have been the Share Village (for both children and staff). As you will be able to see from the photos on our website, all thoroughly enjoyed the time spent there. It was an excellent venue for this meeting.”

A Southern primary teacher wrote:

“Our school were very fortunate to be chosen to participate in this cross border project on migration and multiculturalism. Both teachers and students found the project to be extremely beneficial and very well-organised. The children thoroughly enjoyed the different trips and activities, and they learned lots of new things while having a great time. Not only this, but they also made many new friends with the children from the other schools.

I would be grateful if you could convey our thanks to Marie for her dedication and approachable manner throughout. As previously mentioned, the project was extremely well organised and I know she put enormous work and effort into ensuring that everything ran smoothly.”

A Polish translator who had accompanied a small group of Polish pupils in a Southern primary class to the Ulster American Folk Park wrote:

“All our pupils had a very enjoyable time. For the Polish girls it was a very special time. They had an opportunity to meet new friends and feel just like at home. I think it

was a great idea to organise that type of outing. Because they are children of migrant workers, they need to feel they are not isolated from Irish society and [such an outing] should improve their better settlement in their adopted country. For Irish children it was a great opportunity to share activities and to learn to cooperate with children from another country. So it was beneficial for both. Because children learn about emigration and all issues connected with moving away from home countries, they might develop empathy for emigrants to Ireland and better understand that phenomenon. I would like to say 'very thank you' for the opportunity of taking part in this residential. It was great to feel helpful to this cross-border project. I wish loads of success in the future for this project. A smile on the child's face is priceless!"

Pupils comments on the first year's workshop and 'residential' included: "I thought the workshop was good because you had to use teamwork and helping others"; "today was an amazing experience – thank you"; "today was brilliant – definitely would do it again"; "great because you got to try something you've never done and meet lots of new people"; "thanks for the best day ever"; "thanks for a day from heaven"; "I thoroughly enjoyed the Share Centre because I didn't just get to meet with my friends from Antrim – I got to meet my pen pals from two schools in County Louth as well; "I'll never forget the fun time I had doing the cross border study"; "the cross border studies has changed the way I think of other people and it has left me with lots of happy memories."

Michael Graham, Assistant Advisory Officer of the North Eastern Education and Library Board, who gave advice and support to the project, said: "This project has been a tremendous learning experience for the schools involved. Migration is something that we hear a lot of today, but in reality it has long been a major part of our experience, culture and heritage in these islands. Equipping our young people with such knowledge and understanding is of great benefit in helping them to appreciate such historical development, to know the world they live in now, and to form positive relationships with others from differing backgrounds and cultures. I would wish to commend the hard work and creativity of the project organisers and the schools themselves."

The IERS project will start the 2007-2008 school year with a two day training course for teachers to help them to deal with the sensitive and controversial of issues of racism and sectarianism with their pupils. These will take place on 27-28 September in a hotel in County Antrim, and will have two main aims: to allow teachers to understand their own attitudes to difference based on religion, race and other factors; to upskill teachers so that they can deal with issues of difference and diversity in the classroom.