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## PRESS RELEASE      PRESS RELEASE

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### **‘When equal doesn’t mean the same’**

## **Four Schools Receive Yellow Flag Awards for Diversity Programmes**

**(May 25<sup>th</sup> 2011)** The Yellow Flag Awards – a practical schools based programme and award scheme which recognises a schools work in promoting diversity and inclusion- were held in the New Wood Quay venue, Dublin today and were presented to four schools by former TD and Senator Michael D Higgins.

Hosted by RTÉ 2’s elev8 presenter Diana Bunici, awards were made to two primary and two secondary schools; Aston Village Educate Together, Drogheda, & St. Josephs GNS in Finglas, Dublin and secondary Margaret Aylwards Community College, Dublin and Abbey Community College, Wicklow. The Awards, which are a culmination of a years work for each school, were attended by students, teachers parents and community representatives, and elements of their individual diversity programmes were represented through visual, musical, dance and narrative pieces by pupils from Georgia, the Roma and Traveller Community, Latvia, Nigeria, Ireland, Poland and other communities.

The Yellow Flag Programme provides a practical series of 8 steps that brings issues of interculturalism, equality and diversity into the whole-school programme which schools apply to its day to day running. Working through a cooperation of students, staff, management, parents and wider community groups ensures issues of diversity and equality are not merely seen as "school subjects" but can be understood and taken outside the school setting into everyone's personal lives. On completing the 8 steps and external assessment the school is awarded its "Yellow Flag" and the school can fly its flag with pride. The 8 steps are

1. Intercultural and Anti-Racism Training for Staff and Management
2. Going beyond the School's Walls: Engaging with the Community
3. Establishing a Diversity Committee
4. Conducting an Intercultural Review
5. Formulating an Action Plan for a Diverse School
6. Monitoring and Evaluation and Information Dissemination
7. Curriculum work
8. Production of a diversity code and anti racist policy for the school

Pioneered by the Irish Traveller Movement in 2008 in response to the widely acknowledged changes in the Irish education landscape over a number of years, the Yellow Flag was a practical and innovative solution in the absence of progress in the area of intercultural education at that time. Many similar initiatives were regarded as placing unrealistic expectations on schools and teachers to deliver interculturalism without the necessary supports, the Yellow Flag programme committed to focusing on practical intercultural achievements as well as providing the essential formal and informal framework to the schools themselves.

According to Paula Madden the Yellow Flag Coordinator, *"The Irish Traveller Movement believes there is huge scope for developing the Yellow Flag programme into a mainstream national one, with a long-standing legacy, promoting equality and diversity for all – not just some. We have long believed in the real value of this programme and our piloting stage confirmed those beliefs. Now is the turn of other stakeholders in the education arena to ensure that all pupils throughout Ireland get to experience its remarkable benefits. Today is a testimony to its value and potential."*

Diana Bunici said *“The Yellow Flag initiative is a wonderful programme. We live in a country rich in diversity, and so it’s really important to appreciate and celebrate different cultures. It’s important to encourage our younger generation to immerse themselves into other cultures and embrace diversity, as they are our future and it will be them who determine the attitudes and actions of future generations.”*

Speaking at the Awards Brigid Quilligan, Assistant Director of the Irish Traveller Movement said *“Children thrive in an environment where they feel safe, secure and have a sense of belonging, unfortunately the reality for a lot of children from a minority background is that they do not feel any of those things in school. Sometimes, they are made to feel that to integrate they have to lose all sense of who they are. It is not necessarily done consciously, but under the ethos of 'equal means the same' the Yellow Flag Programme provides steps to support students and teachers to ensure diversity and interculturalism is valued and visible throughout the school.”*

Presenting Flags to each school former TD and long time human rights champion, Michael D Higgins, said; *“The yellow flag awards for intercultural awareness and practice have the potential to have the same impact in time as the green flag awards have had for schools in the environmental area. This is a marvellous initiative by the Irish Traveller Movement, with whom I have been happy to be associated for so many years, they have been and remain pioneers in the best sense of the word in promoting human rights and inclusive citizenship. The yellow flag awards emphasize the central importance of recognising, on equal terms, the dignity and contribution of each person in differing circumstances and with different cultural experiences - they are a marker of respect. These awards have to be earned and I congratulate all of the schools who have made the standard”*

Kathleen Lynch, Minister of State, at the Department of Justice, Equality and Defence with responsibility for Disability, Equality and the Traveller Community could not attend the event but in a statement said *“Education is one of the most important means of combating racism and developing a more inclusive, intercultural society in Ireland. The Yellow Flag programme offers teachers, students and the local community an ideal opportunity to shape and influence how the school works, how the teachers interact with the students and their parents and how students interact with one another and their teachers. The Yellow Flag should be an aspiration for*

*all schools and I look forward to working with the Irish Traveller Movement to make this a reality."*

The Irish Traveller Movement is committed to developing modern models of best practice in order to support genuinely inclusive education in Ireland advocates for an intercultural approach to educating Travellers within the Irish Education system and an approach which respects, recognises, celebrates and caters for diversity.

For further information please contact Jacinta Brack, Public Relations Co-ordinator (01) 679 6577 / 087 27 44 791) [publicrelationsitm@gmail.com](mailto:publicrelationsitm@gmail.com) or Paula Madden Yellow Flag Coordinator on 087 241 0258. **ENDS**

### **Background**

The Irish Traveller Movement (ITM) established in 1990, is a national network of over 80 organisations and individuals working within the Traveller community throughout Ireland and is committed to seeking full equality for Travellers in Irish society.

One part our work comprises initiatives in the area of Traveller Education and specifically an exciting programme pioneered by us titled, the Yellow Flag which promotes diversity within schools in Ireland, please find attached summary document for your interest. Our programme is funded and supported by the philanthropic group - the ONE foundation - and perceived as a progressive social innovative solution.

### **What is the "Yellow Flag" programme?**

The Yellow Flag Programme provides a practical series of 8 steps that brings issues of interculturalism, equality and diversity into the whole-school programme and allows schools to apply them to the day to day running of the school. It works with students, staff, management, parents and wider community groups so that issues of diversity and equality are not merely seen as "school subjects" but can be understood and taken outside the school setting into everyone's personal lives.

In parallel with the Green Schools, the Yellow Flag Diversity in Schools is both a practical programme and an award scheme, therefore; on completing these steps, and being assessed externally, the school is awarded its "Yellow Flag" in recognition

of its work in promoting diversity & inclusion. The award is publicised locally, and the school can fly its flag with pride and use the logo on its official correspondence.

**Steps of the Yellow Flag Programme:**

1. Intercultural and Anti-Racism Training for Staff and Management
2. Going beyond the School's Walls: Engaging with the Community
3. Establishing a Diversity Committee
4. Conducting an Intercultural Review
5. Formulating an Action Plan for a Diverse School
6. Monitoring and Evaluation and Information Dissemination
7. Curriculum work
8. Production of a diversity code and anti racist policy for the school

**Rationale for the Irish Traveller Movement's development of the Yellow Flag programme**

It is widely acknowledged that the Irish education landscape has significantly changed over the last number of years and this has presented schools with many challenges as well as opportunities. Despite there being a commitment at policy level relating to these challenges, practical progress in the area of intercultural education has been slow. Many so-called initiatives remain simply statements of intent and put unrealistic expectations on schools and teachers to deliver interculturalism without the necessary supports.

The ITM is committed to developing modern models of best practice in order to support genuinely inclusive education in Ireland and has therefore developed the Yellow Flag programme which focuses on practical intercultural achievements as well as providing the essential formal and informal framework to the schools themselves. The Irish Traveller Movement believes there is huge scope for developing the Yellow Flag programme into a mainstream national programme, which would have a long-standing legacy, promoting equality and diversity.

**Contact Details:** For more information go to [www.itmtrav.ie/yellowflag](http://www.itmtrav.ie/yellowflag) and or to get involved in supporting the programme to be mainstreamed contact the Irish Traveller Movement at 01-6796577 or email [yellowflagprogramme@gmail.com](mailto:yellowflagprogramme@gmail.com)

## **8 Steps of the Yellow Flag Programme**



### **1. Intercultural and Anti-Racism Training for Staff and Management**

The initial step for a “diverse school” is for staff and management to undergo Anti-Racism and Intercultural Awareness training in order to be equipped with new skills and to be provided with a suitable environment to discuss issues that may arise over the course of the Yellow Flag Programme.

### **2. Going Beyond the School Walls: Engaging with the Community**

Yellow Flag schools will make direct links with local Traveller/ Minority/ Migrant organisations in their area to gain from their expertise and foster new relationships in their community. The Yellow Flag Schools begin to utilise press and other forms of local media to publicise the successes of the school and enable the wider community to recognise their work in promoting interculturalism.

### **3. The Diversity Committee**

The Diversity Committee, to ensure that the programme will meet the needs of everyone, will consist of pupils, teachers, parents, other school staff and management of the school and will meet on a regular basis to drive the project forward.

### **4. Intercultural Review**

Staff and students, working alongside parents and other relevant stakeholders, look to identify the intercultural and diversity issues that exist in the school.

### **5. Action Plan for a Diverse School**

The Diversity Committee, informed by the work of the Intercultural Review, devises an action plan for a specific time-period and sets themselves realistic targets to improve the whole-school environment.

### **6. Monitoring, Evaluation and Information Dissemination**

This ensures that progress towards the self-evaluated, as well as the externally evaluated targets is made.

### **7. Curriculum work**

Classroom study on diversity, covering race and ethnicity will be carried out by all students.

### **8. Diversity Code and Anti-Racism Policy**

After completing all the other steps, the school now produces its Diversity Code. This is developed primarily by the students and states what the school as a whole are trying to achieve on a day-to-day basis. The school also produces an official Anti-Racism Policy to formalise their best practise in the area. Both documents are then publicised widely throughout the school building and included in various school publications.

### **Yellow Flag Award**

On completing these steps, the school will be awarded its "Yellow Flag" in recognition of its work in becoming a school committed to interculturalism.

**ENDS**