



We have solar power: Summerhill NS Green School's Co-ordinator and Assistant Principal Paul Coughlan and engineer Matthias Schmuderer from Solar For Schools Bildung, Munich at Summerhill Primary School. Photo Paul Molloy.

Athlone school first in Ireland to join European Solar project

By Rebekah O'Reilly

Summerhill National School is well on its way to building a greener future after its recent presentation with the Europe Award for Green Schools.

In an event which took place on Wednesday (May 14), students were joined by German Solar for Schools Bildung engineers Mike Marqués and Matthias Schmuderer, who raised the Green Flag to the cheers and celebration of the students.

Matthias and Mike travelled to Ireland as part of the Global Awareness Fund, with Summerhill NS being one of the first schools in Ireland to have been awarded the European grant. A school in Skibbereen, Cork also received a visit from the Solar for Schools engineers during the week as part of the scheme.

Solar for Schools operates out of Munich, Germany, and the technology used in the solar education programme is manufactured in workshops operated under the Roman Catholic Diocese of Munich and Freising and Archbishop Reinhard Marx.

"The project is three years old, and we aim to inspire the new generation about renewable energy, and to teach them that it is something positive," said Matthias.

"We are very happy to extend the scheme outside of Germany. We have worked with over 50 schools across Germany, and these two schools in Athlone and Skibbereen are the first one's outside of Germany, but we hope more people will express their interest. We would love to come back to more schools in Ireland!"

Mike added: "It's hard for people to understand solar energy, because the panels are on top of the building. These projects help them to understand, and we hope to make renewable energy more normal to younger generations."

Summerhill NS Green Schools' Co-ordinator and Assistant Principal Paul Coughlan said they were delighted to be selected for the project.

"Solar for Schools is about trying to promote the use of solar panels and the education of the children about solar panels. I applied for the scheme twice, and we had a video conference and I told them about the school. We have a very large school, and some of the children are from disadvantaged backgrounds, so I thought it would be great for the children to learn. Our children are very interested in hands-on projects.



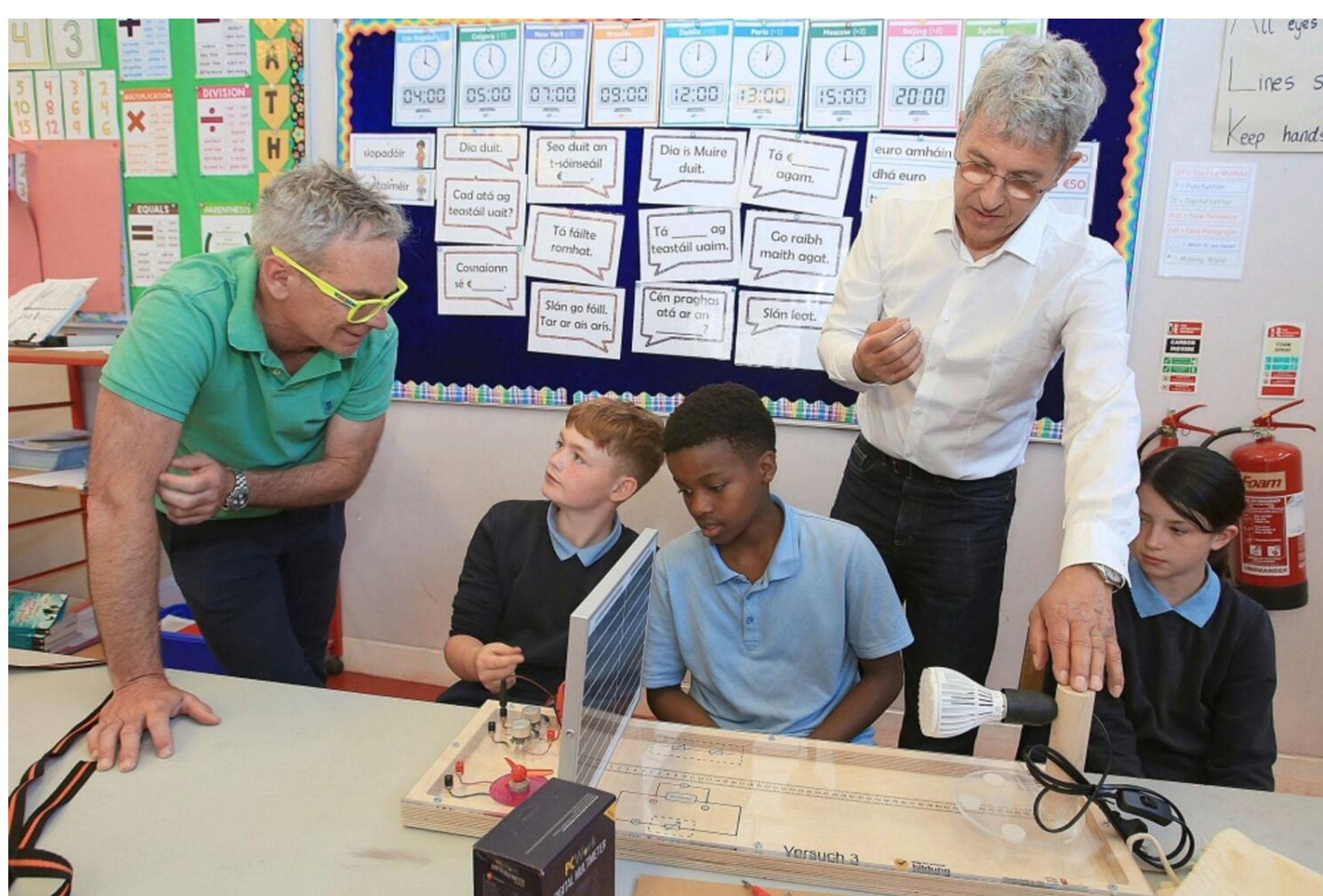
Image 1 of 5 Jia Jia Cui, Peyton Reid, Ciara Woods, Darragh Fuery, Kenzie Shine, Toni Guvo, Adhiroj Bhushan, Eryk Jawilak, Oisin Touhey, Amanda Bajarska with Maura Spillane, Acting Principal, Paul Coughlan, Assistant Principal, Mike Marqués and Matthias Schmuderer from Solar For Schools Bildung, Munich at Summerhill NS. Photo Paul Molloy. PaulMolloy (2024)

"After that, we had a couple of further online conferences, and it was agreed that we would go ahead with the project. The equipment for the projects was sent over from Germany, which involved a lot of logistics.

"Ireland is the first country outside of Germany to receive the scheme, so all of the materials, manuals, and tutorials had to be translated into English, and we then arranged for our two German friends Mattias and Mike to travel over."

As part of the programme, the school was provided with two larger solar panels, and a number of smaller solar experiment kits, which it will keep for future generations of students to continue learning about solar energy.

Over the course of the day, pupils from Mr McManus and Mr Finneran's sixth class took part in three separate experiments which involved learning how to use a PV Module (a solar panel) to power a small fan using solar energy, as well as learning about the efficiency and resistance of the panels, and how halogen bulbs can mimic the light of the sun.



Wednesday afternoon set the perfect scene for further solar activity, as the sun beamed down from the clearest of blue skies onto the yard of Summerhill NS, where students assisted Matthias and Mike in assembling two solar panels.

The staff and students at Summerhill NS shared their gratitude with Matthias and Mike by singing 'Circle of Friends', using the solar panels they assembled to power a keyboard and a microphone for the joyful rendition.

"Getting to this point really was a whole school effort," said Paul. "Without everybody's involvement it wouldn't have come together. We have to thank all the staff and students, and the Green Schools council. It was a new experience for Mike and Matthias as well, and we can't thank them enough."