Raising the Attainment of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Pupils

Guidance for Initial Teacher Education students, trainees and newly qualified teachers

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NATT+
National Association of Teachers of Travellers and other Professionals
Introduction

This document has been written for you as a trainee teacher as, at some point in your career, you will almost certainly have Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) pupils in your school. It is important that you know about these communities because research tells us they are the groups most at risk of underachievement in the education system.

Gypsy, Roma, Traveller groups include the following:

- Gypsies, including Romanies and Romanichals
- Scottish Travellers or Gypsies
- Welsh Gypsies/Kaale
- Roma from Eastern and Central Europe
- Travellers of Irish heritage, Minceir
- Show People (Fairground families)
- Circus families
- New Travellers
- Bargee or Boat families.

Even though many of these communities now have a more settled lifestyle and travel infrequently, their attainment in school remains a matter of concern.
ETHNICITY AND ASCRIPTION

Gypsy, Roma and Travellers of Irish heritage are recognised as racial groups and are entitled to all the rights and protections enjoyed by other minority ethnic groups under legislation. This means that their ethnicities, cultures, languages, religions or beliefs need to have due recognition and acknowledgement.

Some families from these communities choose not to declare their ethnic status to schools and other official bodies for fear of discrimination. They may feel that their ethnicity is no-one else’s business, but schools have a duty to monitor pupil attainment to ensure that no group is disadvantaged and to address inequalities in educational outcomes. Attainment levels for ethnic minority groups are collected in the Annual School Census so that children’s progress can be tracked and any gaps in achievement addressed.

For the purposes of monitoring, in 2003 the Department for Children, Schools and Families identified two ethnic categories relating to these communities;

- Gypsy/Roma (WROM)
- Travellers of Irish Heritage (WIRT).
School Census data shows that attainment levels for most groups have improved but Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils continue to do less well than any other pupils. From the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) onwards, the achievement gap widens steadily up to the end of statutory school age. Given the correct environment and experiences, there is no reason why Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children cannot be equally successful as any other group of pupils. There are many individual pupils from these communities who can, and do, excel at school and achieve national expectations.

**LANGUAGE**

Millions of Gypsy and Roma people speak the Romani language, making it one of the principal minority languages of Europe. Romani is an Indic language, closely related to modern Hindi. There are over a hundred dialects of Romani, (which is a spoken rather than written language) including a hybrid version used by many English Gypsies.

Not everyone realises that many Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children are bilingual or multilingual as most speak English as their main language (the exceptions being European Roma). Those newly arrived to the UK may record their home language as Polish, Slovak or another European language.
Barriers to attainment

RACISM

- Too many Gypsy, Roma, Traveller pupils experience racist abuse and other forms of bullying. Studies\(^1\) have shown that these experiences go some way to explaining poor attendance and under achievement at school.

- Since most Gypsies and Travellers are white\(^2\) their ethnicity is not obvious and deep-seated prejudice towards them may be unashamedly voiced and hostility openly displayed. Some people make openly racist remarks towards these communities due to ignorance.

- As a teacher, it is your professional duty to challenge these attitudes and behaviour and demonstrate the positive values, attitudes and behaviour you expect from children and young people (standard Q2). In addition, you should reflect on your own beliefs and responses.

\(^1\) Derrington and Kendall (2004)
\(^2\) With the exception of Roma
ACCESS AND ATTENDANCE

- Local Authorities have a legal duty to provide education for all school-age children regardless of whether they are living permanently or temporarily in the area. Children from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller families have exactly the same rights as any other pupil in relation to access to school places, even if they do not have a postal address.

- Rules on school attendance are the same for Gypsy, Roma Traveller pupils as they are for all pupils. However, the law recognises that some Gypsy, Roma Traveller parents\(^3\) may be engaged in a trade or business that requires them to travel from place to place and thus prevents their children from attending school. The code “T” can be used in the register to explain such absences.

- Families may reside in a range of accommodation including houses and site provision (either authorised or unauthorised). As there is a lack of authorised sites available for about one fifth of the families residing in trailers (caravans) many are

\(^3\) The term ‘parent’ is used to refer to all those undertaking a parenting role including mothers, fathers, grandparents, other carers, step-parents etc).
forced to park on unauthorised sites. This can place children in situations of risk in terms of eviction, staying safe and being healthy and reduces the chances of access to local schools.

- Some parents prefer not to send their children to settings or school before they reach statutory school age. It may be deemed inappropriate or unsafe for anyone outside the community to be looking after their young children. Parents may need extra reassurance about security of premises, indoors and out.

- Mobility may affect school attendance. The practical demands of a nomadic life-style can be at odds with the routine of regular school attendance. Work can be seasonal and children may have to attend several different schools during the year.

- Pupils who apply for a school place at non-routine entry times may find they do not get a place at the nearest school to where they live. Some parents may not have transport which can impact on attendance.

- In the case of highly mobile families the cost of renewing school uniform may be a barrier to attendance.
All children can be registered at more than one school. This is known as ‘dual registration’. The ‘base’ school is the school that the child most recently attended during the preceding 18 months.

**SOCIAL EXCLUSION**

- Gypsy, Roma and Traveller families may live or travel in small, well-established, extended family groups and their children may be entering a setting where, for the first time, most of the adults they encounter are not family members or other Travellers. They may feel unsafe or unhappy at school which could lead pupils to provoke their own exclusion from school. It’s always a good idea to nip problems in the bud by building supportive relationships with children and young people and communicating directly with parents if any issues arise (standard Q4).

- A home visit can help to establish a trusting relationship and is usually easily arranged by contacting parents directly or with the help of a relevant local authority contact. Demonstrating a commitment to collaboration and cooperative working with colleagues and parents can help you to establish trusting relationships (standard Q6).
Pupils may need support to settle in. Effective admission and induction procedures should be in place to make pupils feel welcome and included so that they can begin to achieve. In addition, you may also wish to appoint a buddy and explain routines and expectations.

As part of the induction process, you will need to ensure that colleagues working with the children are appropriately involved in supporting learning and understand the roles they are expected to fulfil (standard Q33).

Induction should address social as well as academic needs. Pupils should access the mainstream curriculum and take part in age-related learning even if their literacy skills are below those of their peers because of interrupted schooling.

The possibility of previous negative school experiences means that it is essential to make your classroom environment positive and affirming. This includes being aware of your own language and non-verbal communication when interacting with children.

Various developmental, social, religious, ethnic, cultural and linguistic influences affect how children and young people
develop (standard Q18). Use of appropriate resources and displays that reflect the cultures of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities can help challenge the myths surrounding them and serve to promote community cohesion. An inclusive curriculum prepares all pupils for life in a diverse society.

- Some Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils may experience conflicting expectations between home and school. Secondary age pupils may perceive school to be a limiting environment compared to home, where they are treated as adults from puberty. The drop-out rate in KS3-4 is high and particular attention needs to be paid to raising aspirations and offering flexible responses to vocational options.

- Enabling pupils to feel secure in acknowledging and celebrating their personal and family identity is inextricably linked to self-esteem and a sense of belonging. Social, Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL) is helpful in developing an inclusive school culture that welcomes pupils new to the school and helps them to grow safely and become confident learners.
Learning and Teaching

Appropriate conditions for learning are the responsibility of everyone at the school.

- All pupils perform at their best in an environment that positively reflects and promotes their culture and lifestyle. The curriculum and the resources in your classroom should be mapped and audited to reflect this; you should use a range of teaching strategies and resources, that take practical account of diversity and promote equality and inclusion (standard Q25(a)).

- An enabling environment is inclusive and celebratory of Gypsy, Roma, Traveller cultures and instils pride in Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people and their heritage, as well as teaching all children about the world around them.

- Gypsy, Roma, Traveller History Month, celebrated in June, is an ideal opportunity to initially showcase and embed Gypsy, Roma, Traveller culture into the curriculum.

- Gypsy, Roma, Traveller children are often used to spending time and playing outdoors. For young children, the indoor
environment may be overwhelming and it will take time to get used to the rooms and space within a setting. It is vital to find out what they are used to and you should seek to establish a purposeful and safe learning environment conducive to learning (standard Q30).

- High expectations, good quality teaching, effective assessment and targeted intervention all provide the means to improve the performance and attainment of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils.

- Crucial to closing the existing attainment gap is recognising that each pupil has a distinctive knowledge base, skill set and individual aptitudes and aspirations. As good teachers, we must take account of these areas and use a range of teaching and learning strategies, including personalised learning (standard Q10).

- Where families have predictable patterns of travelling and dual registration is not possible then school-based ‘distance learning’ should be considered an extension of personalised learning. This allows pupils to travel and continue learning, maintaining interaction between teacher and their peers in school.
In order to provide continuity while travelling, families find it easier to have one point of contact in the school. If you are a secondary teacher it will be important for you to know who is responsible for coordinating this work in your school.

Pupils with interrupted learning may find their peers have had more opportunities to develop their key skills, especially reading. They may appear de-motivated and feel self-conscious and embarrassed about their low achievement and cover this up with coping strategies like non-participation, distraction, or over confidence.

Interrupted learning or lack of schooling should not be confused with special educational needs (SEN). Sometimes pupils will need to re-learn basic reading skills and sensitivity should be shown when engaging pupils. Some will need more support than others to settle into class.

In order to identify gaps in learning, it may be necessary to spend time talking to pupils and their parents about interests and experiences. Communicating with previous schools and/or relevant local authority contacts will provide further information.
大多数儿童通过参与和互动学习。支持学生的良好策略包括提供 scaffolding，确保活动有明确的成果，并提供根据年龄和适当的学习风格适当区隔的任务，相关于各种学习风格。

你可能需要提供适当的学习条件来完成学校的作业，如果在家里不可能完成，因为有限的空间和联系 ICT。这样做时，你应该确保作业与当前的学习相关，适合学生的年龄和能力，并帮助学生取得进步（标准 Q24）。

对于罗曼学生，收集有关他们的英语语言发展和知识及在其他语言中的能力的信息将是有必要的，以便你能够做出有效的个性化安排，为那些你所教授的学生（标准 Q19）。有关有效实践的例子，支持学生发展英语作为第二语言的参考材料，请参阅国家指导（DCSF, 2007a）。

Partnership

It is known that effective partnership between home and school impacts positively on pupil attainment. In schools where Gypsy Roma and Traveller pupils achieve well, this seems to be a particularly significant and consistent characteristic.

All parents have a vital role to play in the education of their children. Apart from the fact that the parent is the child’s first and most influential educator, parents have a unique knowledge and understanding of their child and their involvement has a significant effect on educational achievement at all stages of schooling (DCSF, 2007b).

The support that parents are able to give to their child’s cognitive and social development is an essential resource. Of equal importance is the fact that parents’ values about education, the way they relate to staff and the level of trust they place in the school will all be communicated to their child.

- You may feel you have more success in developing relationships with some parents than others, particularly if they do not have the confidence and trust to engage in the kind of home-school partnership that you and other parents
take for granted. The key to effective home-school partnership is the quality and frequency of communication with parents (standard Q10). This may take some time to develop.

- The first meeting inevitably sets the tone and influences how the partnership develops. Gypsy, Roma, Traveller adults may have experienced a lifetime of being judged and discriminated against (including during their own school days) and will appreciate teachers who greet them in a way that conveys honesty, genuine warmth, respect and understanding.

- By talking openly with parents, reassuring them and explaining school expectations in a way that demonstrates your shared concern for the welfare and progress of their child, you can begin to establish a working relationship which often brings with it a strong sense of loyalty and respect.

- Some parents may have concerns about participation in school trips and off-site education. Try to be flexible and take time to talk and reassure parents to allay fears.
Sex education may also be an issue for some parents and should be discussed prior to teaching.

It can be tempting to make assumptions about the motives for the behaviour of some parents. If they seem distant and only make contact with teachers when they have a complaint or problem it may be because they feel uncomfortable in the school environment. Ignoring letters or written invitations to discuss their child’s progress could be misinterpreted as a lack of interest, when literacy may be the underlying issue.

Parents that take children out of school without giving notice may be considered to be uncooperative, when circumstances might be beyond the family’s control. Stopping to consider these actions from the perspective of the parent, may help us to develop a sensitive response and foster a positive partnership from the outset.

Some parents might welcome the opportunity to learn alongside their children and spend time in the classroom.

\footnote{A reluctance to mix with other parents at the school gate or social function may be interpreted by others as stand-offish behaviour but may say more about the quality of community cohesion in the local area.}
• Involvement in the classroom is important for partnership as it is not uncommon for Gypsy, Roma, Traveller parents to worry about their children losing their cultural identity through the process of schooling.

• Bearing in mind that some Gypsy, Roma, Traveller adults will have had interrupted schooling, they may experience difficulty with literacy. It is important to think very carefully about the ways in which you share information such as reports, permission requests, positive feedback and concerns. Even verbal forms of communication can be intimidating if you use jargon or acronyms.

The longstanding record of poor educational outcomes for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils is due to a complexity of reasons and will only be reversed with a concerted effort by schools, parents and the children/young people themselves.

Individual teachers can and do make a difference. As you embark on your career, remember that your contribution is essential in helping to address this challenge as EVERY child really does matter.
REFERENCES


Resources and further information

*Moving Forward Together: Raising Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Achievement* (DCSF, 2009)

This resource is part of the DCSF National Strategy (Narrowing the Gap) for primary and secondary schools. The materials consist of four interrelated booklets, each containing essential background information, illustrative case studies and points for reflection. Booklet 3 (Learning and Teaching) is particularly helpful for trainees and NQTs as it provides practical guidance on establishing good practice in the classroom. Booklets 1 and 4 provide very useful contextual information to enhance your understanding of cultural and social issues.

Four guidance booklets are available to download from:

http://nationalstrategies.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/search/inclusion/results/nav:45991
Building Futures: Developing trust – A focus on provision for children from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller backgrounds in the Early Years Foundation Stage (DCSF, 2009)

This resource is part of the DCSF National Strategy (Narrowing the Gap) for Early Years Foundation Stage settings. The materials consist of a DVD-ROM and EYFS guidance booklet in which the EYFS principles are used as a framework to help you evaluate your practice in relation to Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils. The guidance also contains helpful case studies to promote reflection. Available to download from: http://nationalstrategies.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/node/235051

Improving Outcomes for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils: A Literature Review (DCSF, 2009)

This literature review covers research conducted in the past ten years on Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils’ experiences and perspectives, parental beliefs, values and expectations, teacher expectations and attitudes, relationships, levels of engagement, attainment and effective practice. The review can be accessed by clicking on the following link:

**Improving Educational Outcomes for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Pupils: What works?** (DCSF, 2009)

This interim report is based on data from 20 case study schools. The data is analysed thematically to identify constructive conditions that may help to raise a range of educational outcomes for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils. The analysis also draws attention to important contextual influences which can either support or obstruct the raising of outcomes for these groups of pupils. Available to download from:


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**Raising the Achievement of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils** (DCSF, 2008)

This booklet and accompanying DVD contains case studies featuring good practice in supporting the learning of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils in three very different primary schools. Each case study focuses on a different aspect of good practice: Available to download from:

http://nationalstrategies.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/node/97237

DVD reference 00102-2008DVD-EN can be ordered from www.teachernet.gov.uk/publications
The Inclusion of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Children and Young People.

Guidance from the DCSF and strategies for building confidence in voluntary self-declared ethnicity ascription.

Available to download from:
http://publications.teachernet.gov.uk/eOrderingDownload/Inclusion%20of%20Gypsy%20Roma.pdf

Attendance Advice: Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Children

This short booklet published by the DCSF in 2008 contains advice and information for teachers, schools, Local Authorities and parents/carers of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children. The advice clearly sets out the legal requirements in relation to registration and attendance of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils, explains the use of the T code in registers, and provides examples of good practice for schools and local authorities. Available to download from:
http://nationalstrategies.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/node/152135
KEY WEBSITES

The following websites contain links to a wide range of other useful sources.

**DCSF Standards Site**

http://nationalstrategies.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/search/inclusion/results/nav:45991

This section of the DCSF Standards Ethnic Minority website contains useful resources and case studies on Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils’ achievement.

Resources include:
- Frequently asked questions regarding Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils’ achievement
- Gypsy, Roma and Traveller resources for schools
- Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Achievement Project, including case studies

**Multiverse Website**

www.multiverse.ac.uk

This website is aimed at supporting trainee and new teachers in all aspects of diversity. There is a dedicated strand providing support and resources for the education of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children. This strand provides links to all key resources as well as training materials and scenarios experienced by trainees.

Scenarios can be accessed directly from the following links.

http://www.multiverse.ac.uk/ViewArticle2.aspx?Keywo
http://www.multiverse.ac.uk/ViewArticle2.aspx?
Keyword=Traveller&SearchOption=Phrase&SearchType=Keyword&Refine
Expand=1&ContentId=15670
http://www.multiverse.ac.uk/ViewArticle2.aspx?
ContentType=2&menu=29795&ContentId=15671

NATT+
National Association of Teachers of Travellers and other Professionals
http://www.natt.org.uk

This website contains an e-shop facility containing a wealth of resources for EYFS, primary and secondary schools. This comprehensive collection of books, work packs, toys, DVDs and CD-ROMs, posters aims to challenge stereotypes and promote positive images of Gypsies, Roma and other Travellers. The website also contains a contact directory for Traveller Education Support teams throughout the UK.