

## Gypsy & Traveller Education

Improving educational outcomes for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils has been a focus of research and policy for some time and is particularly important for secondary age pupils. Where Gypsy and Traveller pupils do transfer successfully to secondary school, their attendance is unlikely to continue beyond the age of 14 (DfES 2006a; Derrington and Kendall, 2004).

Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils are reported to be amongst the lowest achieving ethnic groups within schools in England, are more likely to be identified as having special educational needs (SEN), and are four times more likely than any other group to be excluded from school as a result of their behaviour (DfES, 2005; DCSF, 2009a).

The national data shows a steady and disproportionate decline in the progression of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils from one year group to the next throughout Key Stages 3 and 4:

Year group	% of all Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils	% non Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils
Year 6	100	100
Year 7	79.5	96.4
Year 8	73.4	95.7
Year 9	63.6	93.9
Year 10	61.0	94.2
Year 11	50.9	92.4
<i>Base (n)</i>	<i>1389</i>	<i>606368</i>

National Pupil Database, 2008

Not all families will ascribe their ethnicity. Those unhappy with a school or fearful of discrimination within the wider community may not state their ethnicity. Mobile Travellers do not always participate in national tests or complete year 11. Therefore, the reality of low attainment is likely to be worse than the published statistics suggest.

### Barriers to education

Equalities & Human Rights Commission (2009) identified strong common themes in relation to the barriers encountered by Gypsy and Traveller pupils. These include:

- enforced mobility and interrupted learning, consistent experiences of racist harassment and bullying, excessive exclusions linked to these experiences and to inadequate school responses
- lack of validation of Gypsy and Traveller culture in schools
- limited relevance of the curriculum for some pupils
- cultural barriers that children have to negotiate between home and school
- teachers' low expectations
- the impact of national targets on schools' readiness to admit Travellers

Parental literacy skills and the cultural expectations within the travelling communities can be a barrier to young people engaging in education. For example, the domestic and caring expectations for girls, and for boys, starting work and cultural attributes unconnected with traditional educational achievement may be more important.

## **Gypsy & Traveller education good practice**

In 2010, Research Report DFE-RR043 reported on the findings of a thorough research study on improving the outcomes for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils. Commissioned by one administration and published under the next, it does not appear to be adopted by government but does provide an excellent, if weighty, appraisal of the best ways to improve outcomes. It can be downloaded at [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/181669/DFE-RR043.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/181669/DFE-RR043.pdf)

Using advice in the report and our own learning, the following is a set of sequential steps to improve Gypsy & Traveller children's experience, retention and attainment in school. Each point builds upon the previous:

### **Leadership**

Is your Head Teacher on board? Leadership is critical. If your Head is on board and willing to share a leadership message that racism against Gypsies and Irish Travellers is unacceptable (as it would be toward any other ethnic or other minority group in the school) and that Gypsies and Irish Travellers are welcome in the school as are all other groups, then you have a good starting point. Providing your senior management team and the rest of the staff team with cultural awareness training is the next step.

### **Staff Cultural Awareness Training**

Give staff training to address lack of knowledge about Gypsies & Travellers and provide positive stories to balance negative media stories. Teachers need to be able to challenge and lead constructive discussions around racism including toward Gypsies & Irish Travellers. In order to do that, you need to train your teachers and address their issues so that they can be confident to do this. In reality, anti-Traveller prejudice is well embedded at all levels of society and it would be unfair to put your staff into the situation of delivering a training programme which they may not agree with or feel confident in.

### **Anti-bullying policies**

Ensure that anti-bullying policies and strategies specifically refer to Gypsies & Travellers. This provides a secure framework for addressing bullying which may not otherwise be recognised as racist bullying.

### **Positive promotion of culture**

Celebrate Gypsy, Roma, Traveller History Month in June.

Encourage Gypsy or Traveller parents to talk to assemblies/classes about their culture (alongside parents from other cultures).

### **Tools to challenge Racism**

Show Racism the Red Card "Out of Site" Education Pack.

<http://www.srtrc.org/uploaded/out%20of%20site%20PRINT%20rev2.pdf>

Put on events such as the Crystal's Vardo play <http://www.gypsy-traveller.org/what-we-do/crystals-vardo/>

Include Porajmos in Holocaust teaching <http://hmd.org.uk/genocides/porrajmos>