

# Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Boys Strategies for Success in School

Guidance for Schools



[www.milton-keynes.gov.uk/emass](http://www.milton-keynes.gov.uk/emass)

# Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Boys – Strategies for Success in School

The Milton Keynes Ethnic Minority Achievement Support Service has produced this document for the purpose of helping schools better understand specific issues facing Gypsy, Roma and Traveller boys attending school. We hope that through improved understanding, new ideas and approaches may be adopted in order to help these boys adjust to school life and achieve their full potential.



Experience	Implications for Schools	Suggested Strategies for promoting good behaviour
<p><b>Highly mobile Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils may be introduced to a class during term-time.</b></p> <p><b>Pupils from an authorised site often have limited contact with their peers from the site when they are in school.</b></p>	<p>Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils may feel isolated from their peers.</p> <p>Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils may stick together on the playground. This may be viewed as intimidating, or as an inability to interact with children from diverse backgrounds, when it may be no more than a form of peer support.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adopt a 'buddy' system for each new Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupil to ensure they assimilate as quickly as possible.</li> <li>• Monitor friendships to avoid isolation from peers.</li> <li>• Establish a sanctuary area where pupils worried about bullying, harassment, or who are overwhelmed by school pressures, can retreat.</li> <li>• Identify a key adult within school for the family and the child to approach with any problems or misunderstandings.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Gypsy, Roma and Traveller parents may have experienced prejudice and hostility from the settled community during their own schooling, and may have ambivalent feelings about education and school.</b></p>	<p>Parents may find it hard to trust members of staff or other adults from the settled community. Pupils could be aware of this barrier and find it hard to confide in school staff.</p> <p>On rare occasions parents may encourage their children to deal with any issues themselves, rather than rely on the school system, and may give the advice, <i>'If another child hits you, you hit him back.'</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Remember that first impressions count. Administration and non-teaching staff play an important role in ensuring a family feel welcome and valued.</li> <li>• Take the initiative to maintain contact with Gypsy, Roma and Traveller parents. Meet parents at the end of the day for a 'casual' chat as often as possible. Share the positive aspects of the school day.</li> <li>• Gypsy, Roma and Traveller parents are as anxious as any parent that their child is happy and making good progress in school. Do not misinterpret any lack of interaction as a lack of care or interest.</li> <li>• Be aware of prejudice and name-calling ("gyppo" and "pikey" are the most common epithets) and deal with any occurrence as a racist incident.</li> <li>• Encourage parents to become involved in different areas of school life, such as governor, class helper or lunchtime supervisor.</li> <li>• Ensure midday staff have an understanding of these issues, and of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller culture. Arrange for the EMASS to carry out an informal training session.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Extended family plays an important and integral role in Gypsy, Roma and Traveller life. Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children spend a lot of time in adult company and are comfortable conversing with adults as equals.</b></p>	<p>Pupils may seem over-familiar and perhaps disrespectful when interacting with staff members.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do not presume the pupils are being disrespectful if they are outspoken with adults.</li> <li>• Speak to the children in a concise, adult manner. A condescending or belittling approach is likely to have the opposite effect of what is intended.</li> <li>• Ensure the pupils understand what language and methods of communication are and are not acceptable in school.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Bare-knuckle boxing is a source of legend and admiration within some Travelling communities, and matches continue today. From an early age, Gypsy, Roma and Traveller boys may be exposed to sports involving violent aggression.</b></p>	<p>Pupils may try to emulate what they have seen and what is respected within their culture.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School expectations should be clearly explained to Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils</li> <li>• Value this element of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller culture by allowing the pupils to share their knowledge of the subject. Encourage 'project' work and parental involvement.</li> <li>• Encourage 'letting off steam' through physical activities such as midday or out-of-school sports clubs.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Corporal punishment as a means of discipline at home is not uncommon. Some Gypsy, Roma and Traveller boys are used to being 'smacked' for poor behaviour.</b></p>	<p>Pupils may at first be unresponsive to sanctions within school.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure time is taken to explain the Behaviour Policy to both parents and pupils</li> <li>• Discipline measures should be firm, fair and above all consistent; changing strategies too quickly may send the wrong message.</li> </ul>

## What Next?

Consider your relationships with Gypsy, Roma and Traveller families and take time to reflect upon the following questions:

How well does your school understand Gypsy, Roma and Traveller culture and lifestyles?

Are you confident that your Behaviour Policy is consistent and yet flexible enough to respond fairly to the sort of situations mentioned previously?

How would you respond to Gypsy, Roma and Traveller parents who may be suspicious of and perhaps hostile towards school?

How do you celebrate diversity within your school and in what ways is Gypsy, Roma and Traveller culture part of the curriculum?

Can you think of displays or other projects that could help in this way?

## What Headteachers say...

*"Adopting a flexible approach has benefited the child a great deal. We have modified the daily timetable to make it more manageable for him and practice a range of anger management strategies. Close liaison with his mother and EMASS has enabled us to jointly agree and carry out support strategies to promote positive behaviour."*

Kents Hill First School

*"Using support from EMASS we have started to develop a greater trust between school and home. Mum now supports her child in school and at home and feels much more comfortable to come into school. As a school, we are much more aware of Gypsy Roma Traveller culture and have made modifications to our timetable and behaviour policy to reflect this."*

Orchard School

*"As a school we have made an effort to reflect Gypsy Roma and Traveller culture within the curriculum and have found our efforts to be beneficial. We also have a display board and each term, together with the support of EMASS, the children have produced the most wonderful displays promoting the many aspects of Gypsy Roma and Traveller life."*

Queen Eleanor Primary School

For further information on any Gypsy, Roma and Traveller-related topic contact Milton Keynes Ethnic Minority Achievement Support Service (EMASS).

Prepared by the EMASS with assistance from the Milton Keynes Primary Behaviour Support Service.

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Available in audio, large print, braille and other languages

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