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Gypsy, Roma and Traveller experiences in Secondary Education: Issues, barriers and recommendations

About the Traveller Movement

The Traveller Movement is a registered UK charity promoting inclusion and community engagement with Gypsies, Roma and Travellers. The Traveller Movement seeks to empower and support Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities to advocate for the full implementation of their human rights.

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Foreword

This timely report from the Traveller Movement sheds a troubling light on the shocking educational experiences of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller school pupils.

A mountain of evidence already exists that suggests Gypsies, Roma and Travellers experience some of the worst educational outcomes of all ethnic groups, and across all social indicators. Their children are four times more likely to be excluded from school, and are the least likely to achieve any formal qualifications. In the 2017/2018 school year, the highest permanent exclusion rates were among Gypsy and Roma pupils (0.36%, or 36 exclusions per 10,000 pupils) and Traveller of Irish Heritage pupils (0.29%, or 29 per 10,000 pupils).

The statistics are shocking, though sadly all too familiar, yet it has been hard to gain insights into why this is happening. This report is useful as it examines the issues and barriers for pupils, and provides some context to the statistics.

The report illustrates how high levels of unaddressed racist bullying damages pupils' educational experiences and negatively impacts their sense of belonging, particularly when there are no positive representations of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller histories and cultures within the school curriculum. Some schools have embedded punitive school policies which disproportionately affect Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils, and fail to take account of how the individual circumstances of pupils impact their school experience and outcomes.

Addressing the bullying, exclusions and damaging admissions policies that disproportionately affect Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils must therefore be a priority. Schools must have policies in place that properly protect these children from discrimination and prejudice. Gypsy, Roma and Traveller history must have its place in the school curriculum - teaching pupils about Gypsy, Roma and Traveller history and culture will go some way to addressing their sense of belonging.

Gypsy, Roma and Traveller parents can often feel helpless and stigmatised in the face of the challenges their children experience at school. They're desperate for their children to do well, but they need the support of schools, accessible information and a welcoming attitude that recognises them as partners in their children's education. I hope teachers, school leaders, local authorities and the Department for Education will take heed of this important report, and work to bring about changes we need to ensure Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children can access the rich, rewarding and inclusive educational experience to which every child is entitled.



Kate Green MP
Shadow Education Secretary
and member of the All Party
Parliamentary Group for
Gypsies, Travellers and Roma

“Gypsies, Roma and Travellers experience some of the worst educational outcomes of all ethnic groups, and across all social indicators. Their children are four times more likely to be excluded from school, and are the least likely to achieve any formal qualifications.”

Executive summary

Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils report high levels of bullying, based on their ethnicity that largely goes unaddressed in schools¹. This damages their educational experiences and negatively impacts their sense of belonging in schools, particularly when there are no positive representations of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller histories and cultures within the school curriculum.

Punitive school policies disproportionately affects Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils who have the highest rates of temporary and permanent exclusions. Zero tolerance policies that are becoming prevalent, fail to take into consideration the individual circumstances of pupils, which impacts their school experience and outcomes.

For pupils from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller backgrounds there is a lack of clear and easily accessible routes back into education for pupils who do not have formal qualifications due to early school leaving. Furthermore, there is a gap in services for pupils aged 14-16 who find that traditional academic qualifications are not a suitable fit and there are limited opportunities for vocational qualifications, increasing the risk of drop out for these pupils. Many parents are not given the right information and guidance from schools and local authorities when it comes to their educational rights and responsibilities, particularly around elective home education, and this information is not always easily accessible to those with lower levels of literacy.

1 <https://travellermovement.org.uk/education?download=170:2020-barriers-in-education-for-young-travellers-in-london>

Recommendations



Schools need to implement **strong anti-racist bullying policies** and adhere to their public sector equality duty. Schools and the Department for Education should **adopt the term anti-Gypsyism** to better define and understand the specific racism faced by Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people.



Introduction of **Gypsy, Roma and Traveller histories and cultures** into the school curriculum.



More funding should be made available for organisations to take on casework. **Clearer information and guidance** should be made available for parents with lower levels of literacy.



Local Authorities should be given **oversight of school behaviour policies** for all schools and academies in their area, and they should ensure that policies are equality impact assessed.



Funding should be set aside for 14-16 and 19-25 provision where a gap in services currently exists. There should be easy access and designated routes back into education for those with little or no qualifications.



Legal aid should be made available for exclusions, bullying and admissions.



Introduction

There are a range of issues and barriers facing Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils in Secondary Education. This paper will give a brief overview of current research and five key issues, which have arisen as a result of the Traveller Movement's (TM) education and advocacy project.

TM's good practice guide research² suggests improvements to Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupil attainment require time, flexibility, financial and social investment, and a commitment to equality and inclusion.

According to TM's education casework, the key presenting issues are racist bullying, punitive behaviour policies, poor sense of belonging, information and guidance, and access routes back into education. Following each issue and case study, a number of recommendations have been put forward to improve the experiences and subsequently the outcomes of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children.

It is hoped that these recommendations can influence policy at multiple levels, not only policies put forward by the Department for Education (DfE) but also changes to internal school policies.

Statistical Data

Whilst Romany Gypsies, Roma and Irish Travellers are three distinct ethnic groups, the way in which they are grouped within school data means that there is some confusion. At present, data is gathered under two subgroups; Traveller of Irish Heritage and Gypsy/Roma. The grouping of Gypsy and Roma further misrepresents issues as many Roma will speak English as an additional language and will face a range of different challenges. Furthermore, it should be recognised that not everyone will disclose their ethnicity due to fear of discrimination and figures are always likely to be underestimates and often distorted.

School Exclusion

Government figures show that year on year, Gypsy and Irish Traveller pupils have the highest rate of school exclusion, permanent and fixed period, among all ethnic groups. In the 2017 to 2018 school year, the highest permanent exclusion rates were among Gypsy and Roma pupils (0.36%, or 36 exclusions per 10,000 pupils) and Traveller of Irish Heritage pupils (0.29%, or 29 per 10,000 pupils).³ Temporary exclusion rates were 17.42%, or 1,742 exclusions per 10,000 pupils for Traveller of Irish Heritage pupils and 16.52%, or 1,652 per 10,000 pupils for Gypsy and Roma pupils. A report by the Children's Commissioner in 2012 highlighted the fact that Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children are four times more likely to be excluded from school than the wider school population.⁴ The research also found that 100% of appeals against the exclusions were successful though the Children's Commissioner highlighted that the reasons for this are unknown and further research needs to be done to understand why their appeals are so successful given their exclusion rates are high.

² <https://travellermovement.org.uk/education?download=122:april-2019-a-good-practice-guide-for-improving-outcomes-for-gypsy-roma-and-traveller-children-in-education>

³ <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/education-skills-and-training/absence-and-exclusions/pupil-exclusions/latest>

⁴ <https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/They-never-give-up-on-you-final-report.pdf>

Achievement

Pupils from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller backgrounds had the lowest attainment of all ethnic groups throughout their school years. At Early Years only 36% of Gypsy and Roma pupils, and 39% for Traveller of Irish Heritage pupils achieved a good level of development. At Key Stage 4 the disparity is greater; the Attainment 8 score which is the average points scored for attainment in 8 GCSEs including English and Maths, was only 18.2 points for Gypsy and Roma pupils, and 21.9 for Traveller of Irish Heritage pupils compared to the average of 46.5 points. These figures have been taken from the latest government data made available.⁵

Further and Higher Education

Pupils from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller backgrounds are also less likely to stay in education after the age of sixteen compared to pupils in any other ethnic group, with just 73% of Irish Traveller pupils and 66% of Gypsy and Roma pupils staying on in 2016/17 (The latest figures made available).⁶ In 2014, only 3 to 4% of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people aged 18 to 30 accessed higher education, compared to 43% of the same age group in the general population.⁷ However, it is worth restating here that these figures relate to the pupils who manage to successfully remain in secondary education up until the age of sixteen – many do not make it this far so the true figures may be much less favourable.

Economic Inactivity

Gypsies and Irish Travellers have the highest percentage of people with no formal qualifications at 60% compared with 23% for the general population,⁸ whilst youth unemployment and economic inactivity was the highest of any ethnic group.⁹ Only 30% of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller young people are pupils, the lowest proportion for any ethnic group.¹⁰ Gypsies and Travellers also have the lowest rate of economic activity, at 47%.¹¹

The Office for National Statistics states that: *'The most common reason for Gypsy or Irish Travellers being economically inactive was looking after the home or family at 27 per cent. This is higher than for all usual residents aged 16 and over in England and Wales at 11 per cent'*.¹² Furthermore, Gypsies and Irish Travellers were the ethnic groups with the lowest proportion of people who described their general health as good or very good - 70% compared to 81% of the general population.¹³

This data gives us a partial understanding of education in relation to Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people. However, it does not allow us to understand the reasons behind the figures. The following sections look at a range of issues and challenges, providing context to some of the figures.

5 <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/education-skills-and-training/11-to-16-years-old/gcse-results-attainment-8-for-children-aged-14-to-16-key-stage-4/latest#by-ethnicity>

6 <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/education-skills-and-training/after-education/destinations-of-school-pupils-after-key-stage-4-usually-aged-16-years/latest#by-ethnicity>

7 https://www.cfey.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/KINGWIDE_28494_proof3.pdf

8 <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/ethnicity/articles/whatdoesthe2011censustellusaboutthecharacteristicsofgypsyoririshtravellersinenglandandwales/2014-01-21#qualifications>

9 <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/ethnicity/articles/whatdoesthe2011censustellusaboutthecharacteristicsofgypsyoririshtravellersinenglandandwales/2014-01-21#qualifications>

10 <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/ethnicity/articles/whatdoesthe2011censustellusaboutthecharacteristicsofgypsyoririshtravellersinenglandandwales/2014-01-21#qualifications>

11 https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmwomeq/360/report-files/36005.htm#_idTextAnchor012

12 https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmwomeq/360/report-files/36005.htm#_idTextAnchor012

13 <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/ethnicity/articles/whatdoesthe2011censustellusaboutthecharacteristicsofgypsyoririshtravellersinenglandandwales/2014-01-21#qualifications>

A photograph of a classroom. In the foreground, the back of a student's head with long blonde hair is visible. To the left, another student's hand is raised, pointing towards the front of the room. In the background, a teacher in a light purple shirt and dark tie stands at the front of the class, gesturing. The room is filled with wooden desks and chairs.

Many schools are failing to not only record incidents of bullying as anti-Gypsyism but also fail to address them

Racist Bullying

The Traveller Movement's research (2019) found that 40% of young Gypsies and Travellers in London had experienced bullying¹⁴. Of these, 67% reported experiencing bullying from teachers that they felt was directly linked to their ethnicity. There was a clear gender divide, with a higher percentage of girls reporting to have experienced bullying. It was a contributory factor in early school leaving of 45% girls and 29% of boys.

Case Study

A mother contacted the Traveller Movement to ask for advice after her daughters were attacked in school by another pupil, following months of bullying. The mother was very concerned about the safety of her daughters and expressed worry about how the school would ensure that the bullying would be stopped. An education support worker from the borough suggested that if she was unwilling to send her daughters back to the school, elective home education may be the best way forward. This worker supported the mother to write a letter to the school informing them that the girls were to be taken off roll.



When the mother contacted TM it was to ask advice about how she could best access a tutor and resources to allow her daughters to continue with their education. The project worker clarified what elective home education means and gave information about accessing tutors and resources. After considering how EHE would affect their education, the family felt that remaining in school would be better for the girls - provided the school could guarantee their safety or that a place would be found in another school. TM wrote a letter to be sent to the school requesting that the girls remain on school roll and that the school deal adequately with the attack.

The girls returned to the school to attend a meeting with the other party involved in the attack. Following this meeting the two girls are now back in school and the mother is assured that her daughters are safe.

Many schools are failing to not only record incidents of bullying as anti-Gypsyism but also fail to address them, instead telling Traveller pupils to ignore bullies or say that pupils shouldn't get upset. There are numerous cases where schools remove Traveller children from the school roll, or place them on a part-time timetable, because of a desire to resolve conflict or cater to everyone's best interests. In fact, Traveller children most likely require more support from schools, as opposed to reduced support. In other cases, the school's failure to tackle bullying means that the child takes matters into their own hands, physically retaliating, and then being permanently excluded.

Implement clear policies – Schools should ensure that they have clear anti-bullying, racism and discrimination policies like those recommended by the anti-Bullying Alliance¹⁵. This will allow for a clear framework to guide teachers and ensure that parents and pupils know the processes. Schools should also ensure that they are monitoring trends in bullying reports and acting upon them accordingly.

Adopt the term anti-Gypsyism – The DfE should formally adopt the term anti-Gypsyism. Anti-Gypsyism is recognised as *“a specific racism towards Roma, Sinti, Travellers and others who are stigmatized as ‘Gypsies’ in the public imagination”*¹⁶ and by the Council of Europe as *“an ideology founded on racial superiority, a form of dehumanisation and institutional racism nurtured by historical discrimination, which is expressed, among others, by violence, hate speech, exploitation, stigmatisation and the most blatant kind of discrimination”*¹⁷.

14 <https://travellermovement.org.uk/education?download=170:2020-barriers-in-education-for-young-travellers-in-london>

15 <https://www.anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk/tools-information/all-about-bullying/anti-bullying-policies>

16 <http://antigypsyism.eu/>

17 European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) 2011

Adherence to public sector equality duty – Schools should ensure that they are fulfilling their public sector equality duty by impact assessing their policies in relation to pupils who have protected characteristics¹⁸. All staff have a duty to challenge racism and promote equality of opportunity. School leaders must ensure all staff are aware that Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils fall within its remit and are particularly vulnerable. The DfE should offer guidance and Ofsted should monitor implementation. Leading academics in the fields of Race and Education argue that the current guidance is insufficient.¹⁹

Punitive School Policies

There has been a growing trend in zero-tolerance policies in English schools, as well as a backlash in regards to their harmful effects on pupils²⁰. Recently the National Education Union described zero-tolerance behaviour policies as “*inhumane*”, “*draconian*” and “*damaging to pupil mental health*”.²¹ While zero-tolerance approaches appear to enforce a level of compliance, fundamentally they fail to address any underlying issues. Research has also shown that behavioural policies that fail to take into consideration the behavioural and cultural norms of different ethnic groups can lead to some in those groups being labelled as disruptive and aggressive.²²

Zero tolerance approaches are also used to enforce non-behaviour related policies, such as strict school uniform policies which disproportionately affects pupils from low-income households, so much so that politicians are intervening.²³ Further, zero-tolerance approaches are strictly reinforced regardless of the pupil’s unique circumstances and often fail to take into consideration individual needs and challenges of different young people.²⁴

Case Study

A recently bereaved Year 7 pupil with unaddressed special educational needs was fixed-term excluded for not submitting her mobile phone to her form teacher. The fixed term exclusion was escalated into a permanent exclusion with the school citing persistent disruptive behaviour as the main reason. The school had previously refused the mothers request for an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) assessment, citing resource constraints and the mother was unaware that she could initiate a request to the Local Authority herself. Legal aid is not available for cases involving permanent exclusion. When the mother complained, the school offered to waive the permanent exclusion if she referred her child to the Fair Access Panel. The mother eventually agreed to a managed move so her child would not have a permanent exclusion on her record. The child moved to another school, eventually receiving learning support, bereavement counselling, and an EHCP assessment.



Several issues arise from this case study: the mobile phone incident is a clear example of how policies do not consider individual circumstances and where the school was inflexible. Bereavement can have a massive impact on young people’s behaviour, and schools should recognise it as a need and take a nurturing approach.²⁵ This is especially important when considering the close-knit nature of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller families which mean that bereavement can be very difficult. Further, the school failed to take into account any underlying issues, such as the pupil’s unaddressed special educational needs. Permanent exclusions should only ever be used as a last resort, and should be fair, rational and proportionate to the offence.

18 <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/advice-and-guidance/public-sector-equality-duty>

19 <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/politicsandpolicy/white-privilege-in-english-schools/>

20 <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2019/apr/17/teaching-union-calls-zero-tolerance-school-policies-inhumane>

21 <https://www.tes.com/news/zero-tolerance-behaviour-policies-are-inhumane-says-union>

22 Policy and practice in multicultural and anti-racist education: A case study of a multi-ethnic comprehensive school

23 <https://services.parliament.uk/bills/2019-21/educationguidanceaboutcostsofschooluniforms.html>

24 <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/15313204.2018.1528914>

25 <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13632752.2015.1054670>

A main feature of the case study used to illustrate this section was the absence of legal aid. The mother was backed into a corner and forced to accept a referral to a fair access panel to ensure her child was not left with a permanent exclusion on her school record. At present legal aid is not available for exclusions, bullying, or admissions - considering that Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children are disproportionately affected by all three of these issues this is highly problematic.²⁶ Without access to legal aid, many of these children and their families are being failed by the system. Furthermore, whilst legal aid is available for special educational needs, judicial review, and discrimination, it cannot be used as a means to overturn an unlawful exclusion.

School policies have become contentious in recent times, with hair policies being the site of discussions on how policies can inherently discriminate against Black pupils who find their natural hair being policed. Furthermore, pupils from Ethnic Minority Background can be further policed by behaviour policies which are based on middle-class norms and ideals, and ignore the varying cultural norms of different pupils.²⁷

Recommendations

Policy – In line with Equality Legislation, all policies must be Equality Impact Assessed to better understand the impact these policies have on pupils with protected characteristics. Schools and teachers should be reminded that Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils are protected by this legislation. Policymakers should engage with external stakeholders and representatives of Ethnic Minority Groups so that policies can be co-created. We also recommend that local authorities be given oversight of behaviour policies for all schools and academies in their area. Finally, schools should adopt a more flexible approach to their policies and consider restorative justice and empathy-based approaches to punishment.²⁸

Legal Aid – Legal aid should be made available for issues surrounding exclusions, bullying and admissions.

Belonging

Whilst issues such as bullying and cultural factors are often cited as the main barriers to education, there has been less exploration on Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils' sense of belonging in Secondary Education, especially regarding the role that teachers play, or importantly don't play, in fostering a sense of school belonging.

Case Study

A Religious Education teacher informed a Year 8 pupil that he would like to teach a lesson on Travellers. He asked if she had an issue with this, as she is an Irish Traveller, to which she replied no. Without any further consultation or explanation, the teacher proceeded to show the class an episode of the Channel 4 show *'My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding'*. Following the class the girl experienced harassment and bullying by her classmates in relation to her ethnicity. When TM contacted the school for an explanation, the teacher stated he thought he was teaching a class on Traveller culture and heritage. The school agreed to allow the girl to re-design the class with the teacher using culturally appropriate content. The teacher agreed to never again show an episode of *My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding*.



This case study succinctly illustrates the teacher's ignorance in relation to Gypsy and Traveller culture and heritage. Without access to culturally appropriate content, the teacher decided to use content he found online which then led to the pupil being bullied.

26 <https://childlawadvice.org.uk/information-pages/legal-aid-for-educational-law-matters/>

27 <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/09518398.2015.1023228>

28 <https://epi.org.uk/publications-and-research/bullying-a-review-of-the-evidence/>

Traveller Movement research shows that Traveller pupils want their culture and heritage included in the school curriculum in a positive way, not in a way that makes them feel different. This is fundamental to their sense of belonging.

“Don’t separate us and make us feel different, and how you put time into country people [non-Travellers], put time into us too”

“[Put] Traveller history in the curriculum. Being firm on bullying and recognising that Pikey, Gypo, Knacker are offensive terms”

These comments were made in the GLA Citizen Led Engagement Project which explored the school experiences of young Gypsies and Travellers in London.²⁹ This research has brought to the surface the tensions faced by Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils. The young people in this case study, like many others, felt that at times their teachers did not always put time into them in the same way they did their non-Traveller peers. Furthermore, there were times they were made to feel different, not in a positive celebration of diversity, but difference as the other and subsequently as outsiders.

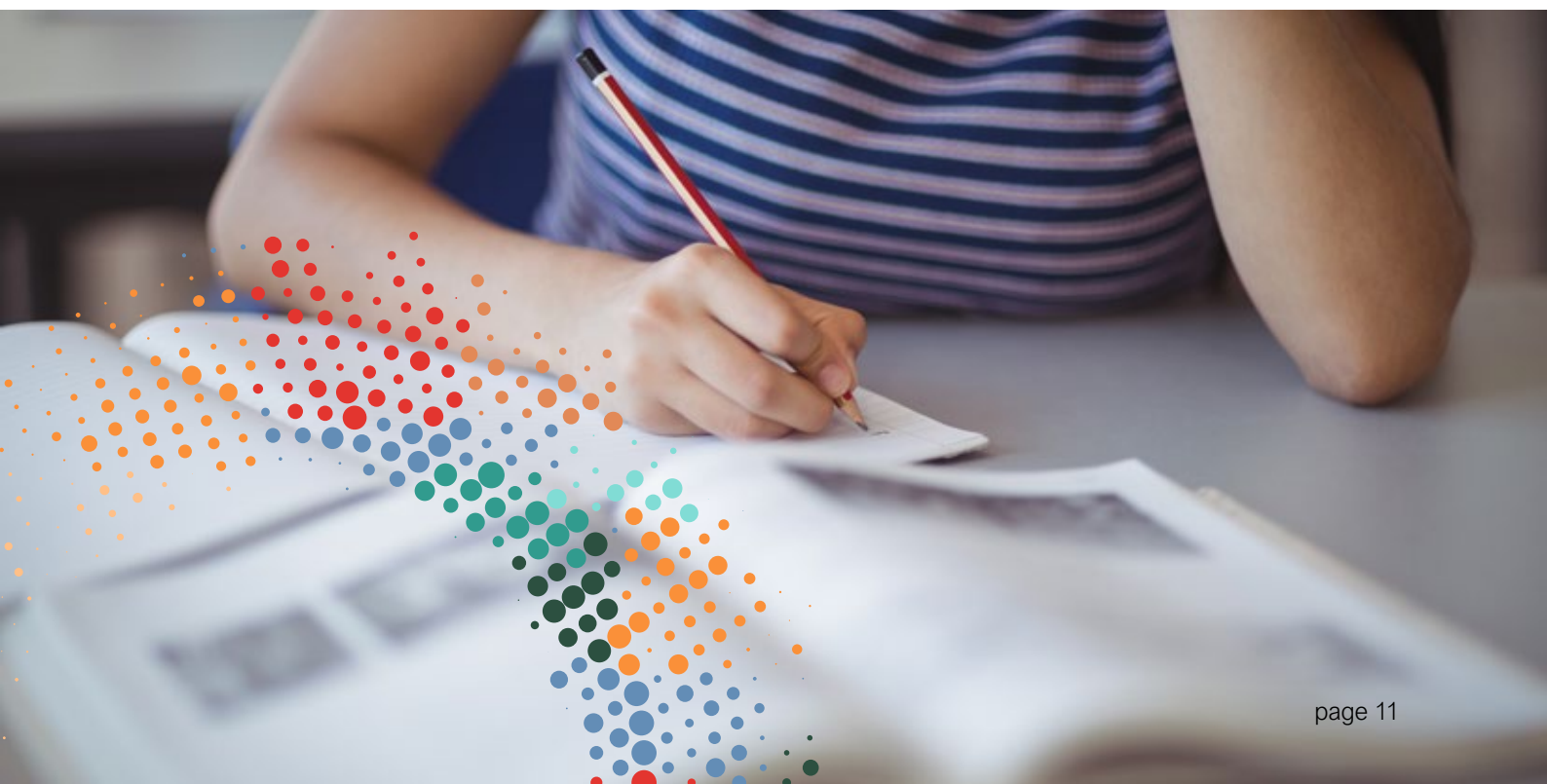
Recommendations

A pupil’s sense of belonging plays an important part in the way they engage with, and experience education. Pupils who feel a sense of belonging are more likely to remain in the education system³⁰. With this in mind, a number of recommendations can be made. Gypsy, Roma and Traveller history and culture should be included across the curriculum. With the introduction of the *Traveller Education on the Curriculum Bill* in Ireland³¹, the Traveller Movement would also echo these calls for inclusion in the Secondary Education Curriculum. This would better allow pupils the opportunity to learn about the history of Gypsies, Roma and Travellers, and their contributions to this country, and their literature. This could play a considerable role in dispelling the myths and misconceptions that surround them. In doing so, both peers and teachers will have a better understanding which can help foster better relationships. Better pupil-teacher and pupil-peer relationships will increase a child’s sense of belonging.

29 https://travellermovement.org.uk/phocadownload/TTM%20Barriers%20in%20education_web.pdf

30 <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/educational-and-developmental-psychologist/article/fostering-school-belonging-in-secondary-schools-using-a-socioecological-framework/C282C54B84E14C1DD8F5381271424D5C>

31 <https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/bills/bill/2018/71/>



Information and Guidance

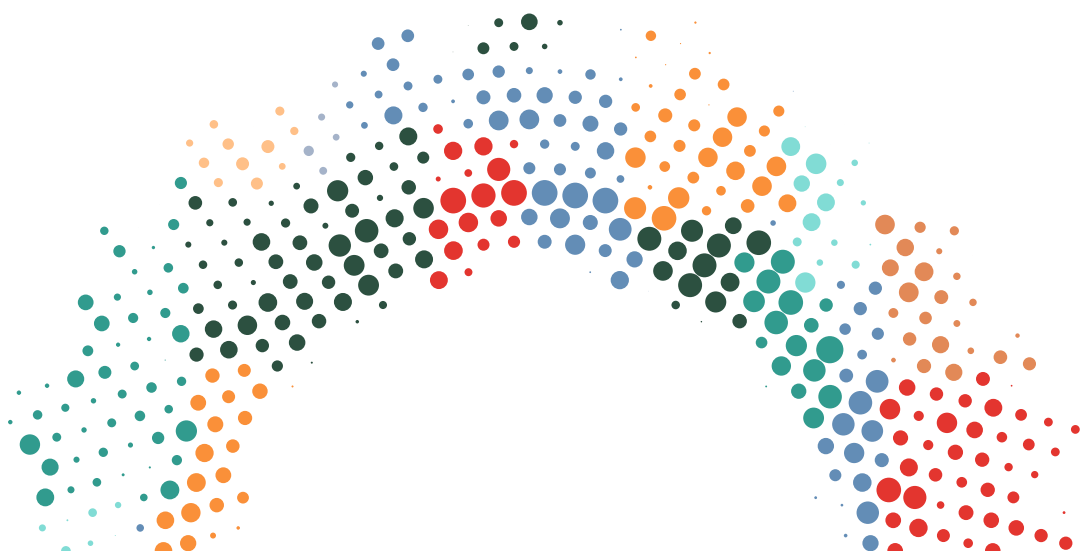
Children have a fundamental right to access an education that meets their needs. Traditionally, Gypsy, Roma and Traveller parents would work with the Traveller Education Support Service (TESS) to ensure that their children were receiving an education. From the mid-1970s until 2008 there was a network to encourage the inclusion of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children into mainstream education and to advise schools on effective ways to promote their achievement and opportunities. These services were part of local authority provision, grant aided by central government. TESS's were staffed by teachers and welfare officers and had an important role in bringing parents into the education workforce as Teaching Assistants and Liaison Officers. The TESS acted as a bridge between parents and schools, but government cutbacks have meant that Local Authorities no longer maintain dedicated services to promote the inclusion and achievement of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils. In some cases, the removal of the TESS has contributed to a breakdown in relationships and communication between schools and parents. For parents this has meant that they are not always equipped with the knowledge to make informed decisions.

Case Study

A parent contacted TM to ask for advice after their children were physically assaulted in school, following months of bullying. The parent had been advised by the local authority education support worker to electively home educate the children if they didn't want to send them back to school. The support worker helped the parent write a letter to the school informing them that they should be taken off roll. The education support worker did not explain to the parent what elective home education would entail. The parent contacted TM to ask how to access a tutor and resources. TM explained the rules around elective home education, and what the parent was and wasn't entitled to. Using this information, the parent decided that elective home education would not be the correct solution. TM contacted the school and asked them to keep the children on roll and deal with the bullying. The school dealt with the incident and the children returned to school.



This case study illustrates a scenario in which neither the school nor the local authority education support worker fully explained to the parent what elective home education would entail. The education support worker and school should have explained to the parent that by choosing elective home education, the parent would be solely responsible for education, including costs for resources, tutors and examinations. This was not explained to the parent, meaning that they were under the false illusion that they could access home education support for free. Presenting the full range of facts to the parent would allow them to make an informed decision. Without the support from TM it is evident that those children could have fallen through the gap in provision. The case study above details how some schools and local authorities are taking advantage of parents' lack of understanding and knowledge of the education system, instead of dealing with the root causes of the issues, in this case unaddressed bullying.



Case Study

A parent contacted TM with concerns surrounding the new Relationship and Sex Education guidance. They were concerned that the teaching of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) relationships infringed her cultural and religious beliefs. TM advised the parent that whilst they had the right to remove their child from the sex education lessons, the relationship and health lessons were mandatory. TM encouraged the parent to engage with the school to better understand it. TM explained the importance of children learning about relationships, including LGBT, in an age appropriate way, especially since this information is widely available on the internet. TM reminded the parent that there are many Gypsies, Roma and Travellers who identify as LGBT. When the parent asked about elective home education, TM explained the rules around elective home education and what the responsibilities of the parent were. TM advised the parent to work closely with the school. The parent agreed to engage in further conversations with the school.



Recommendations

There is a desperate need for more funding to be made available to organisations to undertake the cascading volumes of casework which is very resource heavy and labour intensive. Furthermore, there should be clearer guidance for parents especially those with lower levels of literacy. This guidance should be easily available, clear, and concise, so that parents are better informed on the responsibilities of both parents and schools in to the provision of education. Additionally, schools have a duty to signpost parents to organisations who can support them, as well as outlining the opportunities available to young people who do not find traditional academic qualifications and schools a good fit. Schools should never encourage parents to home educate but instead provide factual information, which includes both the parent's right to educate their children at home, but also their duty to ensure their child has a suitable education to equip them with genuine life choices. Every child has the right to an education and schools and other agencies should ensure that parents are reminded of their legal obligations in their child's right to an education. Parents should therefore be supported to access the appropriate information so they can make informed decisions when it comes to issues such as elective home education, exclusion, and special educational needs.



Access Routes

Current research and government statistics show that there is a large proportion of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils who have, for various reasons, become disengaged from the education system. Once these pupils drop out, whether through elective home education, or being Children Missing Education, it is very difficult for them to re-engage. Barriers include knowing how to navigate local authority and school policies and engagement teams. This can be particularly difficult if parents have lower levels of literacy or limited English. Whilst it is much easier to re-enter the education system during the Primary phase and the first few years of Secondary, Traveller Movement casework has found that attempts to re-engage during the GCSE examination year are almost impossible. This, coupled with the reduced availability of vocational courses, means that pupils in the 14-16 age bracket are facing a gap in services. When they do wish to re-engage, they are faced with a range of challenges, especially if they have spent a large proportion of time out of education. They may not have the basic academic knowledge, skills and competencies that would be expected for their age.

Case Study

Margaret was a sixteen-year-old Irish Traveller girl who had joined college to begin a Hair, Beauty and Media course. She had been diagnosed with ADHD and required extra support in the classroom. Margaret had been out of school for several years.

She was keen and had enrolled by herself. Initially there were a few difficulties around entry requirements but after scoring highly in her initial assessments she began a level two course with functional skills. Margaret was enjoying the programme but began to have difficulties in the classroom. Her mother did not know how to access support for Margaret. After a few weeks off, support still hadn't been put in place and she struggled with the structured lessons. Margaret would get in trouble for speaking out of turn and being distracted with peers. She felt like she was at a different stage to her peers due to being out of school for so long, even though she was academically capable. Although the college said that they were inclusive, Margaret didn't feel like they were taking practical steps. Margaret decided not to return after the half term.



This case study is one example of the challenges facing those who wish to re-engage with the education system, not only practically but also in the perceptions of what is 'for' young Gypsies and Travellers. At times, a lack of representation can make these young people feel as though these courses and institutions are not 'for' them. Helena's case study below is a positive example of how having access routes back into education means that Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils can still go on to achieve, even if they have dropped out of education for a prolonged period.

Case Study

Helena is an Irish Traveller who dropped out of formal education aged eleven and from this point was missing from the system. At sixteen she returned to a further education college where she was able to take some qualifications and eventually do an access course. During this time, she began campaigning, and through her involvement with a number of Traveller advocacy charities was able to meet other Gypsies and Travellers who became role models to Helena. These were Gypsies and Travellers who in some cases had gone on to university and worked in the mainstream. Through her access course she was able to gain the qualifications for University and went to Sheffield University where she was awarded a first-class degree in Youth and Community Work. Helena is now the director of a programme which aims to support young people aged 16-24 who have had difficulties getting back into education, employment or training, through a tailored education support programme. This has been very successful and they have recently expanded from the North of England to their first two centres in London.



Recommendations

Funding should be set aside specifically for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils to re-engage with the education system, particularly in the 14-16 and 19-25 age brackets where a gap in services seems to exist. Easy to access, designated routes back into education would better allow these pupils to access suitable academic and vocational qualifications that meet their needs. These pupils also need access to support once on these courses to ease the transition back into education and to increase retention.

Conclusion

For Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils and their experiences in Secondary Education there seems to be a range of issues and barriers that need to be addressed. As illustrated here, these issues occur at a range of levels – parental, school and structural. The recommendations put forward as part of this research aim to address these issues in a variety of ways. Some of the more significant recommendations will require lobbying from the Traveller Movement and other stakeholders for intervention at a DfE policy level. There are recommendations here that can be taken forward by individual teachers and schools to improve and further good practice to ameliorate Secondary Education.

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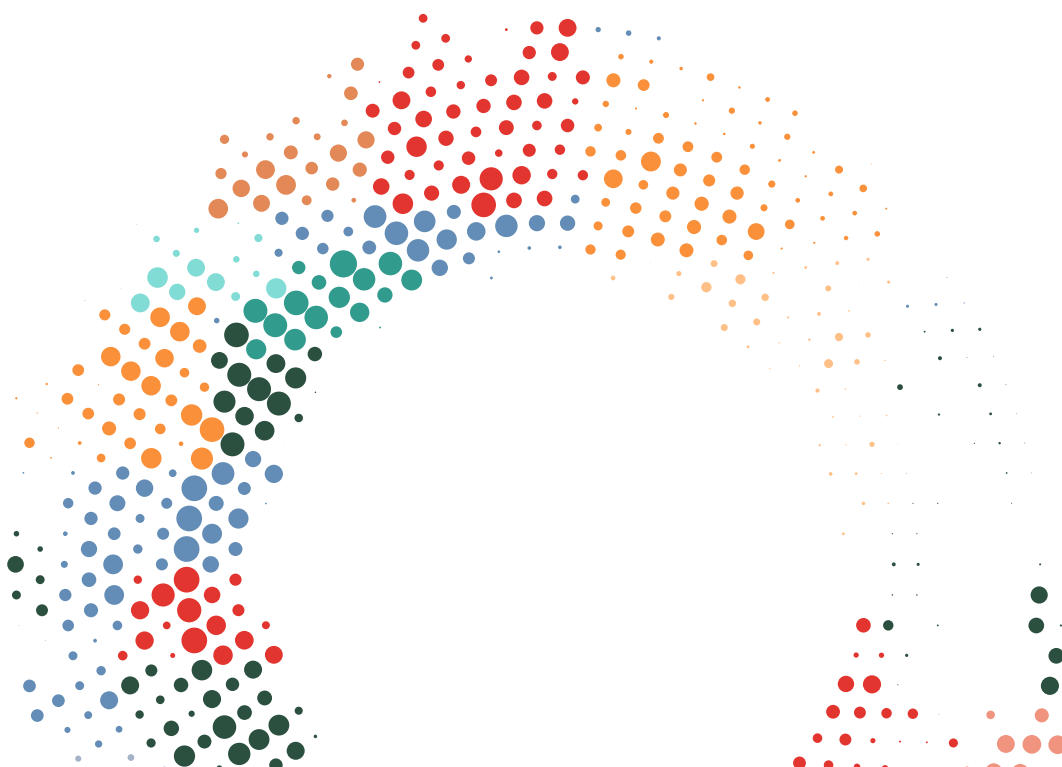
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