



# Educating Gypsy and Traveller pupils

Our education system fails dismally to provide a successful learning environment for this group of children and young people. While there are some pupils fully integrated into schools and achieving well, many remain marginalised.

A major cause of this can be found in the deep-seated prejudice held by the settled community and the absence of respect, knowledge and appreciation of the culture of the different groups of Travellers. The negative impact of this discriminatory attitude is represented in the low educational outcomes of Travellers. As Ofsted's last report<sup>1</sup> on Traveller pupils said:

*"Traveller pupils linger on the periphery of the education system. The situation has persisted for too long and the alarm bells rung in earlier reports have yet to be heeded"*

*"Traveller pupils are the children most at risk in the education system. They are too often 'out of sight and out of mind' "*

The results below (taken from one LEA and thought by Ofsted to be typical) demonstrate just how systematically these pupils fail to achieve within our schools and, most starkly of all, at our secondary schools.

Ofsted considers that about 12,000 Traveller children are not registered with a school and that at Key Stage 4 this represents about 53 per cent of these pupils.

The government has, in recent years, initiated many strategies for school improvement, giving LEAs responsibilities in challenging and supporting schools to improve their performance. This includes, specifically, raising the attainment of socially excluded pupils.

The government has also now made local authorities, as a whole, responsible for raising the outcomes for all children within their locality with a view to *Continued overleaf*

Average	Travellers	National
KS1 English gaining L2 or more	33%	84%
KS1 Maths gaining L2 or more	44%	91%
KS2 E gaining L4 or more	66%	75%
KS2 M gaining L4 or more	44%	71%
KS3 E gaining L5 or more	16%	64%
KS3 M gaining L5 or more	16%	66%

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increasing social and racial equality (The Children Act, 2004 and The Race Relations Act (Amended) 2000). The school improvement agenda will succeed for the more vulnerable groups in our society only when their opportunities are maximised through the collaboration and efforts of all local authority services and in close co-operation with services provided by other welfare agencies.

It is within this context that the government has provided the statutory Guidance, *Aiming High: Raising the Achievement of Gypsy and Traveller Pupils* (Department for Education and Skills, July 2003). Innovations following the Plowden Report<sup>2</sup> (1967) and the Swann Report<sup>3</sup> (1985) did lead to increasing access to education for Travellers but a step change is still needed; and advantage of the current context should therefore be taken to try and make a significant and lasting difference.

The issues in England are part of a broader European scenario. *The situation of Roma in an Enlarged European Union*<sup>4</sup> is a comprehensive and readable study which points to a common situation across most member states, including the UK, which was one of the countries used in their research. The European Parliament passed a resolution on 29 April 2005. It notes: "The importance of urgently eliminating continuing and violent trends of racism and racial discrimination against Roma" and states that "the failure to combat racial discrimination... against Roma, especially by public authorities, is a factor encouraging the persistence of the problems in society." While there is no room for complacency here, some aspects of our provision do provide a model of good practice for other European countries (Ivatts, Arthur R 2003<sup>5</sup>).

# Transforming prejudice and ignorance

There is a long history of unresolved tension between Travellers and settled communities, evidenced by acts of discrimination and racism as well as the increasing obstacles to living a nomadic way of life.

We know that Travellers were persecuted in the 16th century, and, also from that era, there are contemporary comments recorded from popular songs, which describe them as "wild and carefree", "wise and mysterious" and "dangerous outlaws".

This ambivalence continues with many envying their freedom whilst suspicious and antagonistic towards their lifestyle. Travellers have traditionally provided services to the settled communities, in particular seasonal labour to landowners and mending and trading goods. They have, therefore, always relied on the settled community for their livelihood, while also experiencing prejudice and even persecution from them.

Laws and regulations, especially in the 20th century, have been passed which have made their nomadic way of life increasingly difficult and Travellers are now among the most disadvantaged and powerless groups in our society.

There is as yet little comprehensive research on racial prejudice towards Travellers, but one of the key findings in the research undertaken by Chris Derrington and Sally Kendall (NFER 2003<sup>6</sup>) was the extent of

racism experienced by the Gypsy Traveller pupils (aged 10-14) questioned in their survey.

Almost 80 per cent of the sample said they were sometimes called racist names or bullied in school. Most did not report this to the teachers and about one third believed that certain teachers held racist attitudes towards them.

A fundamental shift in attitude is required if there is to develop a more respectful understanding of Travellers and a more accommodating relationship between them and the state.

Local authorities and schools need to implement a range of strategies, in order to bring the discrimination of Travellers into focus, in the same way as has happened with most other minority ethnic groups, and thereby begin to reduce its prevalence.

Many professionals working with children and families have so far paid little attention to these cultures, and indeed often see little reason for doing so; they often have only the most superficial knowledge of them, such as "quaintly painted wagons".

As a society we have failed to give appropriate recognition to the values that Travellers espouse, even though they reflect some of those we ourselves are most concerned about losing – for example, the importance of the family and community, and the teaching of family customs and practical skills to the next generation.



Picture: From Gypsies and Travellers in their own words, published by Leeds TES of Education Leeds

‘You can’t put up a sign saying “No Black People” or you’ll be done good and proper. But it’s “No Travellers or Van People” all over. I tell you we’re the bottom of the pile. We ain’t got nothing’<sup>7</sup>

## Lelling the Jin

Do you know the difference between a pavee and pikey? Or what’s “mokadi” and what’s not? If you don’t, and you work on a daily basis with travelling people, you could probably benefit from cultural awareness training.

Richard O’Neill of Gypsy Expressions provides training adapted to suit each particular setting. The training brings alive what it means to be a contemporary Gypsy and explores and explodes our myths and stereotypes associated with Travellers.

It gives information about Gypsy/Traveller culture and history and examples of good practice in delivering services. For more information, contact [gypsyexpressions@aol.com](mailto:gypsyexpressions@aol.com)

There needs to be serious investment to:

- disseminate Traveller histories and cultures
- celebrate their customs and values
- provide cultural awareness training

The Race Relations legislation provides the framework for

challenging discrimination (1976) and The Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 now requires that the delivery of goods and services by local authorities **promotes** race equality.

The Gypsy, Roma and Irish Travellers are identified as minority groups within this legislation. Therefore, to comply with this new requirement action will have to be taken to reduce the current level of prejudice and ignorance.

# Who are the Traveller communities?

**N**ot all Travellers travel! The term Travellers represents, under one heading, several distinct groups, each with their own travelling tradition. While some prefer to be described differently, the term Traveller is generally an acceptable, if limited, overall identification. It includes:

- Travellers (Irish and Scottish)
- Gypsy (English, Welsh and Scottish)
- Eastern European Roma
- Showmen (Fairground people)
- Circus people
- Bargees
- New Travellers

The total population of the Traveller communities is thought to be about 350,000 in houses and 90,000 who are nomadic or semi-nomadic, living on local authority or private sites or they own their own plot of land. But about one fifth of those not housed have no secure place to stay and are moving, or being moved between unauthorised sites. Many housed Travellers are also highly mobile, sometimes from choice, but often due to problems arising where they live. Each of the groups of Travellers has their own distinct culture and customs and usually lives separately from other groups.

## Irish Travellers

Irish Travellers have a history probably dating back as far as the 11th century, but their numbers swelled in the 19th century mainly due to famine and the dispossession of their land. There was an influx to Britain in the 1960s mostly coming to urban areas which provided opportunities for work. While a distinct ethnic group, many feel that they are inextricably linked to the Roma from India and their language, called Gammon or Shelta, does have strong overlaps with Romani. Irish Travellers have experienced ongoing discrimination and social exclusion, including exclusion from education. This history inevitably created a distrust of the formal education system.

## Gypsy

Gypsies are thought to have arrived in England about 500 years ago, many having left the Indus valley in northern India in the ninth century and travelled through Persia, reaching Eastern Europe about 1,000 years



ago. By the 16th century it was a capital offence to be a Gypsy; this legislation was repealed in the 18th century. Their Romani language derives from Sanskrit but includes words taken from countries they migrated through. Over the centuries the movement of Gypsy/Roma around the UK has been determined by their work, and this largely continues, but it is thought that about 30 per cent have no legal place to stop. As with Irish Travellers, the history of deep-rooted social exclusion provides the backcloth for their ambivalence towards education.

## Eastern European Roma

In the last 20 years, with the break up of the Soviet states, Roma have arrived and settled in England. While there are significant differences between them and the Gypsy/Roma – different customs, beliefs and dialects – they maintain a sense of common identity. These Roma have been accustomed to a settled way of life in Eastern Europe and are mostly housed in England. Despite the extent of exclusion they have experienced in the countries they have come from and the blatant discrimination they face from the UK's immigration system, once they know they can settle here (and, now, most already housed here have been given "indefinite leave to remain") they are successfully accessing education. Indeed there is already evidence that many are motivated to overcome the linguistic challenge and aim for high achievement.

## Showmen

Fairground families have a tradition dating back to the early Fairs in Medieval times; they still hold some fairs in the same place and at the same time of year. Their way of life is constant mobility over the summer, going



**OLD AND NEW:** fairground families (left) have a tradition dating back to Medieval times, whereas New Travellers (above) emerged more recently as a conscious rejection of traditional lifestyles. Right: Circus children are taught the family skills but parents are also eager that they have good educational opportunities.

from fairground to fairground, and usually returning to their winter yard by November to make preparations for the next season or find other work. The children are introduced to the family business from a young age and often stay on as adults. Families usually support their children with their education and expect them to continue through to secondary school.

**The National Fairground Archive (NFA) provides a rich resource on Fairground People, including teaching materials for all ages (see [www.shef.ac.uk/nfa](http://www.shef.ac.uk/nfa)).**

### Circus people

Circus was born in London in the 18th century and quickly spread across Europe and then to America. The Circus People, performers and proprietors, follow a family tradition that now reaches back many generations. There are about 19 traditional touring tented circuses, which travel to towns and villages, reaching people who might otherwise not experience live performance. Circus is an established part of the cultural life of this country; it is thought that most Saturdays during the season over 180,000 people will see a circus performance and just over one in five people will visit a circus each year. Despite this popularity, the majority of tented circuses still remain family businesses and

operate from the back of a caravan. Children are taught the family skills but parents are also eager for their children to have good educational opportunities.

### Bargees

There is considerable interest in the history of our industrial use of waterways and especially the building of the canal system during the 18th century. This history includes the life of the people who built, maintained and worked in this environment. The families came to actually live on the barges as a result of hardship and their inability to pay for other lodgings, particularly once the development of the railways began to erode the viability of the canal system. What is less known about is the small community of bargees that continue to live on our waterways and their cultural heritage.

### New Travellers

New Travellers emerged in the second half of the last century, usually as a conscious decision by young families to reject the settled, class-orientated, nuclear family and regular job lifestyle of English society. Their travel is linked to the summer festivals. New Travellers quickly came into public dispute with certain landowners and authorities and this led to clauses in the Public Order Act (1986) which widen the powers to move on groups of vehicles. This inflamed tensions between Travellers as a whole and the settled community.

***The Education of Gypsy and Traveller Children – towards inclusion and educational achievement* by Christine O’Hanlon and Pat Holmes (Trentham Books 2004) provides an excellent summary for policy makers and practitioners. Combining the experience of professionals working with Travellers and schools and an academic perspective, in just 150 pages which are easy to read, this book is packed full of information about Travellers and ideas for enhancing their educational opportunities.**



# What Travellers think about education

**SCHOOL ROLL:** the Travellers' School Charity provides on-site education in the form of the Skool Bus (now replaced with a dome). It visits sites on request and runs summer camps. The charity also provides workbooks for parents who want to home educate children. Visit [www.travellersschool.plus.com](http://www.travellersschool.plus.com)

**D**espite the legacy of exclusion and hostility that many adult Travellers experienced themselves as children, most now want to support their children in getting a good educational grounding at primary school. There is also increasing interest in pre-school provision, attendance at local playgroups, loaning play equipment and involvement in some Sure Start programmes.

The picture at secondary level is quite different; by the time Traveller pupils reach secondary school attendance dwindles and by the time they reach 14 years it is rare.

In contrast to school, at home the children of secondary school age are usually already treated as mature and responsible members of the community so pupils find themselves caught between

different expectations at home and school. In addition there is far greater ambivalence from parents about the value of schooling at this stage.

*"Travellers are, or expect to be, discriminated against in the job market so even if they had qualifications on a par with those of settled people, they might nevertheless be passed over. Most Travellers prefer to work for themselves, so they are more interested in skills than bits of paper."*

**Brian Foster**  
Inner London Traveller Education Consortium

The secondary curriculum may not seem, and may not be, particularly relevant to the child's future. The research<sup>8</sup> by Chris Derrington and Sally Kendall found, however,

through interviewing parents, that Travellers expressed more strongly their anxiety about their children's welfare in secondary schools. They regard the severity of bullying and racism as dangerous and fear the erosion of their children's morals from the lifestyle accepted in the schools.

The survey showed that some pupils attending school disguised their cultural identity to help them cope with the antagonism they would otherwise have faced.

An increasing number of Travellers are opting to provide Elective Home Education (EHE) for their older children. While this formally resolves the pupil's lack of attendance at school it does not necessarily provide the child with a good alternative education. Older pupils are sometimes returning to education on post-16 courses.

Picture: Alan Lodge

# What schools can do

While many schools across the country are excelling in their education of Traveller pupils, it seems that the majority have not grasped the issue. The statutory Guidance *Aiming High: Raising the Achievement of Gypsy Traveller Pupils* (DfES July 2003) gives plenty for schools to consider and recommends that a plan with timescales for action should be developed.

The agenda needs to tackle the following issues.

## The child's experience of racism in school

Most effective is a commitment from governors, the headteacher and senior management to an ethos of respect and validation of all ethnic groups, specifically including Travellers.

Such a school will hold values which promote their wellbeing rather than undermine them. Travellers will be welcomed and seen as contributing valuably to the school's rich diversity. Implementing the detailed requirements under the new legislation will help schools promote race equality.

## The child's experience of ignorance of their way of life

An absence of any experience at school which relates to their background leaves children feeling invisible. Traveller Education



**'An absence of any experience at school which relates to their background leaves children feeling invisible'**

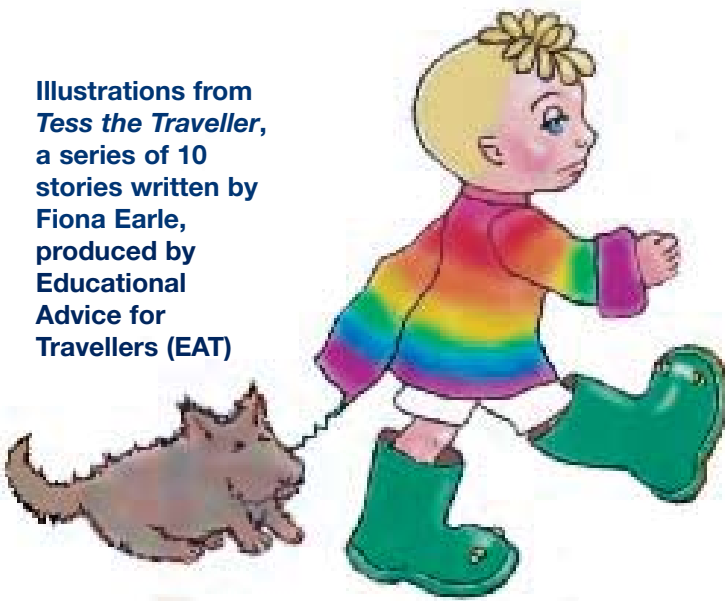
Services (TESs), often in collaboration with Travellers themselves, have produced sets of materials for different ages and parts of the curriculum; a comprehensive list of resources has been developed and

maintained by Devon County and can be found on their website at [www.devon.gov.uk/index/learning/pupil\\_support/travellers\\_education/resources\\_list.htm](http://www.devon.gov.uk/index/learning/pupil_support/travellers_education/resources_list.htm).

A good example is *The Travelling People*, Key Stage 2, National Literacy Strategy Activity Pack produced by Hackney, Newham and Tower Hamlets TESs. Readily accessible for young children, a series of 10 stories about *Tess the Traveller*, produced by Educational Advice for Travellers (EAT), can be found on [www.gypsy-traveller.org](http://www.gypsy-traveller.org). Whether or not there are Travellers in a school at any one time it is important that all staff and children learn about these cultures so as to eliminate their stereotypes.

*Continued overleaf*

Illustrations from *Tess the Traveller*, a series of 10 stories written by Fiona Earle, produced by Educational Advice for Travellers (EAT)



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### The child's experience of low expectation from teachers

Strengthening a personal approach to teaching by making better assessments of pupils will raise expectations as well as encourage more flexibility with the curriculum at all stages. For example, identifying specific learning support requirements to fill in gaps, not necessarily learning difficulties, or taking advantage of the more flexible curriculum now allowed for some pupils in years 10 and 11. A good assessment will also reveal the strengths that pupils bring.

### The child's experience of a school at odds with their parents' aspirations

The effort put into strengthening the links with Traveller families and

actively involving them in the school is necessary for good results but becomes increasingly essential at secondary school when the divergence of cultures is in danger of reaching breaking point.

The school needs to work towards a transparent partnership, acknowledging the power issues and compulsory nature of education while also recognising the validity of both the aspirations and fears of the families. Parents will be convinced by actions, the good practice in schools which focuses on the pupils and responds with flexibility. Schools are the forum in which Travellers can connect most positively with the wider community.

### The child's lack of access to the curriculum

Increasing access to the curriculum should be thought about both in terms of changing how the school offers education as well as changing the education on offer. The former requires creating an environment conducive to learning and a quality of teaching that genuinely gives equal access to the ideas and knowledge contained within the curriculum. The latter requires increasing the flexibility of the curriculum itself.

Effective induction as a child starts a new school can make a critical



Adjacent to a permanent Irish Traveller site, The Nightingale Primary School in Hackney has many years of experience of educating Traveller pupils. Jake Herft, the acting headteacher, aims to maintain an ethos of care and affection in the school, with everybody trusted in a way they would like to be themselves. The school accepts that the Traveller families will sometimes be away for a few days or weeks but is always welcoming when they return. Jake is struck by the children's directness, their pride and their self-sufficiency and, also, how they care for their younger siblings without suffocating them. While appreciative of their positive contribution to the school, he emphasises the need to expect and maintain clear standards of behaviour and says that to do so requires open communication and involvement with the families. He recognises the value of the Travellers Education Service (TES) in supporting this work and especially its help when difficulties do arise between the school and the families. In his experience the TES often have more enduring and therefore trusting relationships with the Traveller community.

Picture: From Gypsies and Travellers in their own words, published by Leeds TES of Education Leeds



Transfer to secondary school requires similarly sensitive handling if it is to be successful.

**The child's experience of interrupted learning and sometimes the reluctance of being given a school place at all**

Schools can promote attendance through specific strategies; these should include quick follow-up of absence, sensitivity to family reasons for absence and recognising and responding to school-based reasons, such as bullying or curriculum difficulties.

Also, finding alternatives to exclusion to enforce discipline makes a significant difference.

To promote the continuity of education full advantage needs to be taken of implementing Dual Registration, including the provision of school based distance learning.

Responding quickly and positively to new admissions throughout the year and helping to arrange transport to school are also significant factors in promoting the continuity of education.

**Training for staff is a powerful tool for achieving all these aims, empowering them with increased knowledge of the history, culture and languages of all Travellers and an opportunity to reflect on how Traveller pupils can be nurtured in the school environment. Equipping schools with appropriate resources and ensuring support to teachers will facilitate significant changes in the classroom.**

## Children have a right to education

**UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (Article 28)**

**The DfES funded a Gypsy/Traveller project (2002/4), focusing on secondary school children, in six LEAs (Cheshire, Dorset, Herefordshire, Kent, Leeds and Greenwich).**

**The aim of the project was raising achievement, improving attendance and engaging parents. The DfES website and a conference in 2006 will be used to disseminate the good practice identified by the projects (for example, countering bullying and incorporating their cultural heritage across the curriculum).**

**The DfES recognises the need for the whole education system to give these issues considerably more priority; their future programme includes looking at changes needed to initial teacher training, setting up an initiative to involve headteachers, encouraging ethnic ascription in pupil level annual school census (PLASC) and developing more sensitive inspection arrangements.**

**For more information contact Sheila Longstaff on Sheila.LONGSTAFF@dfes.gsi.gov.uk**



**My home, by Kora, age 7, a traveller who lives on a green lane in Somerset. Picture courtesy [www.gypsy-traveller.org/cyberpilots](http://www.gypsy-traveller.org/cyberpilots)**

difference to how well the child settles – the child may be completely unused to the kind of surroundings of the school, for example large rooms, or the structure of the day, lessons and play time. The child may find the language difficult.

Only by paying close attention to each child can a warm welcome be achieved. Strategies for achieving this include attentive welcome for the family and the child both by administrative and teaching staff, organising peer support and providing good information about the school.

# What LEAs can do

**T**here is a substantial amount of work being undertaken by local authorities to promote the education of Travellers. This is mainly through the combined support of Travellers by the TESs and schools; research has confirmed that, in some circumstances, low attendance, access to the curriculum and attainment levels can be and have been successfully addressed through these efforts (DfEE 2000<sup>9</sup>).

However, over the years these initiatives have not produced significantly improved results overall. It is likely that the circumstances will be favourable when the local authority as a whole shares similar aims and aspirations.

What is now required, under current legislation, is a concerted corporate approach. This is the way forward to make the kind of difference for these children that will provide them with not only the respect they should be given, but also the success and achievement of which they are capable.

## Local authority corporate aims and plans

Local authority corporate plans to promote the rights of all children, to promote race equality and to promote the outcomes for all children should identify clearly how these apply to Travellers and which of their services they therefore need to re-evaluate.

## Remedying the lack of appropriate and adequate site provision

Economic changes, in the 20th century in particular, have squeezed the Travellers' traditional ways of making a living, for example through the mechanisation of farming and the cheap production of plastic goods. But the most oppressive

factor has been the constant reduction in land where they can stop, jeopardising their mobility and increasing confrontations between these communities and the law.

Access to common land was disappearing rapidly when legislation was introduced in 1968 which was intended to reverse this trend (The Caravans Sites Act, 1968). This imposed a duty on local authorities to make site provision; it was never fully implemented although it did lead to the provision of over 300 additional sites. The duty was subsequently removed under the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act, 1994.

The shortage of sites continues to be a critical problem for Travellers, and has exacerbated the problems associated with unauthorised encampments which in turn have heightened the tensions between the settled community and Travellers. The lack of suitable safe and secure accommodation, whether permanent residences, winter residences or transit sites, also compounds their difficulties of accessing other necessary services, in particular education and health.

Therefore, in order to both reduce prejudice and discrimination and to raise the living standards of Travellers and their children a key strategy will be for local authorities to identify and establish sites that meet the needs of Travellers and are suitably small and placed where good community links can be formed. The importance of the quality of the consultation process, with both the settled community and Travellers, cannot be over-emphasized (ODPM, 2004<sup>10</sup>).

Ofsted pointed out in its report: "In too many authorities the ways in which they deal with unauthorised encampments contradict the principles set out in their public



A good summary of the issues can be found in *Moving Forward – the provision of accommodation for Travellers and Gypsies*, IPPR 2003. The website of the Gypsy and Traveller Law Reform Coalition (GTLRC), [www.travellerslaw.org.uk](http://www.travellerslaw.org.uk), gives details of the Traveller Law Reform Bill and the reasons why Travellers believe certain changes to law are necessary.



‘The most oppressive factor has been the constant reduction in land where they can stop, jeopardising their mobility and increasing confrontations between these communities and the law’

statements on inclusion, educational entitlement and race equality”<sup>11</sup>.

### Children’s services

Within the local authority, children’s services has a particular responsibility to promote the well-being of socially excluded groups, such as Travellers. As part of the restructuring and new arrangements under the Children Act 2004 protocols on how services will work together to promote the welfare of vulnerable children need to be agreed with all local agencies.

Picture: Third Avenue

Supporting access by Travellers to services (such as GPs and Connexions) should be one of the identified objectives. Many local authorities have already made a good start by promoting local partnerships through their TES, for example Leeds TES (see page 15).

### The LEA and the TES

Traveller pupils are marginalised. It is also often the experience of staff working with Travellers that they too are marginalised. The challenge for the LEA is to have arrangements

that balance the need for a dedicated service focused on raising the achievement of Travellers – actively working with the Traveller community and their children – with a service that is sufficiently integrated and respected in the local authority to promote the changes needed within the LEA and the schools.

Most local authorities have their own TES although some small unitary authorities are part of a consortium arrangement. The  
Continued overleaf

# What LEAs can do

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West Midlands consortium, however, covers most of the region and includes large rural and urban authorities. The size of this service has enabled it to develop a pool of expertise and network of support which can respond effectively to sudden influxes of need. It has also had the capacity to take a national lead on some issues.

The inner London consortium arrangement is entirely different, being a small strategic resource that gives specialised support to the TES based in each of the member authorities and shares data, outcomes and good practice across the region. It will be essential that the funding for a distinct TES is maintained in each local authority, wherever the service is located.

Within the LEA, TESs are located in a variety of places within the structure, including teams for school improvement, inclusion, ethnic minorities, strategy and special educational needs (SEN). The issues mainly straddle the access/inclusion agenda and raising achievement/school improvement. Wherever the service is placed, there are strong arguments for close links with both of these agendas and sharing a building can facilitate this.

However, it is also important that the promotion of education for Travellers pupils feeds into the mainstream agendas for all schools in order that every school develop an awareness and respect for Travellers, however many or few they have. Situated in SEN may be enormously helpful for some individual pupils, but it is probably not the most effective place for the service if it is strategically to make a difference.

## School improvement programme

The school improvement programme provides the local authority with a clear remit for challenging the effective learning of their schools. The work of TESs to promote good practice in schools can benefit from close links with this wider programme. Supporting schools to develop the characteristics which are known to be most successful for pupils vulnerable to social exclusion is a fundamental and shared issue. Bringing the TES alongside the School Improvement Programme can help with sharing knowledge and networks as well as, most importantly, promoting the Travellers' interests within more mainstream initiatives.

## Race equality

Hitherto Travellers have not been sufficiently identified as a group with a different religious, cultural and ethnic background and their specific differences and needs have been largely overlooked. There are now some good examples of race equality training, which include the need for consideration of Travellers (Camden TES on page 15).

## Data and statistics

The increasing collation and dissemination of information on pupil statistics and school performance can be used to good effect to promote good practice within LEAs (TEN 2004<sup>12</sup>), but a concerted effort is needed if the data collected on Travellers is to become sufficiently comprehensive to reflect their needs and the gaps in provision. For example, the PLASC system would need to include all groups of Travellers, and Travellers need to be empowered to report their ethnicity.

Improving these systems can assist with tracking pupils as they move from school to school and

thereby reduce the numbers of pupils who drop through the net as a result of their mobility.

## Admissions policies – Travellers and mobility

LEAs, as part of their inclusion agenda, should consider how they can reduce the negative impact on pupils and schools of high rates of mobility. Admission policies and procedures should be reviewed with the aim of promoting sharing the responsibility of highly mobile pupils. Some aspects of current policy on admissions inhibit the promotion of an equally inclusive approach across all state funded schools.

LEAs will therefore need to actively encourage, liaise and negotiate with all schools if the popular schools in an area are to take their share of highly mobile students. LEAs should also recognise the resource implications and remunerate those schools dealing with a disproportionate number of mobile children, such as Travellers.

## Attendance

The LEA should aim for a consistent approach towards affirming the right to a nomadic lifestyle and enforcing attendance. Protocols clarifying the distinct roles of the school, education welfare service and TES can help to achieve this (contact Brian Foster at [brian.foster@camden.gov.uk](mailto:brian.foster@camden.gov.uk) for more information).

## Transport to school – realistic transport arrangements for all pupils

Travellers, particularly in rural areas, may be travelling from sites that do not have access to public transport to their local school. The LEA needs to consider both the support available to get young children to primary school and the arrangements for secondary school pupils getting to their school.



# Traveller Education Services

The Ofsted report (2003)<sup>13</sup> highlights the important contribution that has been made by TESs within LEAs. Their main impact has been at primary school level in increasing access to education. Most services initially focused on helping to get individual children into a school and, once there, giving the child support within the school. Increasingly services are becoming more strategic, primarily by:

- working with the Traveller community to support their capacity to access education
- working with the schools to develop their capacity to provide an appropriate environment and curriculum
- working to promote good practice within the LEA.

The work demands a wide range of skills, from identifying where to buy cheap, lasting shoes to facilitating negotiations between families and statutory services, often in highly complex and stressful situations (involving maybe criminal activity or child protection

issues). Establishing and maintaining clarity of the role of the TES, which does not blur with other statutory responsibilities, is a challenge. TESs often experience being marginalised by other services, especially when they provide effective advocacy for Travellers, but are also given recognition when they can facilitate resolution in highly conflict-ridden situations.

Most services now undertake the following core activities:

- services for schools – classroom support, providing learning resources, supporting curriculum development, INSET for staff, development of distance learning materials, liaison between school and families
- services for Travellers – support with admission to school, school transport, changing schools, secondary transfer, liaison with schools, links with other services.

However, the services are varied, reflecting local priorities as well as the particular skills and interests

within the service. A lack of resources often limits the more pro-active and strategic work in favour of the pressing immediate needs of individual pupils. Nonetheless many services continue to initiate innovative and effective projects and in particular there is growth in the involvement at secondary school level. This small sample provides only a taster of the broader picture.

### Cornwall TES Ginny Harrison White

Ginny Harrison White has taken advantage of current streams of short-term funding for young people (The Children's Fund, Neighbourhood Renewal and the Learning and Skills Council) to significantly enlarge the team and its resources.

The service can now actually demonstrate what secondary school Traveller pupils can achieve when the school environment is both respectful of them and flexible in meeting their needs.

One exciting project was set up in close co-operation with a secondary school, but with the focus on a group of Travellers not attending school and some not even on the roll of a school. This group was helped to plan the project and successfully take it forward.

They are currently landscaping the school site, having themselves gained additional support from some local businesses – a herb nursery and a slate company. As the school has become welcoming of them so these pupils are being successfully integrated into the school community.

Another grant has enabled schools to purchase specialist resources and give their teachers supply cover to take days for training and looking at these materials and identifying how to integrate them into the curriculum. A key element of all the project work is engagement by the schools, with support from the TES, so that the work will continue once the project money is ended.



**STRONG FAMILY TIES:** pictures from the Leeds TES book, *Gypsies and Travellers in their own words*



### Greenwich TES and Abbey Wood Secondary School Felicity Bonel and Paul Frith

Abbey Wood Secondary School together with the TES welcomed the opportunity to become one of the pilot projects set up by the DfES. Activities undertaken included a photography project for pupils in Years 8 and 9, documenting their perceptions of their world and the world of the locality around them. The pupils became totally engaged in the project and produced astounding results. This was celebrated at a well attended exhibition that included many Traveller families.

Other events were held to encourage greater involvement of the parents in the school and links with the community have subsequently improved considerably. In addition, the Humanities department created two curriculum modules, one on Travellers in the Tudor period and the other on Gypsies in the Holocaust.

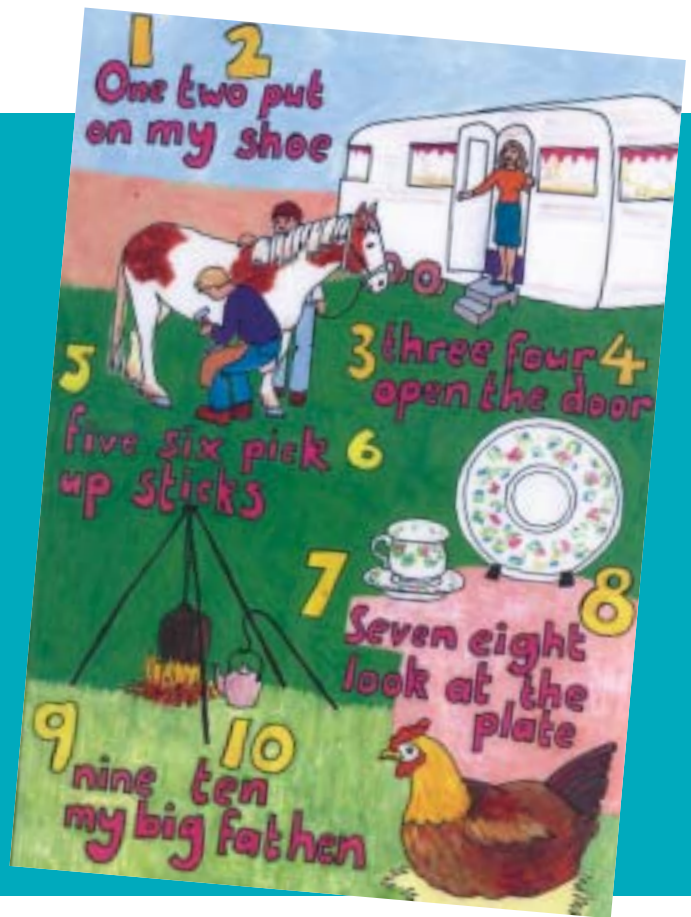
These activities combined have raised the profile of Travellers in the school as well as raising the self esteem and literacy levels of specific pupils and giving them new areas of interest. It is expected that these gains will be maintained, in part, through the increased awareness and sensitivity of staff.

### Leeds TES Peter Saunders

A well established service with substantial involvement from the Traveller community, it supports Travellers wherever they are living and has particularly good links with those staying on unauthorised sites and moving frequently. The service recently developed partnership projects to provide access to a wider range of services. For example, the local Sure Start programme did not include Traveller children, because of the strict location guidelines, but in partnership with the Sure Start programme a successful bid has provided funding for workers to provide a service to all pre-school Traveller children.



**BUDDIES:** (above and page 13) Pupils from Abbey Wood Secondary school got involved in a photography project as part of a pilot scheme with Greenwich TES and the DfES. Right: a York TES poster promoting awareness of the Traveller culture



This gives parents a greater understanding of their contribution to their child's development, the opportunity to loan toys and equipment and to look at how they can keep their children safe while allowing them to explore the world around them both inside and outside. As a result families are now also involved in activities at the local children's centre. To assist other agencies contacting and providing services to Travellers the TES is working in partnership to help facilitate both a Connexions Bus and a Health Bus. Peter Saunders, managing this large and thriving service, is nonetheless acutely aware of how much more there is to do.

The Leeds TES website [www.travellersinleeds.co.uk](http://www.travellersinleeds.co.uk) was set up with Children's Fund money. It is a comprehensive resource for Travellers and anyone who wants up-to-date information about Travellers. *Gypsies and Travellers in their own words*, published by Leeds TES in 2000 (price £15 + £5p&p), is a fascinating 250-page account of Gypsy and Traveller life over the past century, drawn from several generations and richly illustrated.

### Camden TES Leonie Holt

Placed in the ethnic minority achievement team, Leonie Holt is satisfied with how this arrangement has enabled the development of LEA training for all school staff which routinely incorporates examples and modules that specifically relate to Travellers.

The TES has influenced and participated in the running of training courses on race relations, ethnic minority achievement, a differentiated curriculum, disrupted education, partnership teaching, speaking

and listening strategies and a course for classroom assistants. Placing the Traveller agenda firmly within the context of developing good practice in the classroom will raise their expectations of Traveller pupils. The service has also found that by prioritising on early intervention and working with pupils to help them catch up in their first years of school, they have achieved far greater success as the child progresses through the school system.

Many professionals working in this field have built up considerable expertise and, by remaining in the same locality for many years, have established relationships with the Traveller community and schools of sufficient trust that they can help with the resolution of the very sensitive and complex difficulties which routinely arise.

**The National Association of Teachers of Travellers (NATT), established in 1980, has become an important national forum for sharing good practice between services, as well as supporting its membership in relation to national developments. It does this through regular meetings/conferences and mail outs. Its National Resource Day provides an opportunity for seeing a wide selection of the resources that are available. NATT is also managing a DfES project to promote distance learning through the use of laptop computers and internet communication with their teachers and peers. A complete Directory of Traveller Education Services can be found at [www.becta.org.uk](http://www.becta.org.uk) in the schools sector, inclusion and SEN or on the NATT website [www.natt.org.uk](http://www.natt.org.uk)**

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