Inclusion of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Children and Young People (CSN)

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Overview

This document from the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) offers guidance for local authorities and schools to help ensure that Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children are healthy, stay safe, enjoy and achieve and make a positive contribution to school life as set out in the Every Child Matters agenda and The Children’s Plan, December 2007.

Gypsy, Roma & Traveller pupils have the lowest results of any ethnic minority group and are the groups most at risk in the education system. Year on year they fall further behind other children and the Government is committed to changing this trend and to ensuring many more feel able to learn and flourish, and successfully transfer to secondary school, and that fewer are excluded from schools.

A small number of DCSF discussion seminars were recently held to identify and explore current practice and this is summarised in the guidance for local authorities/children’s services and schools.

The guidance emphasises the need for local authorities and schools to improve the level and accuracy of the data on the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities which is collected via the School Census. Practical guidance is provided on developing a generally inclusive approach and on ways to persuade pupils and parents to provide data on their ethnicity. The guidance also indicates how this will help to promote community cohesion and help fulfil the provisions of the Race Relations Act and the Race Equality Duty.

The first Gypsy, Roma Traveller History Month will take place in June 2008, offering a chance to explore and celebrate the history, culture and language of these communities. Local authorities and schools are asked to use this month to promote positive and accurate information about these communities and to involve them in planning these activities. (See 'Additional Information' for link on this).
Ofsted has reported that Gypsy, Roma & Traveller pupils have the lowest results of any ethnic minority group and are the groups most at risk of underachievement in the education system. This is not a new issue. The Swann report (1985) identified Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils as being strongly affected by many factors influencing the education of children from other minority ethnic groups. Particular mention was made then, as now, of racism and discrimination, myths, stereotyping and the need for more positive links between Gypsy, Roma and Traveller parents and their children’s schools. Evidence is that access and attendance are steadily improving, although there is still a long way to go, especially for the secondary age group. Attention is now focused on what can be done, once children are enrolled in school, to sustain their attendance and to continue to raise achievement.


**School census data collection**

It is important that schools and local authorities acknowledge that Gypsy/Roma and Travellers of Irish Heritage are covered by the Race Relations Acts as legitimate minority ethnic communities. These communities frequently experience social exclusion and discrimination which can be intentionally or is unintentionally racist in character on account of the lack of knowledge by the perpetrator(s) of their legal minority ethnic status.

Since 2003 Gypsy/Roma and Travellers of Irish Heritage have been identified as two distinct ethnicity group categories within the School Census. The School Census categorisation does not include Fairground (Showman’s) children; the children travelling with circuses; or the children of New Travellers or those dwelling on the waterways but there is a clear need at local level to capture data on these other groups who travel with their families in order that schools can better meet their needs, in particular, by offering good quality distance learning opportunities.

**Achievement**

While the analysis of the ethnicity data collected since 2003 indicates that children from Gypsy/Roma and Travellers of Irish Heritage families are seriously underachieving, it is also clear that there has been under-recording of their numbers. More complete data would:

- enable authorities and schools to monitor the impact of policies on these racial groups, including their attainment levels
- allow the development of more informed policy initiatives
- highlight the extent of need and assist the targeting of resources.

Children who are confident about their personal and community identity are better placed to be happy and successful learners. The importance of the notion of self-worth is well known as a major determinant of learning success.

In order to secure a more representative sample and therefore a more accurate picture of the overall situation, it would be helpful if more children and parents from these
communities were willing to voluntarily declare their ethnicity in school census data collection. Any attempt at such a strategy should in no way infringe anybody’s right to freely record their felt or claimed ethnic status or to decline to make any declaration.

**Actions recommended for local authorities and schools**

The actions proposed in the guidance are drawn from DCSF discussion seminars on current practice. The guidance recommends a range of actions for local authorities including strategic planning and support for schools. Some of these are listed below.

**Strategic planning by authorities**

Provide all employees with information on the history of the Gypsy/Roma and Travellers of Irish heritage and on the legality of the minority ethnic status of these groups.

Provide briefings for staff working within the school/college admissions department on reasons why these communities may be reluctant to declare their true ethnicity, including the need for a sensitive approach to collecting this information.

Include the categories of Gypsy/Roma and Traveller of Irish Heritage in the collection of data on ethnicity of Local authority staff.

Require senior authority officers responsible for culture, libraries, inclusion, race relations and press/media links, to devise an informed strategy on actions to be taken to ensure the explicit positive representation and promotion of these communities across the work of the local authority.

Establish opportunities for Gypsy/Roma and Travellers of Irish Heritage to be consulted and involved in decision making processes and structures.

Adopt an authority wide policy to publicly challenge negative and inaccurate media coverage of these communities in keeping with the authority’s duties under the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000.

Take positive action to encourage applications from people with Gypsy/Roma and Traveller backgrounds for employment.

Impact assess all policies to ensure they promote equality for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children.

Work in partnership with other agencies to share good practice and ensure consistency in the collection of ethnicity data.

Make sure there is effective cross-agency working to consider the needs and aspirations of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children, young people and families in their planning of services.

Develop strategies to encourage the full participation of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities in Gypsy, Roma and Traveller History Month in June.

**Local authority support for schools**

Support schools in acquiring accurate information on previous schooling and country of
origin of new arrivals, particularly Eastern European Roma migrant workers’ children.

Provide appropriate in-service training for all school staff, including governors and lunchtime staff with the specific focus on all the issues surrounding voluntary ethnicity self-ascription including anti-racist bullying policies.

Provide relevant in-service training for school secretaries and/or staff responsible for admissions and public relations.

Work with Education Welfare Officers, Admissions Officers and school staff to improve the accuracy of ethnicity and English as an Additional Language (EAL) data in schools.

Ensure schools and other education providers own culturally specific books, materials and other learning resources.

Develop a strategy to engage with parents and communities to discuss the issues surrounding voluntary ethnicity self-ascription.

Assist pupils, parents and schools to challenge negative and inaccurate media coverage of these communities in keeping with the duties of schools under the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000.

Recruit professional staff from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller backgrounds.

Raise awareness of Eastern European Roma families and established Traveller communities to enable meetings, sharing of experiences and support.

Ensure that members of the communities are aware of their rights and responsibilities regarding Race Equality issues and the benefits and safeguards inherent in accurate ethnicity self ascription.

Monitor and evaluate the impact and effectiveness of this range of policies for raising community confidence to voluntarily self-ascribe their true ethnicity status.

**Actions for schools**

Ensure that all school staff, including non-teaching staff and governors, receive full information on the minority ethnicity status of Gypsy/Roma and Travellers of Irish Heritage and link this to the schools’ duties under Race Relations legislation.

Ensure that the social and aesthetic environment of the school is specifically and explicitly welcoming, reassuring and affirmative of respectful acceptance of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities, their culture, history and languages.

Devise strategies to enable equal opportunities for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller parents who may have had little access to schooling/the written word and/or whose first language is not English, to understand the ethnicity ascription process and declare themselves accurately.

Ensure that the curriculum is inclusive and provides information on the cultural, historical and linguistic backgrounds of these communities.

Ensure that policy and practice is applied equally across all groups in relation to race equality and anti-racist bullying.
Develop a strategy that always doubly scrutinises any pending decision to exclude a pupil from these communities.

Work in close co-operation with the Traveller Education Support Service (TESS) to devise strategies to extend the school’s ability to involve parents from these communities in the school. Work also with TESS on increasing the accuracy of data collection regarding language and ethnicity.

Develop strategies to encourage the full participation of all pupils in Gypsy, Roma and Traveller History Month in June.

Recruit professional staff and school governors from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller backgrounds.

**Other areas covered**

The guidance also includes sections on:

- the benefits of increasing self declared ethnicity
- some useful case studies
- links to the Race Equality Duty and dealing with racist incidents
- useful websites.

**Comment**

The raising of pupils’ achievement usually relies not only on action by schools but also on having appropriate support by other agencies and services for families and children. It is no different for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children. The guidance is excellent on how Local Authorities can support schools and on the role of schools themselves. If councillors, headteachers and governors follow the recommendations in the guidance there will be improvements in the self esteem, school attendance and levels of achievement of these groups of children. But there is too little emphasis on the need for other council services such as planning and housing to support these communities. For further information on planning issues around Gypsy and Traveller caravan sites see ‘Related briefings’.

Councils that provide suitable sites for these communities with good transport and health services as well as access to inclusive schools, will be better able to improve the health of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities, and their children’s levels of achievement, and then be in a better position to encourage them to self-declare their ethnic group as part of the School Census process. One of the main messages in the guidance is the importance of encouraging these communities to provide such information. Unless the data collected on ethnic groups is more accurate it will be difficult to get a true picture about the extent of need and how to target resources and monitor the impact of the actions taken.

The guidance also emphasises the need to raise awareness of experiences of Eastern European Roma families who have recently arrived and help them make links with the established Traveller communities to enable them to share experiences and be better supported.

The guidance is useful and is based on current practice by some local authorities and children’s services. If councils also ensure that housing and other local partners work across the board to tackle prejudice and violence against Gypsies, Roma and Traveller, communities, the goal of raising their children’s achievement will be more achievable.

http://www.csn.info/csn/briefing-detail.jsp?id=1841&md=0&section=briefing 19/05/2008
Councillors need to ask what their council are doing to promote the first Gypsy, Roma Traveller History Month in June 2008 as this initiative will provide positive messages to these communities and should also help reduce the prejudice often experienced by Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller people.

Additional Information

CSN Seminar on tackling bullying on 12 June 2008.

We are running a seminar on ‘Tackling bullying: what local authorities and partners can do’. This will include looking at strategies to reduce all forms of bullying, including bullying of Gypsies, Roma and Traveller pupils. For more information and a booking form click here http://www.csn.info/csn/events-detail.jsp?id=152&md=0§ion=events

The first Gypsy, Roma and Traveller History Month happens in June 2008. More information is available about it aims and the events being planned at http://www.grthm.co.uk/

In April 2008 the DCSF issued a booklet The National Strategies – raising the achievement of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Pupils (April 2008) and a DVD on case studies of good practice, showing how three schools have developed support for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils. To access this DCSF booklet go to ‘Related Links’.

The CSN booklet, Educating Gypsy and Travellers Children (2005), has been popular with Councils and Traveller Education Support Services as a way to promote more general awareness in schools and among services of the need to support these pupils and their families. The booklet is downloadable from our website and is free of charge to LGIU or CSN members. To download or purchase go to http://www.csn.info/csn/publication-detail.jsp?id=131&md=0§ion=publication

The General Teaching Council has Traveller education resources on their website available at http://www.gtce.org.uk/networks/achieve/resources/travellers_spring08/

Covers

- Education
- Children’s services

Question
Related links

- DCSF guidance 2008 and 2003
- The National Strategies DCSF April 2008

Related briefings

- Planning for Gypsy and Traveller Caravan sites

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