



# Aiming High: Raising the Achievement of Gypsy Traveller Pupils

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## *A Guide to Good Practice*

department for

**education and skills**

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## **Acknowledgement**

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## Foreword

All children and young people should be able to achieve their potential, whatever their ethnic and cultural background and which ever school they attend.

Working towards and achieving good practice in the education of Gypsy Traveller pupils is the responsibility of everyone within the education system – DfES, LEAs, schools, teachers, governors, the Traveller Education Support Services, parents and pupils. Many schools already have effective policies and practices in place which ensures that these children are fully integrated into school life. For others, there may be some way to go.

Schools will want to learn from what has been shown to work. This document offers advice and practical guidance on action you can take to raise the achievement of Gypsy Traveller pupils ensuring their educational and social inclusion. I hope that you will find it useful.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Stephen Twigg'.

Stephen Twigg MP  
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Schools

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Any school, anywhere, may have Gypsy Traveller pupils on roll. Raising the achievement of Gypsy Traveller pupils is the responsibility of everyone within the education system and a significant measure of the effectiveness of policies to combat educational and social exclusion. Ofsted<sup>1</sup> has shown that Gypsy Traveller pupils, mostly either Gypsy/Roma or Travellers of Irish Heritage, have the lowest results of any ethnic minority group and are the groups most at risk in the education system.
- 1.2 This is not a new issue. The Swann report<sup>2</sup> identified Gypsy 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 Traveller parents and their children's schools. Evidence is that access is steadily improving<sup>3</sup>, although there is still a long way to go, especially for those children who are travelling from place to place and for the secondary age group in particular. Attention is now focusing strongly on what can be done, once children are enrolled in school, to sustain their attendance and to continue to raise achievement.
- 1.3 This document, aimed at all school staff, offers advice and practical guidance on action which can help these pupils improve their attendance and achievement

### The Gypsy Traveller Communities

- 1.4 A number of different groups are covered by the generic term Traveller: English and Welsh Gypsies, Irish and Scottish Travellers, Showmen (Fairground people) and Circus people, Bargees (occupational boat dwellers) and New Travellers. Most of these communities have a long tradition of a travelling lifestyle, although their history and customs vary.
- 1.5 The term Traveller is acceptable to most members of these groups because Gypsy is a term that can be perceived as having negative connotations and is acceptable only to some. This is very much the case with families from Eastern and Central Europe and 'Roma' is very much the universally preferred term. Fairground people, who prefer to be called 'Showmen', Circus people and Bargees have their own traditional occupations and history of planned movement. A large percentage of the total population of the Gypsy Traveller communities, estimated at 350,000, live in housing, though exact figures are not known. Others live on local authority, or privately owned caravan sites or are resident on their own plot of land. Approximately one-fifth of the non-housed Gypsy Traveller population have no secure place to stay, and are moving between unauthorised encampments. Living in housing is *not* seen as an ultimate goal for many families.

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<sup>1</sup> Raising the Attainment of Minority Ethnic Pupils, Ofsted 1999

<sup>2</sup> DfES Committee of Enquiry into the Education of Children from Ethnic Minority Groups, Education for All, (The Swann Report) 1985

<sup>3</sup> DfEE Annual Reports on Traveller Education Summary 1997/8

## Family mobility

- 1.6 Mobility is a distinguishing feature of all Traveller communities. The high level of movement required for Fairground and Circus businesses means that their families have a seasonal pattern to their lives, which for some can be up to eleven months of the year. Children who travel with a circus usually attend a new school every four or five days.
- 1.7 Although Gypsy Traveller groups, like all groups of people, have long histories, their culture does not remain static. A major feature of Gypsy Traveller communities has been their ability to adapt to changing circumstances, both economic and social, whilst retaining a central identity.

## 2. HOW SCHOOLS CAN RAISE THE ACHIEVEMENT OF GYPSY TRAVELLER PUPILS

- 2.1 Everyone in schools want to see all their pupils succeed. The long experience of schools and the Traveller Education Support Services leads to the conclusion that the following particular factors are important in influencing the achievements of these pupils.
- **The experience of racism and social exclusion:** Gypsy Traveller pupils can be treated unfairly and less equally than others, often without intent and knowledge, because of policies and practices in place in some schools. For example, they are disproportionately represented amongst pupils who are excluded.<sup>4</sup>
  - **Teacher knowledge and expectations:** A lack of knowledge of the communities, lifestyles, cultures and languages can lead to schools being unaware that it is beneficial for pupils to see their home culture reflected in a positive way in the school curriculum and respected in school organisation. Low expectations, which may be based on misplaced ideas that the pupils will not be staying long in the school or unchallenged stereotypes, can lead to them not being encouraged to reach their potential.
  - **Parental education and aspirations:** Many Gypsy Traveller parents have had little or no education or have had poor quality experiences, especially in secondary schools. They often have few literacy skills making it difficult for them to know how best to support their children. Some parents also do not appreciate the relevance of the secondary curriculum to their children's future and see it as undermining their own values and aspirations for their children.
  - **Interrupted educational experience:** Families may be working seasonally or are subject to unpredictable forced movement, hindering access to school or to a lower priority given to school attendance.

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<sup>4</sup> Social Inclusion: Pupil Support DfEE Circular 10/99

2.2 The experience of successful schools has been that the following has been particularly important in challenging unintentional racism and changing attitudes:

- **Informed leadership and an ethos of respect** which creates a school culture in which the needs of Gypsy Traveller pupils are effectively addressed. Head teachers, governors and senior managers with a clear understanding and commitment to promoting equality find that the barriers facing these pupils can be dismantled by their clear and positive leadership. **Training, which raises expectations and enhances all staffs' knowledge and understanding** is essential so that the school can take collective responsibility for challenging negative stereotypes and promoting good practice. **A culturally relevant and affirming curriculum** is important for all pupils. It is particularly important for children and young people from Gypsy Traveller backgrounds to see their culture, history, language and values reflected in their school experience. All schools, whether or not Gypsy Travellers are on roll, should have resources in classrooms and libraries which give a positive view of their culture and lifestyle. This adds to the quality and accuracy of knowledge for all children.

**Witchford Village College**, a rural secondary college has children from Gypsy and fairground backgrounds. The social inclusion of these pupils is a key feature of the college. Profiles of each child's progress, attainment and college engagement are drawn up and regularly maintained. Early interventions on issues of attendance, parental support and pupil behaviour keep the confidence of their parents in the college's efforts to integrate their children. Continued attendance at the college is confirmed by the Principal's and Governors' clearly stated and written commitment to Gypsy Traveller pupils.

2.3 Schools that have **developed an approach to induction for newly arrived pupils, which addresses their social as well as academic needs**, have been most successful with Gypsy Traveller pupils. Effective actions include:

- Administrative staff are welcoming to parents and pupils and sensitively offer help with filling in forms if needed;
- Pupils have a labelled place to put their belongings and a place to keep work in advance of arrival;
- The head teacher meets parents and pupils and explains school policies and procedures, especially pupil health and safety, bullying and race equality and agrees how the school and family will communicate, such as by mobile phone or through outreach Traveller Education Support Service staff;
- Pupils are given a buddy who will look after them at break times and explain school routines;

- Pupils are paired with others in the classroom who will offer peer support for curriculum access if needed;
- Targeted use is made of both peripatetic Traveller Education Support Service staff and materials and school support staff to ensure that the class teacher is able to offer the pupil access to the on-going curriculum as soon as possible;
- A key named person is designated for the Gypsy Traveller pupils to contact about any issues which arise for them within or outside school;
- A sanctuary area is identified, where pupils worried about bullying or harassment or overwhelmed by school pressures can retreat; and
- Staff are fully informed of the pupils' situation and informal training may be given;

2.4 As a result an open, welcoming atmosphere is generated which affirms the pupils' culture and respects their lifestyle, for example, culturally reflective resources are used in the teaching and learning for all pupils.

- **Raising the profile of race equality within the school** will lead to more effective practice for all pupils and promote respect for minority ethnic groups, including Gypsy Travellers. **Ethnic monitoring and data collection** at school level is fundamental in providing the means for schools to analyse the impact of their policies and procedures on Gypsy Traveller pupils. This analysis enables resources to be targeted most effectively, raises expectations and ensures accountability. Successful implementation and monitoring of the schools Race Equality Policy will ensure that schools fulfil their duty to promote good race relations.
- **Providing equal educational opportunities** for these pupils presents a challenge to ensure that differences in culture and lifestyle are not seen in deficit terms.<sup>5</sup> For example, Gypsy Traveller pupils should not automatically be regarded as having Special Educational Needs (SEN). Many Gypsy Traveller pupils are underachieving because of poor access and lack of opportunity to learn, rather than any learning difficulty. Working with the Traveller Education Support staff can help schools distinguish between learning delay caused by interrupted education and learning difficulty caused by special educational needs.
- **Involving Traveller parents and the wider community** positively and imaginatively in the life and development of the school is vital in raising aspirations and expectations. Recruiting and supporting Gypsy Traveller parents to be school governors, inviting them to work in schools as mentors and teaching assistants, naming key staff as contacts for parents are strategies which provide positive role models for all.

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<sup>5</sup> Working Towards Inclusive Education: Aspects of good practice for Gypsy Traveller Pupils DfEE Research Brief No 238 Kalwant Bhopal with Institute of Education, London November 2000



### School administrators training sessions

A Traveller Education Support Service invited a small group of school administrators to a morning session to discuss good practice on welcoming Traveller children into school, as first impressions are so important to families. They had a mix of experienced school administrators and some of whom had had Gypsy Traveller children into school for the first time that year. During the session they worked on the text of a booklet of practical guidelines for school administrators and head teachers, which later went into schools.

Examples of strategies known to encourage regular attendance are:

- First day follow up of non-attenders, which conveys the message that the pupil's presence is valued;
- A high level of positive contact between schools and parents;
- Specialist training and advice for school staff on the varied circumstances faced by pupils, encouraging sensitive responses;
- Audit of curriculum provision, social support, bullying and race equality practice to ensure that these are not factors in poor attendance;
- Study support and targeted teaching and mentoring support which create a quick experience of success; and
- A pastoral support system which alerts staff to potential difficulties.

### Promoting continuity of learning

2.5 Where pupils have a mobile lifestyle their education can be interrupted in many ways: seasonal movement as a result of work, including on a travelling fair or circus; travelling to attend important family and annual traditional events such as festivals and horse fairs; all year round mobility because of a lack of a secure place due to inadequate site provision nationally. To protect the continuity of learning for Gypsy Traveller pupils Dual Registration is permitted.<sup>6</sup> If parents inform their 'base' school or the Traveller Education Support Service that the family will be travelling and intend to return by a given time, the school may keep the child's school place for them and record their absence as authorised. The child can register at other schools whilst the family is travelling.

2.6 Specific and sometimes innovative methods to promote continuity of learning are needed, for example:

- ensuring continuity of school wherever possible, including providing transport to allow pupils to maintain attendance at a school, whilst the family is moving within a local area;

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<sup>6</sup> DfES Circular 10/99 Social Inclusion:Pupil Support

- having flexible LEA and school structures in place to facilitate **continuity of schooling**, including allowing children to start school as soon as practicable, liaising with Traveller Education Support Service staff to pre-arrange access to schools and provide support during their early days/weeks in school; support for the pupil to allow **access to the curriculum without undue interruption** including liaison between families, schools, Traveller Education Support Service staff over the transfer of educational information.
- **School-based distance learning** is particularly successful in minimising the effects of discontinuity, where school attendance is not possible, for example, when families have relatively predictable patterns of movement. It allows teachers to respond to pupils' diverse learning needs as in the National Curriculum inclusion principles "taking action to maintain interest and continuity of learning for pupils who may be absent for extended periods of time".

#### A school-based distance learning scheme in action

During the period when the pupils are in school the class or subject teachers and Traveller Education Support Service teacher all work together to plan the curriculum areas to be covered. The material is differentiated for independent learning and packaged in attractive binders/folders in 'bite size bits' depending on the needs of the individual pupil. Parents are invited to a school meeting where the distance learning work is discussed and the best means of returning and exchanging the packs for example, weekly, monthly, by post, in person.

On returning to school at the end of the season parents are invited to a welcome back meeting and children receive certificates for work well done. Parents, school and Traveller Education Support Service staff meet again prior to the next travelling season to look at ways of improving distance learning, supporting children and maintaining links with the school.

### 3. LIFTING BARRIERS TO INCLUSION - WIDENING PARTICIPATION

#### National Strategies

- 3.1 Local Sure Start programmes aim to transform the life chances of children under 4 years, particularly those living in areas of disadvantage. A key requirement of Sure Start is that the services are non-stigmatising, culturally appropriate and sensitive to particular families' needs.
- 3.2 Local Sure Start programmes frequently work with Traveller Education Support Services and many devise their own outreach or other services to help families with young children.

### Sure Start Lawley Plus in Telford

Sure Start has been working for over 2 years with families on a 40 plot, council owned site in Ketley. A purpose built play area, designed and built with the help of the families is proving invaluable in developing links between them and the programme.

One of the biggest challenges is that families are constantly moving in and out of the area and aren't always aware of the Sure Start services on offer. The programme runs weekly home visits and 'fun days' during the school holidays which have helped build good relationships with more permanent residents who now liaise with the Sure Start programme and new arrivals.

- 3.3 **Pre-school and Early years Education.** Few of the Gypsy Traveller pupils currently in schools have had the opportunity to attend any form of pre-school or early years setting. Any child without any pre-school experience is already at risk of underachievement. Gypsy Traveller families who move seasonally are likely to miss out on the usual forms of baseline assessment in Reception classes. Good practice in this area includes obtaining information from nursery classes or undertaking a later assessment for the child's records.

### Promoting learning through play

A number of Traveller Education Support Services have devised Play Boxes and Play Sacks, focused on the six areas of learning for the Foundation Stage, and for loan to parents. Staff have been trained in using the resource, which contain high quality learning materials, and then go on to share their training with parents, who then use them with their young children. Schools can then capitalise on these early experiences in the home, in their links with parents and their work with the youngest children.

- 3.4 **The National Curriculum programmes of study<sup>7</sup>** set out what most pupils should be taught at each key stage - but teachers should teach the knowledge, skills and understanding in ways that suit their pupils' abilities. This may mean choosing knowledge, skills and understanding from earlier or later key stages, so that individual pupils can make progress and show what they can achieve. A similarly flexible approach will be needed to take account of any gaps in pupils' learning resulting from missed or interrupted schooling.
- 3.5 **The statutory programme of Citizenship** ensures that all pupils will be taught about the origins and implications of the diverse national, regional, religious and ethnic groups in the UK and the need for mutual respect and understanding. Through citizenship education pupils have opportunities to learn about the Gypsy Traveller history, culture, languages and life-style. The Department has funded the development of a resource pack which will present a full and rounded picture of Traveller life, culture, history and

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<sup>7</sup> 'Inclusion: providing effective learning opportunities for all pupils' QCA NC Online 2003 and 'Evaluating Educational Inclusion: Guidance for Inspectors and Schools', Ofsted 2000

languages, focusing on engendering a respect for, and a valuing of, diversity in our society.

### **Alphabox**

One Traveller Education Support Service has devised a set of materials suitable for use with pupils who start school for the first time in Key Stage 2. It includes resources not usually found in classrooms for older pupils such as simple picture dictionaries, clearview folders, magnetic letters, phonic skills games, early reading books and tapes, early basic skills CD-ROMs. It contains a Pupil File with content free frameworks for independent recording of work and other worksheets to support early literacy, as well as a Teacher File which includes a programme of SMART targets and pupil-friendly target sheets.

- 3.6 **The Primary Strategies for Literacy and Numeracy** include intervention and booster programmes for use in schools, which make changing schools much easier for pupils. These provide a national basis for common language to transfer information about academic attainment and needs. They also provide an excellent link of continuity in learning between early years and the KS3 National Strategy, with specific programmes for use at transfer from Year 6 to Year 7.
- 3.7 **The Key Stage 3 National Strategy** aims to raise standards in the early years of secondary education for all pupils, ensuring that pupils should receive similar learning experiences, regardless of any movement from one part of the country to another. The KS3 English and mathematics frameworks ensure continuity and progression from KS2 to KS3 and between schools. There is also targeted support in years 7, 8 and 9. The KS3 Strategy includes a suite of materials called 'reading, writing and mathematics challenges', designed to support focused 1-1 mentoring programmes and aim to quickly increase pupils' confidence and skills in identified areas. These resources could be of great benefit to Gypsy Traveller pupils in years 7 and 8.

### **The Smiths Secondary Literacy Programme**

Devised by experienced Traveller Education Support teachers and Literacy advisers, this programme is based on a specially written novel about a Traveller family. It includes a huge amount of support materials for literacy, which are highly differentiated and make it suitable for use in a class which may contain beginner readers.

- 3.8 **Recent reforms to vocational education at KS4**, such as the introduction of the 'Increased Flexibility for 14-16 Year Olds' (IFP) programme, and the 8 new GCSE's available in vocational subjects, will lift barriers to inclusion for those Gypsy Traveller pupils who face serious motivational or other factors. These provide the same standards and rigour as other GCSEs and so represent a positive choice for young people.

- 3.9 **Proposals for changes to the KS4 curriculum**, so that it provides greater flexibility and a range of options which pupils will find attractive and motivating, can improve retention of Gypsy Traveller young people in education. For example, there will be a new statutory requirement for all young people to undertake some work-related learning.

In North Derbyshire there are 2 Fairground yards. The children always attended primary school but the few who transferred to secondary school did not usually remain past Year 9, and there were 5 boys showing signs of dropping out.

In response to the parents' and pupils' request for a more practical curriculum, the local Traveller Education Support Service obtained funding from the Careers Service and the Learning and Skills Council for a local training provider to run a welding course. A home/school agreement was drawn up and signed, requiring the pupils to attend school 4 days a week and to attend the training for the remaining day; to complete their distance learning materials whilst travelling and return to school to take their tests. They kept to this agreement, returning to Year 10. In the first year, all 5 pupils gained a British Standard welding qualification. The training provider was astonished by the very high standard of achievement, commitment and enthusiasm shown by the pupils, and the school noticed improved attendance.

The provider is running a NVQ level 1 course for the Year 10 pupils and a Gypsy Traveller girl has joined the basic welding course. Feedback from the parents and pupils has been very positive and some of the pupils are aspiring to take GCSE's.

- 3.10 **The Connexions Service** brings together schools, colleges, the Youth Service, voluntary and community groups, careers services, LEAs and all agencies involved in providing support to young people. It provides young people with access to guidance and support that enables them to engage in education, training or employment and have a successful transition to adulthood. It should help in providing an effective network which specialist workers in LEAs can access in their efforts to provide meaningful educational opportunities for young Gypsy Travellers. The assistance of Connexions, both within and outside the school or college can also help combat the risks and effects of both temporary and permanent exclusion.

## **Race Equality**

- 3.11 Romany Gypsies and Travellers of Irish Heritage are recognised ethnic groups under the Race Relations Act 1976. The Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000, which was introduced in response to the identification of 'institutional racism' in the Stephen Lawrence Report, gives public bodies, including schools, a statutory duty to promote race equality.
- 3.12 In addition, there are specific duties on schools to help them meet the general duty. These are a means to an end which should result in improved educational experiences for all pupils, including Gypsy Travellers, and not become a bureaucratic exercise.

These duties are to:

- Prepare a written statement of the school's policy for promoting race equality, and to act upon it;
- Assess the impact of school policies on pupils, staff and parents from different racial groups, in particular, the impact on attainment levels of these pupils; and
- Monitor the operation of all the school's policies, in particular their impact on the attainment levels of pupils from different racial groups.

3.13 The Act is a powerful tool which can be used to raise the achievement of Gypsy Traveller pupils. By monitoring the outcomes of policies on all minority ethnic pupils, schools are better able to identify and remove any unintentional barriers to achievement of pupils from Gypsy Traveller backgrounds.

3.14 Ofsted will inspect schools' compliance with the Act as part of their regular inspections. Their new inspection framework places a strong emphasis on race equality and the need for schools to plan action to improve achievement gaps. Ofsted's guidance on Evaluating Educational Inclusion sets out for schools what it means to be an inclusive school and is a valuable tool for monitoring and evaluating practice.

### **The Traveller Education Support Service**

3.15 Most LEAs provide specialist Traveller Education Support staff to work with schools, Governing Bodies and other agencies to promote educational approaches which are positively inclusive of Gypsy Traveller experiences and lifestyle. Staff provide practical advice and support to schools and mainstream Education Welfare Officers to establish good communications with families, explain the importance of regular attendance to their child's progress at school, and support outreach work to build up successful relationships with Gypsy Traveller families and communities.

3.16 Nationally staff prioritise highly mobile pupils and can frequently assist schools with baseline assessment for older pupils, curriculum advice and materials, as well as the transfer of educational information between LEAs. The Educational Contacts for Travelling Families<sup>8</sup> booklet lists the contact details for all Traveller Education Support Services nationally.

### **National Funding**

3.17 Gypsy Traveller children can benefit from a range of grants and funding mechanisms, including:

**The Vulnerable Children Grant**, one of the DfES' Standards Fund grants supports activity specifically designed to secure improved access to education, more regular school attendance and satisfactory levels of achievement of a range of children, including those with a Gypsy Traveller background, who may be at particular risk of educational and social exclusion.

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<sup>8</sup> Produced by the National Association of Teachers of Travellers, The European Federation for the Education of Children of Occupational Travellers and Showmen organisations, funded by DfES

Support should be aimed at securing unhindered access to, and full integration in, mainstream educational opportunities.

The Children's Fund is locally determined and flexible. This makes it particularly good for meeting the needs of diverse and changing communities, adding value to other services and working across boundaries of home and school. Projects have an emphasis on supporting children from 5 to 13 years old, within the home and the school and in the wider community. It is particularly useful for providing innovative support to those Gypsy Traveller children and families who are at risk of educational and social exclusion.

#### 4. NEXT STEPS

- 4.1 The Department is committed to ensuring that there is real equality of opportunity and the highest possible standards for all pupils in all schools. To ensure that this happens, Gypsy Traveller pupils must be seen as an integral part of all schools and LEAs policies and programmes, not just an 'after thought' or 'add-on'.
- 4.2 It is recommended that the following actions are taken by schools and LEAs:
  - Pause and reflect on current practices and use the guidance as a tool to devise strategies to raise the achievement of Gypsy Traveller pupils;
  - Undertake a planned impact assessment of all your policies, in particular the ones which have, or could have, an adverse impact on the attainment and achievement of Gypsy Traveller pupils;
  - Ensure that you have mechanisms in place to monitor the impact of your policies, in particular those policies which have an impact on the attainment and achievement of Gypsy Traveller pupils;
  - Ensure that within the National Curriculum subjects, particularly Citizenship, every opportunity is taken to positively reflect Gypsy Traveller history, culture, language and life-style;
  - Ensure that you have a written Action Plan clearly setting out timescales, outcomes and targets; and
  - Ensure that Gypsy Traveller pupils are included in the Education Development Plan, which should state clearly how the LEA will close the achievement gap between Gypsy Traveller pupils and national targets.

## 5. FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

- Q. We have never had Gypsy Traveller children in our school before and a family has just moved into the local area, what support is available to help us?
- A. Your local Traveller Education Support Service, part of the LEA, will be able to offer you practical advice, guidance and support to help you liaise with the family and settle the children into your school. If the children have had an interrupted education they will also be able to help with baseline assessments and, if necessary, provide specialist support to your teachers and school staff.
- Q. A Gypsy Traveller family has requested places at school for their children even though they are camped on the roadside and may not be here long. Do I have to admit them?
- A. Yes. They should be admitted on the same basis as any other children. Local Education Authorities have a statutory duty to ensure that education is available for all children of compulsory school age in their area appropriate to their age, abilities, aptitudes and any special educational needs they might have. This duty applies to children whether they are residing permanently or temporarily in the area and therefore includes Gypsy Traveller children.
- Q. Three Gypsy Traveller siblings asked for places mid-term. We have room for the Year 3 and Year 6 children, but our Year 1 Class already has 30 children. Will the parents have to go to appeal for a place in this class?
- A. The Infant Class Size legislation makes sensible allowance for the entry of an additional child in certain limited circumstances. In the case of Gypsy Traveller pupils this would usually arise “where a child moves into an area outside the normal admissions round and there is no other school which would provide suitable education within a reasonable distance<sup>9</sup>”. There are no special provisions under the Regulations for Gypsy Traveller pupils, who must fall into one of the general categories to become an excepted pupil.
- Q. We had a child on the school roll for a few months but they seem to have left the area as we have not heard of them for a considerable time. Can we take them off roll?
- A. It would be reasonable to expect the parents to let you know if they are going travelling and if they expect their child to return to your school. If they have not done so and the child has been continuously absent from school for a period of not less than 4 weeks and the school and LEA have failed, after ‘reasonable enquiry’, to locate the pupil, they can be taken off roll. However, if you are the Base School for this pupil, their absence should be recorded as ‘authorised’ and a place kept open for them. If you are not sure whether you are the Base school, your LEA Traveller Education Support Service will be able to offer advice.

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<sup>9</sup> The Education(Infant Class Sizes)(England) Regulations 1998



Q. We have Gypsy Traveller children in school at the time of the end of Key Stage Tests, what do we do?

A. If the children are on your school roll, you should administer the tests in the same way as you would do for all other children. Their marks should be added to the school mark sheet for each subject taken, their scripts should be sent for marking in the usual way, and you should report their results to their parents.

If the children have dual registration and they are 'guests' in your school, you should administer the tests in the normal way and then pass the results to their base school which should take 'ownership' of the results and report them to their parents.

Q. We are an over-subscribed school. Our over-subscription criteria include giving preference to children whose older siblings have attended the school and a newly arrived Traveller family is objecting to this on the grounds that it discriminates against them. Are they right?

A. Admission Authorities should carefully consider the possible impact, direct or indirect, on equal opportunities of their criteria. Bearing in mind the Race Relations (Amendment) Act, your criteria could disproportionately (even if unintentionally) disadvantage Gypsy Traveller families who have more recently moved into the area.

Q. How do we record absences of Gypsy Traveller children?

A. In exactly the same way as for any other child with the exception of instances where it is known that the family is travelling away from the area. In that case the mark "T" or other chosen letter is put in the register and the absence is recorded as authorised.

Q. What do we do if the poor attendance of a Traveller child is causing concern?

A. Your local Traveller Education Service may have a specialist Education Welfare Officer who will assist the school, in the first instance, in liaising with the family to improve attendance rates. If the issues persist then the mainstream Education Welfare Officer should be involved and procedures followed as for any child, with due regard for the need for sensitivity.

Gypsy Traveller parents are protected from conviction for the non-attendance of their children at school, where they can demonstrate the following:

- that they are engaged in a trade or business of such a nature that requires them to travel from place to place;
- the child has attended at a school as a registered pupil as regularly as the nature of that trade permits; and
- where the child has attained the age of six years, they have attended school for at least 200 half day sessions during the preceding year.

This concession is designed to protect Gypsy Traveller parents from unreasonable prosecution. *200 sessions should not be regarded as the norm.* It does not relieve parents of their legal duties to ensure that their children are receiving efficient, suitable, full-time education even when not at school.

- Q. There are always at least ten Gypsy Traveller children in our school as we are the closest school to a Traveller site that opened six years ago. The local Traveller Education Service put plenty of support in for the first few years but they now give us support only when new children arrive even though we keep requesting extra. Shouldn't we be having more help?
- A. Support from Traveller Education Support Services is targeted towards the most vulnerable children and the first priorities would usually be:
- highly mobile children to secure access and attendance at school:
  - transfer to secondary school; and
  - maintenance of attendance at secondary school.

When a Gypsy Traveller child enrolls in a school the child "belongs" to that school, not the Traveller Education Support Service. Those schools that are located near sites and always have Gypsy Traveller children on roll usually develop their own expertise in this area of work and may well become beacons of good practice for other schools who take these children in less frequently. However, Traveller Education Support staff can always be contacted to discuss specific issues and can provide a wide range of practical help and advice.

**Copies of this publication can be obtained from:**

DfES Publications  
PO Box 5050  
Sherwood Park  
Annesley  
Nottingham NG15 0DJ  
Tel: 0845 6022260  
Fax: 0845 6033360  
Email: [dfes@prolog.uk.com](mailto:dfes@prolog.uk.com)

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