

Good Practice Guidance for Supporting Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Children

A summary of the National strategies materials:
'Moving forward together: Raising Gypsy, Roma
and Traveller achievement' and 'Building futures:
Developing trust' (Crown Copyright 2009)



Compiled by: Janet Millward, Shropshire Traveller Education Service

Jo Softley, Stoke-on-Trent Traveller Education Service

Good Practice Guidance for Supporting Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Children in Primary Schools

The Collective Grouping of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Communities Include:

- Gypsies
- Scottish or Welsh Travellers
- Travellers of Irish Heritage
- Roma
- Show people & Fairground families
- Circus families
- New Travellers
- Bargee or canal boat families

Points to Consider:

- Many GRT families do not ascribe themselves to their appropriate ethnic group; this may be due to the persistent racism experienced by the GRT communities. Consequently they often remove themselves from mainstream society and this can create challenges in developing trusting relationships.
- Accommodation and mobility is an issue for about 20% of GRT families as it is officially recognised that there is a lack of authorised site provision nationally. This impacts on children's access to education and poses considerable risks to staying safe and being healthy.
- When communicating with families schools may presuppose knowledge and skill levels that not all GRT parents will have. Be clear about these messages and flexible in choices of communication methods.
- Whilst many GRT families speak English as a first language, a range of languages are used within GRT communities e.g. Romanese entirely as their home language, some Romany interspersed with English words (Gypsy and Roma families), or Shelta, otherwise known as Gammon or Cant, with English words (Traveller of Irish Heritage families). It should be noted that Roma families sometimes speak 3 or 4 languages.
- Achievement levels of GRT children are persistently lower than any other groups and the gaps are widening. However, research shows that when given the right experiences in schools GRT pupils can achieve as well as children from any other group.
- Attendance: 1908 Children Act supports GRT families' legal right to travel, with a reduced, minimum attendance of 200 sessions per year.
- GRT pupils have the highest rates of exclusions nationally and attendance rates are below the national average in many areas.

Statutory Requirements:

- It is vital that schools and settings have a clear understanding that Gypsies, Roma, Travellers of Irish Heritage and Scottish Travellers are identified as ethnic minority groups under the Race Relations legislation. *see below
- GRT children have the same rights to unhindered access to education as all others. The School Admissions Code of Practice (2003) requires all authorities and admissions forums to have in-year fair access protocols in place. The protocols cover all maintained schools and academies in any LA area. The LA should ensure that access to suitable education is secured quickly for children who, on arrival in the area, have no school place.
- Schools and settings are required to collect and analyse attainment and other data, by ethnicity, in order to monitor and set targets to close the achievement gap.

*The Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 places a clear statutory duty on public bodies, including schools and settings, to:

- Provide equality of opportunity
- Tackle unlawful racial discrimination
- Promote good relations between members of different ethnic communities.

New Arrivals:

- Encourage families to correctly identify their ethnicity (ascription). Benefits of correct ascription include: Positive impact on children's self-esteem and learning, schools are complying with their duties under the Race Relations Act and it helps SIPs to support schools in raising achievement when they are fully aware of the diversity of pupils.
- Build up trust and positive relationships with families through meaningful communication.
- Develop effective links with Traveller Education Service to improve relationships with families and to build capacity within schools.
- Create a welcoming environment where GRT culture is positively represented and parents understand their role within their children's development and learning experiences
- All new arrivals need to feel part of the school's community as soon as possible, even if they are attending for a very short period of time. This will make them feel valued and reduce their sense of exclusion.
- An induction policy that gives access to Buddy and Mentor systems.
- Clear support and guidance on school's language, rules and conventions (It is important not to assume that a child of a certain chronological age has a certain degree of knowledge about school systems. Some GRT children will have experienced intermittent schooling or a different education system and will need extra support to adapt to systems within new school settings.).
- Swift, appropriate assessment of children is essential and should be undertaken using a variety of methods in a way which will not cause undue stress. Results of assessments should be shared rapidly with staff.

Engaging with Parents:

- Ensure families feel welcomed, respected and valued.
- Enter into partnership with GRT families by listening to what they have to say and have appropriate systems in place for information gathering and sharing (minimise use of educational jargon).
- Encourage positive role models from the GRT community to be involved in the setting
- Invite parents into school to share and celebrate their children's milestones and successes informally and formally as often as possible (allay fears of organisations).
- Relationships are an important aspect of children's success in the education system and it is important to have regular dialogue with their parents as parental experiences of education can often have been negative and can, therefore, impact on their level of engagement with schools.
- Schools should challenge negative perceptions of GRT families and view parents as real partners in the education of their children.
- Schools that are effective in raising the attainment of GRT pupils make a priority of building their links with parents and the wider community
- Schools need to establish personal contact with GRT families. *see Outreach below
- Encourage parents to allow their children to go on educational visits and to attend after school activities (Parental anxieties about educational visits are common).
- Develop an active partnership with families to ensure they are fulfilling their duties in promoting community cohesion. Understanding the local context is vital if schools are to respond to the needs of their GRT children.
- Talk with parents on the playground and invite them in to school to share specific things e.g. community lunches, bingo.

***Outreach:**

Many GRT families will require outreach support during their children's education. Outreach provision is essential in building trusting relationships, signposting to other services who may not be purely educational but may have an impact on the development of the children and enabling families to understand what experiences their children will have in educational establishments and why they are beneficial.

School Improvement

Teaching & Learning:

- In traditional GRT homes children learn through participation rather than decontextualised verbal explanation. Learning involves temporal and spatial freedom.
- All pupils should access the mainstream curriculum offer and take part in age-related learning even if their literacy skills are below their peers because of interrupted learning.
- Identify gaps in schooling in order to personalise learning.
- Provide activities with clear learning outcomes.
- Inclusive, in class, high quality teaching provides the means to improve the performance of GRT pupils.
- An emphasis on Quality First Teaching ensures the greatest impact upon pupils' outcomes; prior learning is recognised and pupils' learning needs are targeted.
- A curriculum that reflects GRT cultures and allows opportunities for reflection and discussion of their cultural identities is most effective.

Achievement & Attainment:

- In order for data to be effective and support school improvement it needs to be accurate.
- In order for ethnicity data to be analysed effectively in order to create an accurate profile of this group ethnicity needs to be correctly recorded. (Ethnically disaggregated data is important as it has a strong influence on the priorities and orientation of Ofsted inspections of schools).
- School data should be used to track pupils' progress and tackle underperformance so that intervention strategies can be targeted appropriately.
- There is a marked deterioration in achievement as GRT children move through the key stages. Intervention strategies are important in closing these achievement gaps.
- Regular attendance is key to raising standards and this needs to be communicated to pupils and their parents (First day follow up, study support and targeted support, pastoral support all encourage regular attendance).
- Reducing exclusions is important in raising standards; this can be done by improving race relations within school and appropriate, swift responses to any issues arising in schools in order to resolve problems quickly.

Assessments, Interventions & Personalising Learning:

- It is important that the right interventions are used at the right time and to the best effect for these pupils.
- Use of Self-evaluation tool will enable SLT to gather information about the profile of GRT children in school.
- Three interlinking features of Assessment for Learning (AfL): day to day assessments, periodic review and sharing of judgements at transitional points, are important and relevant to the teaching and learning of GRT pupils.
- Teachers cannot personalise learning and teaching if they do not know pupils individual and group learning strengths, weaknesses and needs.
- Assessing Pupils' Progress (APP) is extremely relevant to GRT pupils and provides teachers with assessment criteria to define National Curriculum levels of attainment for each assessment focus within a subject. It is recommended that a separate assessment guidelines sheet is used for each GRT pupil. These sheets provide a common scale throughout a key stage, thereby giving teachers the tools to accurately and confidently focus on assessments of pupils' learning.
- APP enables GRT children's learning to be assessed by exemplifying them with a profile of attainment. This provides valuable information that can support discussion with the pupils themselves in order to inform their next learning steps. It also helps their parents to understand current level of their children's education and where it needs to be.
- Schools need to value Romani in the same way as other languages and to make the same considerations for GRT children as for those with EAL. However, these languages are community languages so there needs to be a sensitive approach to how they are shared in schools.

Contact details for Shropshire Traveller Education Service: Janet Millward - 01743 254363
Janet.millward@shropshire.gov.uk