



Raising the achievement of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils



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Case studies of good practice

The case studies featured on this DVD provide examples of how three schools in different contexts have developed a range of provision to support Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils.

A short written case study for each school is provided in this booklet and each school is featured separately within the DVD in sequences of no more than 20 minutes.

The three featured schools are as follows:

1. Urban primary school in the Midlands with 50% Gypsy Travellers on roll
Focus: Creating a welcoming environment, family learning and secondary links
2. Small village primary school in the north-east of England with 12% Gypsy Travellers on roll
Focus: Building high aspirations, family learning, celebrating Gypsy Traveller culture
3. Large village primary school in the south-east of England with approximately 50% Gypsy/Roma and Irish Travellers on roll
Focus: Curriculum development, transition and working with parents

Case study: Urban primary school in the Midlands with 50% Gypsy Travellers on roll

Focus: Creating a welcoming environment, family learning and secondary links

Background

This school is a Church of England primary school with 193 children on roll. The area the school serves is one of considerable social and economic deprivation. The percentage of children eligible for free school meals is 33% which is well above the national average and the percentage of children with special educational needs (SEN) is twice the national average. The majority of the children who are not Gypsy, Roma or Travellers are White British monolingual English speakers although the percentage of children learning English as an additional language is increasing and currently stands at 12%. The school has a long history of working with Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) children. Currently 86 of the children on roll are from GRT families. All are English Gypsies and all are ascribed as Gypsy/Roma on the annual school census. There is a fair degree of mobility; 52 GRT children travelled during the past year, but the majority are settled in houses or are based on the local sites living in trailers. About a third of the children come from the town's permanent Traveller site. There is a high number of children joining and leaving the school other than at the usual time of admission, with only about 30% of the children remaining from the start of Year 1 to the end of Year 6. The school is involved in a number of local and national initiatives including the Improving Boys' Writing programme, Investors in People and the National Strategies Gypsy, Roma, Traveller Achievement programme.

'The school is highly successful in integrating everyone into its work; everyone associated with the school is treated fairly and with high regard to their backgrounds, beliefs and circumstances.' (Ofsted 2005)



What is being done?

The vision for the school is to celebrate difference while ensuring that all children feel special and have an understanding and appreciation of each other's culture and lifestyle. The school has high aspirations for all children and recognises that Traveller children, in view of their transience, need to see themselves and their culture reflected from the minute they walk into the school in order to feel that this is a place where they will be supported and welcomed.



The school has a clear commitment to celebrating diversity and to extended school provision. This is evident in the displays which are prominent in shared spaces as well as in the classrooms. Breakfast and after-school groups, early years groups and parent groups all take place in the school and are seen as important in the wider provision offered to all families. There is a significant take-up by GRT families of these opportunities.



The school has worked hard to develop trust with the Traveller community and this has been achieved through the headteacher being very visible and accessible at the start and end of the day as well as through the hard work and commitment of all staff who have a clear appreciation of Traveller culture and lifestyle.



The senior leadership team (SLT) is committed to raising the achievement of GRT children and this is achieved in a number of ways:

- There is a structured approach to assessment and tracking in school. This includes monitoring individual progress and the use of visual maps to identify target groups and to track the progress of individual children. These tools are particularly useful for monitoring the progress of GRT children over time.
- Enhanced provision for a group of GRT children who did not access the Foundation Stage has included the use of the daily 'workout box' and the 'five minute box' which provide effective intervention resources and has been accompanied by focused teaching assistant (TA) support.
- The school makes good use of short, achievable, measurable early intervention programmes to support literacy development and accelerate progress.
- Data is analysed in order to track the progress of GRT children and provide access to appropriate Wave 3 interventions which have radically accelerated the children's learning particularly when they have returned from travelling.



- The school has developed an excellent relationship on the local Traveller site with parents and nursery children who may start off in the nursery on site but then move to the school nursery. By providing a teaching assistant who has responsibility for outreach work in the community,

the school has been able to make links with Traveller families through the use of a mobile library van on the site, organising visits from Sure Start and health visitors and the setting up of mother and toddler groups. These initiatives have gradually moved from the site to the school so that there is a seamless transition for Traveller parents and children into the nursery at the school, all supported by the teaching assistant who is known and trusted by the families.



- The school explicitly celebrates the diversity of the population it serves and seeks to make learning for children and parents a shared educational experience. This is achieved through a number of pupil/parent projects running throughout the year that encourage children and parents to learn together in an informal setting, with familiar staff, where children and parents feel safe and secure and are working towards an end product. Projects in the last year include pottery, puppet and mosaic making, wood carving, mural painting and gardening. In addition, parents have been encouraged to work on courses to extend their own learning such as first aid, food hygiene and childcare courses. When parents are successful in these they are encouraged to receive their accreditation certificates in assembly in front of their children in order to share their success which in turn will boost their self-esteem and strengthen parental engagement with the school and their children's learning.



- The high level of parental nurturing and care for all parents has helped to integrate the parents and children of all cultures within the school and has resulted in a high take-up by GRT parents of the activities the school offers. In addition, providing parents with positive experiences of working in the school has helped to break down barriers, foster friendships among families and created a sense of ownership and pride in the school and in their own achievements.
- The school has developed excellent links with the neighbouring secondary school, recognising that transition is a very vulnerable time for Traveller children. The secondary teacher makes early links with the school and visits prospective children with information about life at secondary school and opportunities for Traveller children to voice their fears and concerns. In doing so she provides a bridge that leads them to the next phase of their education and in turn, this has encouraged more Traveller parents to send their children to secondary school.



Outcomes

Inspired by the headteacher's drive and enthusiasm there is a clear sense of purpose permeating throughout the school which means that staff and governors are all pulling in the same direction. This has resulted in:

- good leadership and management of provision for GRT children
- a strong ethos of diversity and inclusion and a commitment to celebrating diversity
- commitment to the Every Child Matters agenda
- positive relationships with parents
- increased take-up of Early Years provision by GRT families, linking on-site provision with nursery provision in school led by the headteacher and a dedicated nursery teaching assistant
- focused targets shared with GRT children and parents
- effective tracking in respect of prior attainment of GRT children
- targeted small group work with GRT children
- highly effective, supported transfer arrangements to feeder secondary schools
- good communication between the school and the Traveller Education Service (TES) and other schools
- close working relationship with the local authority Primary Strategy Manager.

Feedback

'I think probably the biggest accolade is that the parents and the children are very proud of this school because it is their school not ours. They make a difference and that's what's important.' (Headteacher)

'It's really important that when a child has been travelling, the parent knows that when they come back there is a place available in school. We respect what they've been doing whilst away and really value their experiences out of school.'
(Year 4 teacher)

'They make you feel welcome when you walk in the school, there are Gypsy displays and wagons and horses and they treat our children exactly the same as the Gorgio children. Gorgio children aren't no less of value than our children we feel like they are all equal.' (Traveller parent)



'It doesn't matter; some people might be different, I'm glad to be different.'
(Year 6 Traveller pupil)

'When you first start, like I did in Year 2, everyone welcomes you. I sat on the table and they showed me where everything was, and I like it because sometimes when you don't know how to do the work, someone will come and help you.'
(Year 6 Traveller pupil)



'I think if you are sensitive to their needs and show that you understand their culture it is a lot easier to work with Traveller children and families.'

(Teaching assistant)

'There is obviously no reason at all why Traveller children shouldn't perform as well as anybody else. When we look at progress rates, the progress of Travellers are at least in line with other children, so when we have them they are making progress. When they are not in school, obviously that can impact negatively on their attainment.' (Headteacher)

'The nursery teaching assistant is great; she really helps our children cross that bridge between being on the Traveller site and coming into nursery at the school.'

(Traveller parent)



'There is a mutual respect between home and school, parents feel confident and comfortable about coming into school.' (Teaching assistant)



'For some Traveller parents it might be about giving them confidence to come through the door, for others it might be about opening doors to enable them to go further.' (Headteacher)

'My advice to other teachers would be you need to build relationships with the whole family, listen, be sensitive to their needs and take an open, friendly approach. It takes a long time to earn trust.' (Teaching assistant)

'Personalising the learning in secondary school to make a curriculum that has relevance to Traveller children is the key to sustaining GRT pupils' interest.' (Secondary teacher with responsibility for transition process)

'We want to celebrate difference. We need to ensure the children feel that they are special being different but equally that they have an appreciation of each other's differences and an understanding and a tolerance towards each other.' (Headteacher)



Case study: Small village primary school in the north-east of England with 12% Gypsy Travellers on roll

Focus: Building high aspirations, family learning, celebrating Gypsy Traveller culture

Background

This school is a small village community primary school. The majority of the children live in the village, although a few parents choose to bring their children to the school from the neighbouring area. The village is made up of a mix of housing and has a permanent privately-owned site for Traveller families. The village is in an ex-mining area which now has a significant level of unemployment.

The school is smaller than most primary schools and currently has 113 children on roll aged between 4 and 11 years. Twelve per cent of these children are Gypsy Travellers. There is an independent pre-school on the same site which many children attend prior to their enrolment at the school.

Foundation Stage profile data shows that on entry to school, attainment is below national expectations for many children. Attainment is very low in communication, language and literacy, with few children working at or above the expected levels for their age.

Overall, the number of children who join and leave the school during the school year is above average. The proportion of children eligible for free school meals is above average. The proportion of children with special educational needs, mainly for moderate learning difficulties, is below average. The majority of children are White British and the largest minority ethnic group is Gypsy/Roma. Currently all Traveller children attending the school ascribe themselves as Gypsy/Roma.

'Children from Traveller backgrounds achieve well owing to the very good relationships the school has established with the Traveller community, the systems that have been established to provide children with work when they are not in school, and the close relationship the school has with the local education authority Traveller Support Service. As a result, children's attendance has improved significantly over recent years and parents have come to recognise the value of education and learning as important for their children.

Children develop a high respect for the feelings and values of others and gain a very good insight into the traditions of other cultures, particularly that of the Traveller community.' (Ofsted 2005)



What is being done?

The headteacher and deputy headteacher share with staff a strong vision for the school and for the community it serves. The vision of the school is that every child should have the opportunity to achieve and that safety, security and happiness are essential conditions for learning to take place. It is recognised that children come from a variety of backgrounds and experiences. These differing backgrounds and experiences are celebrated and acknowledged in lessons and in the visual displays around the school. The school values the vibrant culture which Gypsy/Roma children bring and appreciates that sharing this culture enriches the ethos for all children.



The headteacher and deputy headteacher are committed to ensuring that the school provides an exciting environment where children will want to learn and will be keen to attend regularly. The school offers a visually stimulating environment with high quality interactive displays and varied learning opportunities. The school has high aspirations for children and the community. There is a strong belief that the outside community has much to offer the school and that the school can raise the aspirations of that community.

- **Developing trust between school and the community**

Staff meet parents individually in the playground and are keen to listen to concerns and celebrate successes as they occur. Developing trust is seen as key to any engagement with parents, carers and the community.



- **Welcome DVD**

Staff and children have worked together to produce an introductory DVD for prospective parents and children. The DVD gives a tour around the school premises and introduces key personnel and activities. Copies of the DVD are available from the warden at the Traveller site and newly arrived families are able to see what the school is like before actually stepping inside the door.

- **The use of data to identify underperforming groups and children**

The use of data is seen as key to informing teaching and learning opportunities. Pupil progress is tracked termly in order to gain a clear understanding of where children are in relation to their targets. The specific context for each child is noted and individualised programmes are put in place as necessary. The data is analysed to identify underperforming groups, and teaching and learning is appropriately contextualised to raise achievement for all children.

- **The *Fly with Me* programme**

A personalised ten-week intervention programme was developed to improve the speaking and listening skills of Key Stage 1 Gypsy Travellers as a basis for raising attainment in writing. Existing National Strategy Additional Literacy Support (ALS) and Further Literacy Support (FLS) intervention programmes were used as a starting point. This was complemented by a personalised programme using a story book with a central character of a hobby horse. The programme was entitled *Fly with Me*, 'Fly' having connotations of raising aspirations and 'with me'

inclusive of all. This captured the imagination of the targeted Key Stage 1 Gypsy Traveller children, their older siblings and parents alike. Real hobby horses were created and activities have taken place on the local Traveller site. The local authority's Traveller Education Service were partners in this work, providing resources and expertise to further enhance the programme of work with both children and parents.



● Family learning

The school has run family learning sessions for five years but it has been difficult to encourage some Gypsy Traveller parents to attend the sessions. Running alongside the children's *Fly with Me* programme, a family learning programme was developed, with the opportunity for children and parents to work together on the Traveller site. This has established trust, motivation and a sense of joint responsibility, and has increased understanding of ways in which parents can support their children's learning in writing and have a greater understanding of target setting and national expectations.



- **Building aspirations for all children**

A strong element of the school's philosophy is to build high, but achievable aspirations for every pupil. The school is working with Connexions and with the local community to provide practical opportunities, both on the school site and further afield, for Year 5 and Year 6 children to experience aspects of a range of jobs. Children have the opportunity to question visiting tradespeople and professionals about their jobs and the training and qualities needed to follow their career paths.

They are encouraged to identify qualities and key skills needed to achieve aspirations.



- **Recognition and celebration of other cultures**

There is an affirmation of different cultures throughout the curriculum and in the visual learning environment. Curriculum audits are regularly carried out to ensure that equality and diversity issues are embedded in the daily curriculum and not seen as an 'add on' or separate entity. Much recent work has moved from the celebration of cultures to the analysis of negative stereotyping and the effects this has on groups and individuals.

- **Speak up! Speak out!**

There is a high commitment to addressing race equality issues throughout the school. Children are given the opportunity to challenge their own perceptions and to understand and reflect upon the impact of their actions on others. Through daily 'Speak up! Speak out!' speaking and listening activities, the school has moved beyond celebrating all cultures into challenging stereotypes and preconceived ideas.

- **Children as young leaders**

The development of the whole child is central to the vision of the school and its community. Developing skills of leadership and responsibility are essential for the children in terms of learning lifelong skills and raising future aspirations. Upper Key Stage 2 children have many responsibilities throughout the school, including running their own ICT club for other children and being involved in a Young Sports Leaders initiative whereby they collaborate to provide fitness and team-building activities for younger children.



Outcomes

- **The use of data to identify underperforming groups and individuals**

By rigorous analysis of performance data the school was able to identify that, despite a strong foundation of working with Gypsy Traveller families, the attainment of these children, although higher than the attainment of the group nationally, was still below that of other groups in the school. This information provided a basis for the identification of a target group of Gypsy Traveller children for the *Fly with Me* programme. A baseline assessment was carried out for each child to identify the gaps in learning and to inform personalised teaching and learning programmes.

- **Fly with Me programme**

All children involved in the programme exceeded their predicted levels of attainment in writing at the end of the academic year and their comparative rate of achievement was higher than that of many in their peer group. The programme was developed with the opportunity for children and parents to work together. This has established trust, motivation and a sense of joint responsibility, and has increased understanding of ways in which parents can support their children's learning in writing and have a greater understanding of target setting and national expectations.



- **Family learning with Gypsy Traveller families**

Since the *Fly with Me* work with parents, Traveller parents are now attending the family learning sessions in school with non-Traveller parents. This year the school is focusing on the family learning opportunities of the Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL) initiative.

- **Building aspirations for all children**

In the past many Gypsy Traveller children have not transferred to secondary school; parents preferring instead to opt for Elective Home Education (EHE) post primary school. The early introduction to future career opportunities allows Traveller children and their parents to look at a range of opportunities for future economic well-being and may challenge negative perceptions about the value of secondary school for their children's future.

- **Recognition and celebration of other cultures**

Through the opportunities that the school provides, children are tolerant and respectful towards one another and towards other cultures and traditions. The emphasis on celebration of culture means that children value differences and have the self-confidence and belief to aim high in their lives.

- **Speak up! Speak out!**

The daily sessions provide an open forum where children can discuss topical issues and know that their views and responses will be valued. Not only does this raise standards in speaking and listening, it also reflects the partnership in learning that the school strives towards. Children's views are heard and responded to as a starting point for any curriculum innovation.



Feedback

'All our families bring something special to our school. The Gypsy Traveller children bring a background of experiences and knowledge that we have learnt from.' (Headteacher)

'First of all listen... let the children talk about being Travellers. Our children who have been to other schools will tell us that very often the school doesn't mention the fact that they are a Traveller pupil. In our school we actively seek to engage children and their families in conversations about being a Traveller.' (Headteacher)

'I enjoy coming to this school because they do work about Travellers instead of ignoring us, they kind of appreciate us. Not like other schools, this is a much better school.' (Year 6 Gypsy Traveller pupil)

'The school welcomed us with open arms... we came on a Sunday... they were in school on a Monday. We got a really big welcome from everyone. There's absolutely no prejudice as a travelling family and we just feel very, very happy here. I would really recommend this school for any family, any colour, any creed. I think everyone's welcome here.' (Gypsy Traveller parent)



'What the school does well for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children is what it does well for all children. It has an inclusive approach to education. What impresses me is the creativity of their approaches and the enthusiasm they bring to the programme.' (LA head of learning support services)



Case study: Large village primary school in the south-east of England with approximately 50% Gypsy/Roma and Irish Travellers on roll

Focus: Curriculum development, transition and working with parents

Background

This primary school has 210 children on roll. It includes a Foundation Stage unit which offers 52 part-time places for three-year-olds and 55 full-time places for four-year-olds. A children's centre facility is being built on the school site. The school serves a relatively deprived catchment area and there is an above average number of children with special educational needs. Within the catchment area, there are a large number of Gypsy families who have lived in houses near the school for several generations. Many of the families are proud of their Gypsy background and continue to follow their cultural traditions. It is estimated that over 50% of children in the school are from a Traveller background, although only 32% ascribe themselves as Gypsy/Roma on the annual school census. There is a Traveller site situated in the local area and at present two Travellers of Irish heritage attend the school.

The November 2007 Ofsted report acknowledged the school's good links with parents and their understanding of the cultural background of families in their catchment area:

'There is a strong understanding of the cultural heritages of the children and the school makes significant efforts to ensure that all children feel valued, safe and secure.' (Ofsted, 2007)



What is being done?

The vision of the school is to provide an inclusive education where every child feels welcomed and valued. The headteacher is committed to building strong and lasting partnerships with the community. A key focus is to provide a supportive ethos where parents feel able to approach any member of staff with concerns or issues; families are encouraged to feel full participants in the life of the school. There is recognition by the senior leadership team (SLT) of the importance of a culturally-inclusive curriculum and an environment that reflects and celebrates the diversity of the school population.

The headteacher leads initiatives to build good relationships with the families. These have included activities that support and value Traveller culture and recently have included the following:

- A Gypsy artist worked with the children and parents delivering art workshops, modelling good practice in raising aspirations and celebrating Traveller culture.

- The parents and children took part in developing a DVD. It traced the family history of Travellers in Surrey and was shown at the local community centre.
- A Traveller storyteller worked with families and children using cultural stories to enhance knowledge and improve literacy skills.

Further initiatives supporting children and families have been implemented in order to increase attendance, self-ascription of GRT pupils and raise attainment. These include the following:

- A rigorous self-assessment process (based on the Ofsted self-assessment process) in relation to Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) children to develop whole-school policies and approaches to raise GRT achievement.
- Data has been analysed and pupil progress has been tracked in order to inform teaching and learning and introduce appropriate intervention programmes to improve literacy, numeracy and science.
- The school improvement partner (SIP) includes discussion on progress and tracking of the GRT cohort during the termly progress visit.
- SLT has liaised with the neighbouring secondary school and transition intervention programmes have been introduced which target those vulnerable at the transfer stage. Additional visits have been arranged and a buddy system is in place.
- SLT has worked with link primary schools in the area disseminating effective practice.
- The introduction of a breakfast club where Year 6 boys from Traveller backgrounds were targeted with personalised intervention programmes for literacy, numeracy and revision classes for national tests in English and mathematics.
- A parent group was established to support adult and family learning.
- Parents were invited to a meeting to discuss the issue of ascription to Gypsy/Roma and Irish Traveller categories and express their concerns.

- The local authority Traveller education service (TES) and SLT have worked in partnership to improve self-ascription to Gypsy/Roma and Irish Traveller ethnic categories focusing on the new intake and communicating with parents to address concerns.
- The school family link worker targeted the non-attendance of families and supported them with preventative strategies.
- The TES has supported the school with advice and cultural materials to develop schemes of work which highlight the history and background of Travellers. This is now embedded in the curriculum.
- Engagement with parents, including home-school liaison, has increased enrolment of Early Years GRT children and ensured a smooth transition from the Foundation Stage to Year 1.

Outcomes

- The school has a clear understanding of the need for strategic management of the progress of GRT children.
- The school has clear mechanisms in place to track the progress of GRT children at individual pupil level and group level as well as tracking attainment in terms of gender.
- There was 100% attendance by GRT children for the 2007 national tests with some parents altering travelling commitments to ensure their children stayed at school to sit the national tests.
- The school has forged active and productive links to share good practice and focus on Key Stage 2 to 3 transition.
- The school has developed excellent and often innovative practice in parental engagement.
- The school has actively sought both parental and pupil voice in order to gain better understanding of the aspirations and values of the GRT community.

- There has been strong parental commitment to the breakfast club and high attendance of GRT children.
- Traveller children are actively involved in the school council.



- There is improved GRT attendance. At the school's presentation evening 50% of attendance prizes were presented to Traveller children.
- During the period of a year the number of children being ascribed as Gypsy/Roma has more than doubled, indicating greater confidence on the part of families to acknowledge their Traveller status.
- TES and mainstream staff work collaboratively to embed Gypsy and Irish Traveller culture in the curriculum and in schemes of work.

Feedback

'I feel strongly about being able to engage with parents even though it takes a long time to build up trust with them. It is important to see where they are coming from and take that on board. It is really important to see the whole child and care for the whole child.' (Headteacher)

'I always make sure that we value diversity by explicitly teaching about difference and tolerance, for example some members of the class were intolerant of a new boy and I felt that this would be a good opportunity to do some work on Traveller culture, so we are doing a scheme of work which is a differentiated programme and celebrates the Gypsy heritage.' (Year 6 teacher)



'We really home in on language as a priority in the first half of the school term. Many of the children coming in to school are not used to sharing their parents or resources or even time to speak; they tend to speak over each other. Many have not been away from their parents at all or key members of their family. We work within small groups so the adult can focus on the language skills of the individual child.' (Foundation Stage teacher)



'We have used the self-evaluation form for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children in this particular school; this has enabled the headteacher to look at her practice and see what is going well for GRT children and build on that and feed it into the Ofsted SEF. This has ensured that the school asks very important questions of their practice in order to see how they can raise the achievement and close the gaps for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children.' (Traveller Education Service manager)

'The strategies we use to ensure transition to secondary school are very much about partnerships with primary schools starting in Year 5 and continuing in Year 6. We also work very closely with families and with the young people themselves. Our aim is to identify any barriers that might make transition not so smooth then together we encourage the transition to be as successful as possible. We also work with other agencies, Traveller Education and the Youth Service. We have an extensive programme that supports the families at this time of transition.'
(Head of extended learning – secondary school)

'The LA identifies the underachieving cohorts by centrally held data and supports schools with advice on planning, implementing and evaluating provision for GRT children. What this school does particularly well is develop excellent relationships between the headteacher and the Gypsy, Traveller and Roma community and enables them to do a lot more. Equally, the school is conscious of the aspirations of all groups and they make sure the challenge and support is right for all vulnerable groups.' (LA school improvement partner)



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