

Promoting Community Cohesion - Illustrating that good practice in inclusion at school level supported by The Learning Trust and a multi-agency approach can produce good results in the social and educational inclusion of Travellers

National perspective

From the CRE- There are between 200,000 and 300,000 members of the GRT communities in the UK today. Travellers of Irish Heritage are identified as a racial group and are covered by the Race Relations Act (2000) as legitimate ethnic communities. Traveller communities frequently experience social exclusion and discrimination which can be unintentionally racist in character on account of the lack of knowledge of their legal ethnic status. (O’Leary v Allied Domecq)

National evidence demonstrates consistently that Gypsy and Traveller children and young people face overwhelmingly greater challenges in achieving good educational outcomes, than children and young people from other backgrounds. ‘Gypsy Traveller pupils are the group most at risk in the education system. Although some make a positive start in the primary school, by the time they reach secondary level their generally low attainment is a matter of serious concern.’ *OFSTED (1999)*

Gypsy Roma Traveller communities have experienced a history of social exclusion and prejudice which has resulted in generational educational disadvantage. Over the past 30 years efforts have been made to promote inclusion and achievement but the legacy remains.

The DCSF has recognised that, children like these will need to receive effective, appropriate and targeted interventions in they are to narrow the gap and reach national expectations. National research has shown that the two GRT groups identified in the schools census, Gypsy/Roma and Travellers of Irish Heritage and among the lowest average achievers at all Key Stages. They are also most likely to be on the register of Special Education needs and to be excluded. It was also noted that the KS4 cohort was less than one third of that at KS2, suggesting many students do not transfer to, or drop out of secondary education. Fewer than 20% of those who remain in school achieve 5 plus GCSE at A*-C.

For children to be able to be comfortable and in a suitable environment for learning there must not only be an absence of racism but a situation where the other children and the teachers demonstrate an active interest and recognition of the Gypsy and Traveller community, which directs schools to change the curriculum to ensure that the specific culture of Gypsies and Travellers is included.

Hackney perspective

Community Cohesion – Case Study – 2010 Travellers Education – St Dominic’s Primary

A significant number of Gypsy Travellers in Hackney are Catholic and a strong element of the cultures and traditions relate to religious observances. Benchmarks such as christenings, first communions, confirmations, weddings funerals and bereavement masses are all hugely significant community events. St. Dominic’s (case study below) understands this and promotes opportunities for Gypsy, Roma, Traveller pupils to maintain and celebrate their religious and familial traditions.

The Learning Trust (TLT) confirms its on-going and future commitment to improving educational outcomes for Gypsy Roma and Traveller children, young people, adults and their communities by taking positive measures to support schools and settings to implement best practice in raising their achievement and promoting community cohesion in order to be fully compliant with their legal responsibilities under the Race Relations Acts. The principles and activities to achieve this are set out in the Children and Young Peoples Plan.

TLT is also committed to working in partnership with all relevant agencies across the council, the other Team Hackney partners and the voluntary sector to support the Every Child Matters Agenda for these ethnic minority groups within the full expectations of the Race Relations Act. The particular vulnerability of these ethnic minority groups to underachievement across all the ECM outcomes is well understood and therefore TLT understands that only by working together at strategic and operational level partners can jointly achieve this agenda for our Gypsy Roma Travellers.

Every Child Matters: the importance of the holistic approach round the child

Enjoy and achieve Gypsies and Travellers will not have an equal platform to enjoy and achieve unless they receive sufficient tuition and low attendance is a major issue with this.
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A genuine partnership approach is required because many of the causes of poor attendance are spread out across the Every Child Matters themes

Health – Gypsies and Travellers living on unauthorised encampments and in bricks and mortar are more likely to experience worse health outcomes than the general population. Illness amongst family members can mean that children don’t attend school, through illness or caring responsibilities.
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Safety – Concerns about transport to and from school can be a real safety concern, particularly where children have arrived mid-phase, coupled with racist bullying this can be a factor preventing attendance.
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Economic and social wellbeing – Roma people have often escaped such poor economic conditions in Eastern Europe, that extreme poverty of a rare type in the UK is a real issue for families, this can interfere with school attendance. The need to move is also a consistent theme in undermining attendance.
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Making a contribution – children’s positive role in the extended family can also indirectly undermine attendance. For instance, travelling to family occasions such as weddings and funerals is important, but should not disrupt education.

Gypsy Roma Traveller attainment in all tested subjects in Key Stage 2 SATs has risen significantly over the last five years.

GRT families in Hackney

Table 1 below give the composition of the GRT groups living in Hackney during the academic year 2008-9. Irish Travellers remain the largest group of children and families but there are increasing numbers of Roma from Eastern Europe (mainly Poland, Romania and Slovakia).

Table 1 GRT known to Traveller Education Service in Hackney Families in Hackney 2008-9

Group	Families	Children 0-18
Gypsy	2	7
Irish Traveller	91	238
Roma	25	44
New Traveller	19	20
Circus	2	2
Other	3	6
Total	142	317

The majority of GRT families live in rented social and private housing, both temporary or permanent. There are currently 5 official Traveller sites, accommodating 25 families. Other families occasionally come to visit and share pitches from time to time. The table below indicates the proportions in the different types of accommodation and the levels of mobility associated with them. The mobility rate is high suggesting that the average Hackney GRT child will move once every two years. In practice families on sites tend to be quite stable while some families in housing may be highly mobile.

Table 2 Accommodation types in Hackney 2008-9

Accommodation	In Hackney 1/9/08	Arrived	Left	In Hackney 31/8/09	Turnover
Hostel	10	6	0	15	40%
Housed	3	1	3	1	100%
Official site	58	19	12	65	40%
Permanent housing	81	27	24	84	47%
Squat	20	16	11	25	75%
Temporary housing	0	4	0	4	100%
Temporary site	34	6	10	30	40%
Unauthorised camp	4	0	4	0	100%
TOTAL	0	9	0	9	100%
TOTAL	210	88	64	233	51%

The Traveller Education Service has established close links with the GRT communities in Hackney, which enable them to remain in contact with families who move and contact new ones who arrive in the borough.

St Dominic’s Primary School

Currently there are 18/19 Traveller pupils on roll at St Dominic’s Primary School. At the beginning of each term the designated teacher meets with The Learning Trust’s Traveller Education Service (TES) and we map-out our activities and provision for the pupils in the Foundation Stage, Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2. The TES has provided a wide range of support to this school over a number of years to raise levels of access, attendance, achievement and inclusion. As partners in this process, we can celebrate success in promoting the inclusion of Traveller children and their families.

Cumulative short periods of absence from school to attend important family occasions results from the need to maintain a cohesive culture and to survive as a people. However if Traveller pupils are consistently absent from school we will monitor the reasons and attempt to regularise their attendance. We stage a three-way meeting between the school, Education Attendance Service and the TES.

Here are some brief notes on the work we have been doing at St Dominic’s.

- All of our school staff very welcoming, particularly the Admin/Office staff. This was initially fundamental in parents enrolling their children in St. Dominic’s. The importance of welcoming new families provides very strong encouragement. Parents feel that they can always ask for help with form filling and with asking for advice on all kinds of problems without the risk of being judged. Staff will always make time to listen.
- The school’s commitment to celebrating important occasions in the religious calendar, eg. Christmas, Lent, Easter, is very helpful in engaging these communities.
- We are culturally aware re the Irish Travellers. This includes the presentation of whole school assemblies and classroom activities to celebrate St Patrick’s Day and other aspects of Traveller culture.
- We are aware that Travellers have had long experience of institutional racism and significant prejudice from local communities. The school works hard to address this by sending positive message to all communities, recognising the particular needs of the GRT communities. We have displays that reflect this. The TES provide us with relevant books and advice on such books.
- *Gypsy Roma Traveller History Month (GRTHM)* first started in 2008- Offers the chance to raise awareness and explore the history, culture and language of these communities. It aims also to challenge myths and tackle prejudice and celebrate the richness that GRT communities bring to our lives. This is comparable to Black History Month. We have

been active participants in GRT History Month (GRTHM). The school was involved with poster competition for GRTHM. The TES provided us with a CD- Rom which provided many ideas for the children to help with their posters. We have also been loaned great resources such as caravans and instruments.

- The school attended a GRTHM event last year with a storyteller at Homerton Library.
- We have a strong pastoral role with families, particularly two families, working closely with our team and social Services. A significant number of our Traveller families have required long term support from Tier 3 and Tier 2 agencies. We have been heavily involved with units from Children and Families, Child & Family Consultation Service and The Family Intervention Programme.
- We put together collection of household goods for a very vulnerable family who were re-housed after encountering serious mental health/prison/violence issues. One of the priests from our local parish gave a donation to family via the school.
- All school staff attended Inset from TES on cultural and community issues. Resources for lessons and activities have been made available to all staff via our curriculum server.
- The School Attendance Service works closely with the school and families. We work together to maintain good attendance and to provide practical support and advice around issues such as transport, accessing free school meals, taking SATs and effective secondary transfer.
- The designated teacher works very closely with the Traveller Education Service and regularly discusses all the Traveller pupils on roll with to monitor access, attendance, inclusion and achievement.

As a team we can see evidence of improved self-esteem and welfare of Traveller pupils at the school and greater engagement by families with the education system. There is also a noticeable acceptance of Traveller families in the neighbourhood.