Education of Gypsy, Roma and traveller pupils – Ofsted reports

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Summary
This briefing is on the five Ofsted linked research reports on good school practice related to the education of traveller and Gypsy/Roma pupils, all published on 26 March 2015. These are:

- Traveller children uptake in the Early Years Foundation Stage
- Raising aspirations and retaining Roma pupils at Key Stage 2
- Supporting Traveller pupils in primary to secondary transition
- Raising aspirations and retaining Roma pupils at Key Stage 4
- Engaging Traveller parents to raise achievement of their children

References to the three groups in this briefing are to all Gypsy and Traveller groups, including those from Irish Traveller communities, as well as Roma groups from Eastern and Central Europe. As NFER explains, Roma is a generic term used to describe many different groups of Romani people, including Gypsies.

This briefing will be of particular interest to members and officers with responsibility for education, equalities and community cohesion. The report will also be of interest to governors and school staff, particularly in areas with there are Traveller and Gypsy/Roma pupils.

Overview
The imperative to improve the educational outcomes of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils has been a key focus for research and policy in recent years. Although there is evidence of economically and educationally successful communities of these groups, there is still concern overall that Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children are reported to be among the lowest achieving ethnic groups within schools in England. In 2011 for example, only 12% of pupils from these groups achieved five or more A*-C GCSE grades including English and maths compared with 58.2% of all pupils. These groups are also more likely to be identified with Special Educational Needs and four times more likely to be excluded as a result of behavioural issues. More recent Ofsted figures identified an overall increase in Gypsy/Roma pupils from 16,735 in January 2013 to 19,030 pupils in January 2014 and that in 2013, only 13.8% of Gypsy/Roma pupils nationally gained five A*-C GCSE compared to 60.6% of all pupils.

The Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) funded a NFER study, Improving the outcomes for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Children in 2007 which reported to the DfE in 2010. In recognition of the underachievement of this group, the Coalition Government established a cross Government Ministerial Working group in 2010 under the chairmanship of the then Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, Eric Pickles. A progress report was published by

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the Working group in April 2012. Amongst its 28 commitments were that Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils would be a vulnerable group in the revised school inspection framework, and Ofsted would focus more on their progress, attainment and attendance. The DfE Virtual Head Teachers' pilot focussed on these groups in a small number of LAs from April 2012, with the local championing of the interests of these pupils, and increased monitoring and responding to issues of low attainment and poor attendance. The DfE also made a commitment to collect case studies of effective approaches by high performing schools to the progress, attainment and attendance of these groups.

Ofsted has reported previously on the poor attainment of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils, particularly at the end of Key Stage 2 and 4. In December 2014, it published *Overcoming barriers-ensuring that Roma children achieve in education*, a study of three local authorities with an increase of Roma pupils from Eastern Europe in eleven of their schools. The five Ofsted reports that are the subject of this briefing are an outcome of the DfE commitment to collect and disseminate case studies in this area, and are a set of examples that showcase good practice in raising achievement and attendance of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils as well as reducing their exclusion rates. All five schools have been recently judged as outstanding in inspections carried out between 2011 and 2013.

**Briefing in full**

**Improving Traveller children uptake in the Early Years Foundation Stage: Holy Family Catholic Primary School**

Holy Family Catholic Primary School in the centre of Leeds is a medium-sized 3-11 voluntary aided primary school with 231 pupils on roll and located in an area of high deprivation. The proportion of Traveller pupils at the schools is 6.9% and has fallen from 12.6% in 2011. There are no Gypsy/Roma pupils on roll. This example shows how the school improves the uptake of Early Years Foundation Stage education for Traveller pupils and families.

The good practice involved is set out below:

- The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) coordinator and the school's learning mentor visiting families on the local Traveller site, to engage the trust of the parents and ensure that they are familiar with staff when the children start school. The learning mentor supports the family on wider issues, for example reading documents for them and offering advice where they are facing difficulties. This allows the school to develop good relationships with the families of younger children who are yet to start school.
- The learning mentor is the key worker in the school for Traveller parents. She develops ongoing relationships over a long period of time once children have started school and understands a willingness to listen to their needs is essential to building trust. She sends short text messages to families rather than letters as literacy levels are low amongst the parents.
- The introduction of story-telling sessions every week has increased the number of Traveller parents visiting the EYFS unit. They can get involved in the story-telling and learn from the teaching in how to support and improve their children's reading at home. The school sends reading books home every day and provides additional reading support for Traveller children to build up their vocabulary.
EYFS resources and activities support pupils' cultural heritage and language development through posters and artefacts reflecting Traveller history and lifestyle. A Gypsy storyteller visits the school to promote Gypsy, Roma and Traveller cultural heritage, and Gypsy/Roma and Traveller history month is regularly celebrated.

Indicators of success

- Starting in nursery numbers used to be two or three each year in contrast to last year when there were eight new starters from Traveller families.
- Parents now approach the learning mentor to request EYFS places.
- The current cohort of Traveller children joined the school well below the level typical for all pupils nationally in language and numeracy but have gained ground fast.
- The overall attendance rate for all traveller children in the school is 90.1%, compared to the national average for Traveller pupils of 79.6%.
- There have been no permanent or fixed-term exclusions for Traveller pupils in the last three years.

Raising aspirations and retaining Roma pupils at Key Stage 2: Parkside Community Primary School

Parkside Community Primary School is small but developing 3-11 community primary school on the outskirts of Canterbury in an area of high deprivation. The proportion of Roma pupils on roll was 10.3% in 2013. This example shows how the school has raised aspirations and retained pupils at Key Stage 2.

The good practice involved is set out below:

- Monitoring achievement and the virtual school: Tracking information is used to pre-empt barriers and pupil progress meetings are held regularly, with Roma pupils being treated no differently to other pupils. The school accesses the support of the local authority ethnic minority support service and a virtual school for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils led by a virtual headteacher who tracks and analyses the achievement, attendance and behaviour of these pupil groups across the authority. The authority provides weekly reading sessions and pastoral support. All staff in the school take responsibility for these groups of pupils as they are a whole-school priority and the aim is for the school to become a Gypsy and Roma champion and a model for other schools.
- Effective relationships: The close partnership between the senior leaders for pupil achievement and community links and the authority's outreach worker has fostered effective communication and relationships with Gypsy and Roma families. Examples of effective communication include a pictorial newsletter to accommodate families with low literacy levels, and regular home visits. The curriculum is genuinely adapted to reflect the community's language, culture and values, such as a topic on homes including caravans alongside dwellings and pupils trained as 'language ambassadors' including Roma speakers.

Indicators of success

- In 2013, the attainment of Gypsy and Roma pupils at Key Stage 2 was well above that of those pupil groups nationally in reading, writing and mathematics, and in line with that for all pupils in the school and nationally.

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At Key Stage 1, Gypsy and Roma pupils' attainment was below the national average but above that of other pupils in the school. Their progress based on value-added measures was above the national mean, especially in writing.

The attendance of Gypsy and Roma pupils (91.5%) in 2012/13 was higher than those groups nationally (86.1%). To promote better attendance of Gypsy and Roma pupils on school trips, their parents have been invited as well and this has improved their participation.

Supporting Traveller pupils in the transition from primary to secondary school: St Edmund's Catholic Primary School

St Edmund's Catholic Primary School is a small (117 pupils on roll) 3-11 voluntary aided primary school in Skelmersdale in an area of high deprivation. 2.3% of pupils are Travellers with no Gypsy or Roma pupils on roll. This example shows how the school supports Traveller pupils throughout its transition from primary to secondary school.

The good practice involved is set out below:

- **Enrolment in secondary school:** The primary school offers parents and carers of Traveller pupils the chance to look around the secondary school during a normal school day and where this is met with a lack of enthusiasm, primary school staff are relentless in persisting with parents to change their minds, including accompanying the parents on the visit. Where parents are considering removing their children from school once they reach secondary age, the primary school will negotiate a phased start at the secondary school, where pupils attend some lessons in Year 7, but return to the primary school for additional literacy and numeracy support and help with homework. Initial free transport is offered by the primary school to the secondary school with the learning mentor, a key worker from the primary school funded by the pupil premium, taking the children and staying with them until the children feel more confident. Traveller children and young people who do not enrol in secondary school are still engaged and provided with home study packs where possible.

- **Building trust:** The key to the school's success is the trust built up with the families. The school is confident in reaching out to families through home visits, text messages, telephone calls, and meetings in school or at sites and the relationships established are then transferred to secondary school because of the transition links made between the key workers in both schools. Because of the school's understanding of the difficulty that some pupils have in doing homework in overcrowded or unsupportive conditions, after-school clubs are provided for reading, homework and extra-curricular activities which involve staff that the Traveller pupils and their families trust.

- **Support from the local authority:** The LA's Ethnic Minority, Roma and Traveller Achievement Service plays a key role in supporting the school and Traveller families. It offers support for older pupils to gain work experience and arranging alternative education for those not choosing to continue with school; analysis of data on attainment and progress of different pupil groups including Travellers, in order to hold schools to account for their performance; peer mediation between school and family if any issues cannot be resolved; and school access to additional support and training provided by its pupil premium fund. In its liaison with a range of local agencies, the school also liaises with the local authority about achieving secure housing or permanent sites for families.

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**Indicators of success**

- The attendance of Traveller pupils (90.2%) in 2012/13 was higher than that compared to Traveller children nationally (79.6%) but below that for other pupils in the school and for all pupils nationally. There was no persistent absence, although the national average for persistent absence of Traveller pupils is 40.6%.

**Raising aspirations and retaining Roma pupils at Key Stage 4: Babington Community College**

Babington Community College is an 11 -16 comprehensive school on the outskirts of Leicester, with around 900 pupils on roll. The college has a growing cohort of Czech and Slovak Roma students, with 10.7% of its pupils identified as Gypsy or Roma in 2013, compared to 3.9% in 2011. Of the 17 Roma pupils entered for GCSE in 2013, only six had been in the school since the start of Key Stage 3. This example shows how the college has raised aspiration and retained pupils at Key Stage 4

The good practice involved is set out below:

- A whole-college approach: Effective school leadership promotes a culture of high expectations, no excuses and individual responsibility. Roma pupils are seen as the responsibility of all staff, and all staff are trained by the college's experienced coordinator. Trust has been built up between key members of staff and Roma families through regular coffee mornings, time spent by leaders listening to Roma family concerns and regular meetings to ensure that the families are aware of the college's expectations. The curriculum has been modified to reflect Rome history and culture, including a performing arts project and the celebration of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller month.

- Securing achievement: The college's tracking of all groups of pupils is reinforced by accurate monitoring of their performance, and the Roma students are monitored for attendance and progress in the same way as all other pupils. A senior or middle leader is allocated a group of students they monitor closely and whose progress they discuss with the students concerned. Football and craft clubs are used to promote punctuality and attendance and the impact of such initiatives is monitored closely.

- Using the pupil premium: The pupil premium is used to raise Roma students' aspirations through the college's 'Dare to dream' programme. Twice a year the school holds an 'Economic role models and skills' show that colleges and employers attend. Students have the opportunity to enrol on programmes ranging from horse riding, vehicle maintenance, cake decorating, song writing, to football.

**Indicators of success**

- The attendance at school of Gypsy and Roma students was 91.5% compared with the equivalent national figure of 83.5% in 2013.

- No Gypsy and Roma pupils were permanently excluded in 2012/13 and the percentage of fixed-term exclusions was 3.45%, almost half the rate for all pupils in the school (6.65%) and well below the national figure (35.98%) for all Gypsy and Roma pupils.

- Key Stage 4 completion rates are very high for Roma pupils and the college tracks post-16 leavers carefully, most of whom go on to Leicester College.
Improving relations with parents to raise achievement and improve attendance of Traveller pupils: Kingsmead Primary School

Kingsmead Primary School is a medium-sized community primary school in London, near Hackney Marshes in an area of high deprivation with 245 pupils on roll. The proportion of Traveller pupils is 4.5%, but has risen over time. There are no Gypsy or Roma pupils on roll. This example shows how the school engages Traveller parents to help raise achievement and improve attendance of their children.

The good practice involved is set out below:

- Raising achievement: All pupil progress is checked regularly including ethnicity, and staff discuss all pupils during pupil progress meetings and agree next steps. Where Traveller children or others are struggling with their reading, they receive one-to-one or small group catch-up with a specialist reading teachers. Parents are invited into school to see what activities they can do with their children at home.
- Improving attendance: There are regular awards for good and improving attendance for individuals and classes. Parents are contacted on the first day of absence to ensure the reasons for non-attendance are valid. Where attendance is an ongoing concern, parents are asked to attend more formal meetings known as 'attendance surgeries' and parents are reminded of these by telephone and text message. The school explains the consequences of poor attendance, including the potential for court action and fines. The school has gained the trust of parents over time through key workers such as the Inclusion Manager and attendance officer and parents know that the school has high expectations for regular attendance.
- Working with families: School staff have established positive relationships with parents through home visits and regular telephone contact with experienced staff suggesting that oral communication works best with families. The headteacher is proactive in talking to parents and encouraging them to send their children to the Early Years Foundation Stage and the school helps parents to complete their admission forms. Parents are confident about allowing their children to go on trips because of their trust in the school. Pivotal to the school's success in achievement, attendance and engagement with parents, are the key staff involved, including the family worker and inclusion manager, who are available and visible to parents at the beginning and end of the school day. Staff overall have good training from the local authority through the Traveller Education Service, which is seen as an excellent resource for the school to access. Gypsy, Roma and Traveller history month is celebrated every June, run by the Traveller Education Service across Hackney, involving pupils and their families.

Indicators of success

- The overall level of attendance for Traveller pupils was 86.8% in 2012/13 compared to the national average for Traveller pupils of 79.6%.
- Persistent absence fell to 12.5% in 2012/13 compared to the national average for traveller pupils of 40.6%.
Comment

The school practice related to improving the progress, attainment and attendance of Gypsy/Roma and Traveller pupils, as outlined in these five reports, shows schools working at their absolute best. The scope of the different ways in which they interact with these pupils and their families, with their particular needs is very impressive, particularly the way in which the schools extend their reach into the wider social issues of secure housing and welfare. The case studies also demonstrate effective partnership between local authorities and schools with the sharing of services to support the achievement of Gypsy/Roma and Traveller pupils including access to expert local authority staff, sometimes funded using pupil premium. The championing of the needs of the Gypsy/Roma and Traveller community by the local authority is seen as beneficial by the schools. The combination of having the same high expectations for these pupils as those of all pupils while recognising the difference and diversity in their culture and lifestyle through the academic and the wider school curriculum has all the hallmarks of excellent inclusion practice. There is a lot here for all schools to consider when reviewing how far they are meeting the complete range of their pupils’ needs including improving achievement and attendance, and being more effective in the way that they (the schools) interact with the families of their pupils. Local authorities too will benefit from the dissemination of the experiences of these five schools.

However, there is a long way to go to improve nationally the prospects of Gypsy/Roma and Traveller pupils. Better research intelligence and understanding about their communities is necessary. The new Government needs to ensure that a cross-government (including local government) approach to improving Gypsy/Roma and Traveller pupils’ performance across a wide range of social indicators is a priority, with education policy commitments complementing the moves to establish authorised sites for these groups and supporting improved relationships with the settled community.

External Links

NFER study, Improving the outcomes for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Children (October 2010)

Progress report by the ministerial working group on tackling inequalities experienced by Gypsies and Travellers (April 2012)

Overcoming barriers- ensuring that Roma children achieve in education (Ofsted December 2014)

Related Briefing

Gypsies and Travellers: two new government reports (May 2012)

Pupils missing out on education (Ofsted December 2013)

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