

# Gypsy/Traveller Pupils in Schools

## Handbook for Good Practice



**"When a Traveller enrolls in a school the child 'belongs' to that school"**

Taken from 'Aiming High': *Raising the Achievement of Gypsy Traveller Pupils*  
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# Terminology

***“ There is no one simple definition of Gypsy/Traveller. There are minority ethnic, professional, trade, craft and business communities which travel, each with a rich history, culture, religion, dialect or language”.***

‘The Educational Institute of Scotland’: 2012

In Scotland, the term ‘Gypsy/Traveller’ was coined by the Scottish Parliament in an attempt to address a ‘wide community of different needs’. This was after much consultation with Travelling Communities. The EIS points out however that this is a term which is not necessarily welcomed by all Travelling Communities and therefore, a certain amount of discretion should be applied when addressing traveller groups. UK National policies refer to Travelling Communities as ‘Gypsy /Roma/ Travellers’ (GRT). Both terms may be applied in this document depending on the context.

Whatever the terms used, Travelling Communities are diverse, proud groups of people, steeped in heritage and historic tradition. Some distinct groups include:

- Gypsy/Romany
  - Irish Travellers
  - Scottish Travellers
  - European Roma
- } Ethnic groups
- 
- Fairground Travellers
  - Circus Travellers
  - New Travellers
  - Bargees (living on boats)
- } Occupational groups

All groups have a strong sense of identity. They have their own cultural traditions and some even have their own language. All groups have a right to be treated with equality and respect.

# General Historical Context

**53 B.C.E(Before the Common Era)** Fairs are being held in Britain after the Roman invasion.

**c.1000 C.E(Common Era)** Groups of Roma, originating in Northern India, reach modern Greece and Turkey.

**1100s C.E** Travellers first recorded in Ireland. Travelling smiths mentioned in Scottish records.

**1200s C.E** Many fairs are created by Royal Charter, including Bridlington (1200) and Hull

**1299** By the turn of the 13<sup>th</sup> Century Roma begin to arrive in Western Europe.

**1498** Four Gypsies travel to the New World with Christopher Columbus.

**1505** King James the Fourth of Scotland pays seven pounds to “Egyptians” stopped at Stirling, who may have come from Spain. Parish records from around this time show that Irish Travellers are already living in England.

**1530** Gypsies are forbidden to enter England under Henry VIII. Those already there are deported.

**1554** Queen Mary of England passes the Egyptians Act. Being a Gypsy is punishable by death, as is being found in “the fellowship or company of Egyptians”. This is the only time that fraternizing with an ethnic community has been punishable by death.

**1570s** Scottish Gypsies are ordered to stop travelling or leave the country. First records of the Kale Gypsies in Wales. The first recorded Gypsy presence in Leeds is in the Leeds Parish registers of 1572.

**1650s** Last known hanging for the crime of being a Gypsy, in Suffolk, England. Gypsies are deported to America.

**1660-1800** English Gypsies calling themselves Romanichals survive by working for trusted non-Gypsies who know them. Appleby Fair granted chartered fair status in 1685 by James II. Ballinasloe Fair receives its royal charter in 1722.

**1714** British Gypsies are shipped to the Caribbean as slaves.

**1768** The first modern Circus is held in London.

**1780** Some English anti-Gypsy laws begin to be repealed.

**1800s** Fairs start to include mechanical rides, as they still do today.

**1820s** Tents start to be used for fairs under George IV.

**1830s** Covered horse drawn wagons begin to be used by Gypsies in Britain. Many Gypsies live in the more makeshift bender tents, and will continue to do so until the mid-late 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

**1880s** Agricultural depression in England. Many Travellers and Gypsies are poverty stricken and move to urban squatters' areas. Hundreds of Irish Travellers leave Ireland for Britain.

**1889** Showmen in Britain form the United Kingdom Van Dwellers Association, later called the Showmen's Guild, to fight the Moveable Dwellings Bill, which restricts Travellers' movements.

**1908** The Children's Act makes education compulsory for Travelling children in England by The Children's Act, but only for half the year.

**1930s-60s** Groups of European Roma come to live in Britain.

**1934** Django Reinhardt introduces "swing jazz" to the world. A major influence on the development of Jazz.

**1939-45** World War II. Nazis compose lists of English Gypsies to be interned. In Britain, the government builds caravan camps for Gypsies serving in the forces or doing vital farm work. These are closed when the war finishes. Roma, Sinti and other Gypsies are stripped of all human rights by the Nazis. As many as 600,000 are murdered in camps and gas chambers. This is Porrajmos (the devouring), the Roma holocaust in Europe.

**1945-60** Travellers start to use motor - drawn trailers, and some buy their own land to stop on with them.

**1960** New private sites are banned from being built in England by The Caravan Sites (Control of Development) Act. Mass evictions and public harassment of Gypsies and Travellers. Irish Government "Commission on Itinerancy" begins a programme to assimilate Irish Travellers.

**1968** Lord Avebury helps to pass the new Caravan Sites Act. From 1970, the Government have to provide caravan sites for Travellers.

**1970s-1990s** People from the settled community start to take to the road and live in caravans. They are known as "New Age Travellers" in the media.

**1994** The Criminal Justice and Public Order Act abolishes the Caravan Sites Act. This is disastrous for all Travellers living in Britain, and more than 5,000 families now have no legal home. Local councils became duty bound to identify land for private purchase by Travellers. Not one local council adhered to this.

**1997** Slovak Romani refugees arrive in Dover, England. The media reaction is openly hostile.

**2000** The amended Race Relations Act recognises Irish Travellers as an ethnic minority. This has not yet happened in Ireland, where they are seen instead as a “social minority”. Scottish Travellers are still not recognised as an ethnic minority in Scotland. In England, Gypsy-led protests at the ban of the 600 year old fair at Horsemonden in Kent are successful and the ban is finally lifted in 2006.

**2003** Irish Traveller Johnny Delaney, 15, is kicked to death in Cheshire for being “only a f\*\*\*ing Gypsy”, as Eyewitnesses report. The Judge at his murderers’ trial rules that it was not a racially motivated attack and sentences the killers to 4½ years.

**2003** 12 Sussex Bonfire Society members arrested for incitement to racial hatred after burning an effigy of a caravan containing images of Gypsy women and children, and painted with inflammatory slogans.

**2004** The labour government makes it a legal duty to assess the accommodation needs of Gypsies and Traveller.

**2005** The Sun newspaper launches its “Stamp on the Camps” campaign against Gypsies and Travellers. The Conservatives try to get re-elected by targeting Gypsies supposed flouting of planning laws.

**2006** BBC starts Rokker Radio, the first programme for Gypsies and Travellers in its history.

**2008** Britain celebrates the first Gypsy, Roma and Traveller History Month. But in Italy, Roma camps are firebombed by neo-nazis.

# Policy Context

At local level, those working with Traveller communities in East Ayrshire should be guided by Standard Circular No 78: *Support Framework for Scotland's Travelling Communities* (revised in April 2019). This can be found on the East Ayrshire council intranet or the EAST ASN and EAL glow tiles. However, no policy ever stands alone and there are numerous policies and documents which have to be recognised in order to fully meet the needs of our Travelling Communities, including those relating to equality and diversity and race and discrimination.

The most current Scottish Government guidance on improving educational outcomes for children and young people from traveller communities can be found here:

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/improving-educational-outcomes-children-young-people-travelling-cultures/pages/2/>

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/improving-lives-scotlands-gypsy-travellers-2019-2021/>

<https://education.gov.scot/media/r2eppudv/supporting-gypsy-travellers-in-education-aug-2020.pdf>

# Welcoming Gypsy/Traveller Children into Your School:

## Ideas for Good Practice

First impressions create lasting impressions. Many Gypsy/ Traveller pupils have little or no experience of school and those who do may not associate this time with good experiences. The following information includes a number of initial practical measures that schools can take to ensure that Gypsy /Traveller pupils integrate with the school and feel welcomed and valued as part of the school community.

- Designate a key person within the school to liaise with G/T families and key EAST personnel. This person could also support and advise newly enrolled G/T pupils.
- Explain and clarify school rules – pupils may be unaware of the conventions of school. It must not be assumed that they know what is expected of them behaviourally in class and in school. For instance, they may not know to put their hand up and wait their turn to speak during discussion. They may not know they need to ask to leave the room or go to the toilet. Patience, explanations and words of encouragement will be required to support new pupils in familiarising themselves with the school environment.
- Give pupils a buddy who will look after them especially at break times and who will explain school routines.
- Pair Traveller pupils with others in the classroom to offer peer support for learning.
- Give pupils a labelled place to put their coat and a labelled drawer to keep their work in. These two practical points transmit a strong underlying message to the pupil that they are part of the class.
- For many Traveller pupils changing for P.E in front of the opposite sex will make them feel uncomfortable. This may not be acceptable at home within some families. Finding an alternative area for them to change in such as a cloakroom area is helpful.
- Older siblings may have been given the responsibility of looking after younger siblings. Traveller children take this responsibility very seriously. When settling new Traveller children into school it is sometimes really helpful for the older ones to stay with the younger children in their classes, for a short period.
- Where schools have split playground areas for infants and juniors this can create some stress for the Traveller children. Again it is really helpful for a



school to have a flexible approach and allow the older siblings to stay with the younger ones while they settle in.

- Many infant G/T pupils may not have attended an Early Years establishment before entering school. It may be helpful for these pupils to spend some time in the Nursery connected to the school as well as P1 so they can 'learn to play'.

# **Gypsy/ Traveller Pupils and Equality within Your School: Ideas for Good Practice**

- Plan clearly in both your policies and practice to include all members of the school community.
- Develop policies in consultation with all stakeholders (including parents).
- Understand that equal opportunity means more than treating everyone the same.
- Accept every pupil as your responsibility even if they are only with you for a short time.
- Undertake speedy assessments of new pupils.
- Demonstrate that you have high expectations of all pupils.
- Monitor the progress of Traveller pupils closely. They are nationally among the most underachieving ethnic groups.
- Make good contacts with parents. Go the extra mile to reach out to Traveller parents who may feel reluctant to approach the school. Offer as much reassurance as possible.
- Log and report racist incidents (however minor they may appear) using the Local Authority Racist Incident forms.
- Have resources in school which reflect the diversity of Traveller cultures and ensure these are available for all pupils.
- Monitor the attendance of Traveller pupils and develop a range of strategies to improve attendance (see 'Improving the Attendance of G/T Pupils in Your School' further on).
- Treat all pupils as individuals and avoid making generalisations about Travellers from previous experiences from both inside and outside the school environment.

# **Gypsy /Travellers and Early Years within Your School/ ECC: Ideas for Good Practice**

All settings should be promoting inclusion and equality for all pupils. 'Early Years' are no different. The same ideas for good practice in promoting equality apply to all settings: See 'Gypsy/ Traveller Pupils and Equality within Your School' (previous page).

The importance of play in the early years is well documented. However, play is more meaningful if it is related to what children already know about their world around them and if it is culturally relevant. The following information offers some suggestions regarding play that will help to promote an inclusive approach for Gypsy/Traveller pupils within Early Years settings.

- Be prepared to be flexible. Many young Gypsy/Traveller children may not have spent any time away from their family. They may have to be 'phased' in over a period involving increasing timed intervals. They may require some Outreach input before they join the Early Years setting.
- Try and involve parents as much as possible. As with all parents, offer reassurance and give regular updates about how the child is getting on. Invite them to be involved in the ECC.
- Have clear rules for play that apply to all children. Rules can help reinforce the importance of the inclusion of others and ensure all children play together. If rules are made up with the help of the children they are more likely to follow them.
- Introduce the children to images associated with different cultures including Gypsy/ Traveller culture (trailers, horses, caravans, fairgrounds etc).
- Build positive links between home and the Early Years setting. Perhaps allow the child to take a favourite toy home to play with and bring back the next day.
- Read stories from books that are relevant to Gypsy/ Traveller culture.

# Relationships with Gypsy/ Traveller Parents in your School:

## Ideas for Good Practice

- Take time to talk and listen to parents.
- Show that you care and that the pupil is part of the school.
- Be aware that some Traveller parents may have had little or no experience of school themselves. They may not know the protocol for paying for school dinners or contacting the school when their child is ill. It may not be appropriate to simply issue a school handbook as many parents cannot read.
- Some parents may have difficulty in obtaining school uniform quickly. Keeping second hand school uniform, especially jumpers with the school logo, which can be lent to new children, can help them feel part of the school straight away.
- Explain school policies and procedures especially about health and safety (security within school, following up attendance on the first day of absence, safety on coaches and on trips), bullying (recording racist name calling etc), race equality (school's commitment to inclusion of different ethnic cultures within curriculum etc) and school's behaviour policy.
- Give parents the school phone number and explain the importance of keeping in touch with the school to help ensure child safety.
- Offer to help parents complete admission forms. Some parents may not be able to read or write.
- Reassure parents that if they are not happy for their children to go on a school trip that the children will be provided for at school. It is not necessary for them to miss school on the trip day.
- Reassure parents that the school will phone them with important information - instead of a letter, if they would prefer.
- Seek opportunities to discuss pupil's achievements.
- Be flexible with Parent's Evenings: invite them personally and try to be flexible about timings.
- Encourage families to take part in all school activities, inviting them personally whenever possible.

Information obtained from <http://www.step.education.ed.ac.uk/> and *Welcoming Traveller Children to your School*: Gloucestershire County Council

# Homework and Gypsy Traveller pupils in Your School

## Ideas for Good Practice

Gypsy traveller pupils find it difficult to complete homework for a variety of reasons. Lack of support at home may be a major factor because parents are often unable to read or write themselves. Lack of access to ICT may also contribute to difficulties in completing homework. The following information offers some suggestions to support pupils to complete homework tasks.

- Have a dialogue with parents regarding the importance of homework.
- Consider whether the homework tasks set are realistic for all pupils to complete. For example if an online task is set, will a Gypsy /Traveller pupil have access to the internet at home?
- Think about the length of time tasks will take to complete. Lengthy, complicated tasks are unlikely to be attempted.
- Reflect on the resources required to complete homework tasks. Where possible it may be necessary to provide resources such as coloured pens, pencils etc.
- Personalised homework folders with reward system in place for attempted/completed homework may motivate some Gypsy/Traveller pupils. Praise attempted homework even if it is not completed.
- Have a display area for good homework to reinforce the idea that homework is meaningful.
- Support pupils who have difficulties completing homework with an after-school or lunchtime homework club.
- Take account of different learning styles. Gypsy/ Traveller children often have excellent practical skills. They are more likely to complete a task if it relates to their interests and strengths. This practical element can be transferred into many homework tasks for example measuring, constructing models, drawing plans etc.

# Reflecting Gypsy/Traveller Culture in your School:

## Ideas for Good Practice

- It is important that Traveller culture is reflected in the school's resources. This enriches the learning experience for all children not just the Traveller pupils.
- Promoting positive images of Traveller cultures is a natural thread that should run through planning and provision, in the same way that other cultures are incorporated into the curriculum.
- School libraries should have a selection of books reflecting Traveller cultures and lifestyles. EAST has a selection of resources which the EAST teacher in your school can borrow.
- Celebrate the rich history and way of life of Travelling communities and make sure they are effectively integrated into our schools and society. The first Gypsy Roma Traveller History Month took place in June 2008 and is now an annual event. This event is a good way to explore and celebrate the different Traveller cultures that exist in the UK today. Visit <https://www.gypsy-traveller.org/heritage/celebrating-gypsy-roma-and-traveller-history-month/> for more information

Information obtained from: **Welcoming Traveller Children to your School:** Gloucestershire County Council.

## **Improving the Attendance of Gypsy/Traveller Pupils in your School: Ideas for Good Practice**

- Treat each family individually and try to get to grips with why that child is not attending. Be sensitive to the possible reasons why a child may be genuinely unable to achieve full attendance.
- Emphasise the effect that attendance levels have upon a child's education.
- Ensure parents are aware of consequences of non attendance (breaking the Law if school not informed).
- Investigate the use of reward schemes or attendance charts with the pupil.
- Ensure that families have positive feedback regarding their children's education.
- Speak directly to parents as regularly as possible.
- Act rapidly if a child does not attend. A phone call on the first day of absence shows that the school cares about the child, as well as that non-attendance is an issue.
- Make parents aware of the school's expectations regarding attendance on entry. Schools need to ascertain whether regular travel is likely to be a feature of the child's education and how the family may be supported in this.
- Set meaningful targets regarding attendance for Traveller pupils. Make pupils aware of their targets and how they can achieve them.
- Encourage pupils who travel to keep in touch with the school for example by postcards, email or school blog (GLOW). Re-entry for any child is easier if they feel that they have been kept in the loop regarding class work and social events in school.

# Gypsy/Traveller Pupils and Transition to Secondary School :

## Ideas for Good Practice

- Early identification of those pupils who are at risk of not transferring to secondary school.
- A reassuring dialogue with parents and children could start in P.6
- Each family will have their own outlook on secondary school. Talking with parents about their reasons for their choice, however informal, is a valuable starting point.
- Talking with the family first about secondary transfer is important. The child will have loyalty to his/ her parents' wishes and the family may be distressed that the issue has been discussed with the child first.
- Arrange early and additional visits to secondary schools if possible (Enhanced Transition)
- Emphasise the importance of attendance on these transition days.
- Engage the whole class in conversation about secondary school with the assumption that everyone will transfer.
- Arrange a visit from a Traveller pupil already attending secondary school to talk to those about to transfer.
- Use secondary school resources about transfer e.g. school made videos/ books etc.
- Discuss with secondary school about the support offered to the Traveller pupil on entry and throughout years at school.
- **ENSURE THAT THE NUMBER OF GYPSY/TRAVELLER PUPILS WHO TRANSFER OR DO NOT TRANSFER TO SECONDARY SCHOOL IS MONITORED.IT IS VITAL THAT CHILDREN DO NOT JUST DISAPPEAR FROM VIEW WHATEVER THEIR CULTURE OR RACIAL GROUP.**



## **Assessment of New Gypsy/ Traveller Pupils in Your School: Ideas for Good practice**

- Gypsy/Traveller children are almost certain to have experienced periods of interrupted learning throughout their schooling. This in itself means they are likely to require some form of additional support in school. They should therefore be added to the ASN log and an action plan formulated as soon as possible, based on assessment information.
- STEP advocates 'fast tracking' G/T pupils who have interrupted learning in order to give them a feeling of success and enable progress to be made. Early and swift intervention is key.
- The EAST teacher in your school can assist in the completion of a Pupil Assessment Profile (PAP) for Gypsy /Traveller pupils that will help pinpoint specific literacy gaps/difficulties.
- Explain all assessment procedures to reassure parents and pupils beforehand. Make them aware why the assessments are necessary in order to fully meet the needs of the child.
- Ensure parental consent has been obtained before carrying out formal assessments.

# Gypsy/ Traveller Pupils and ICT in Your School:

## Ideas for Good Practice

ICT holds the potential to enhance education for all pupils but has particular significance in the education of Gypsy /Traveller pupils - given the mobile nature of the Traveller lifestyle. It can help allow them to continue their studies while travelling. Of course the effectiveness of this as an educational tool is dependent on the ICT skills of Traveller pupils and their access to computers, netbooks and an internet connection. If ICT use is to be effective, it is important that the teachings of ICT skills are a priority for Traveller pupils when they attend school. Schools should ensure that the ICT skills these pupils have match any e-learning tasks being set. Effectiveness is also dependent on levels of literacy skills to allow access of information on-line (Padfield, 2006).The following are some starter ideas for good practice when using ICT to enhance the education of Traveller pupils both in and out of school.

- Some Gypsy/ Traveller pupils will have 'English As Additional Language' (EAL) needs. There are good internet sites which can be used to assist with learning English as a new language and developing Literacy skills in the classroom.  
<http://www.learnenglish.org.uk/> is part of the British Council English Learning website and has a good children's section (LearnEnglish kids) with stories and interactive quizzes. A picture dictionary in English and 6 other languages can be found at:  
<http://www.enchantedlearning.com/Dictionary.html> . You can contact EAST EAL team for information on software resources such as Mantra pens and dictionaries.
- I pads have a vast selection of apps which can be used to support learning in class and on the move. 'Call Scotland' has a 'Wheel' of Apps. It is meant for Children with Dyslexia and reading and writing difficulties but many of these apps could be used to support Traveller pupils.
- Schools are now using GLOW as a platform for learning. Pupils have their own accounts and individual work can be uploaded by teachers for pupils to access outside school.
- More information on use of IT and remote learning with Travelling families can be found at <https://www.step.education.ed.ac.uk/>

## Some Useful Websites

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/improving-educational-outcomes-children-young-people-travelling-cultures/pages/2/>

<http://www.step.education.ed.ac.uk/>

[www.gypsy-traveller.org](http://www.gypsy-traveller.org) (*Friends, Families and Travellers is a nationally recognised organisation that serves the whole spectrum of the Gypsy Traveller community.*)

[www.exchangehouse.ie](http://www.exchangehouse.ie) (*Information about Irish Travellers*)

[www.ruralmedia.co.uk](http://www.ruralmedia.co.uk)

<https://www.travellerstimes.org.uk/features/end-road-traveller-teachers-association>

[natt.redsquirrels.co.uk](http://natt.redsquirrels.co.uk) (*National Association of Teachers of Travellers*)

[www.history.org.uk](http://www.history.org.uk) (*Resources related to Romany Gypsies*)

<http://www.applebyfair.org/> (*Information about Appleby Horse fair*)

<http://www.imninalu.net/famousGypsies.htm> (*Famous Gypsies*)

[http://romasupportgroup.org.uk/?page\\_id=83](http://romasupportgroup.org.uk/?page_id=83)

<https://step-families.co.uk/> - *supporting families during COVID*