



# Moving forward together: Raising Gypsy, Roma and Traveller achievement

Booklet 4: Engagement with parents, carers  
and the wider community





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# Preface

This guidance aims to support schools and settings in promoting the progress and achievement of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils and gives essential background information for those involved in the teaching of these pupils. It has been produced as part of the DCSF action to raise the achievement of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils and will support schools in meeting their statutory duties in terms of the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000.

The guidance materials consist of four interrelated booklets:

1. Introduction
2. Leadership and management
3. Learning and teaching
4. Engagement with parents, carers and the wider community

It is strongly recommended that Booklet 1: Introduction and Booklet 2: Leadership and management are both read before the other two, as they give the context for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children and young people in English schools and outline schools' overarching management responsibilities towards them.

The guidance materials aim to support schools to raise standards, narrow achievement gaps and accelerate progress through:

- an exploration of learning and teaching approaches that will maximise the achievement of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children and young people;
- providing conditions for learning that value diversity and build and promote self-confidence;
- challenging racism and promoting racial equality throughout the school;
- developing effective partnerships with parents, carers, families and communities.

In this way, Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils, like all children and young people, can be helped to achieve their full potential through equal access to – and full participation in – their education.

## Key principles

- There are no inherent reasons why a child from a Gypsy, Roma or Traveller community should not achieve as well as any other child.
- High-quality teaching and effective Assessment for Learning (AfL), plus appropriate specialist interventions, supported by school leaders, are key factors in improving the achievement of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children and young people, as groups and as individuals.
- Achievement will only occur through the combined efforts of school, child and home.

## Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities

Throughout these guidance materials, reference is made to Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils, parents and communities. This collective grouping includes:

- Gypsies
- Scottish Travellers or Gypsies
- Welsh Gypsies or Travellers
- Roma
- Travellers of Irish heritage
- show people
- fairground families
- circus families
- New Travellers
- bargee or canal-boat families.

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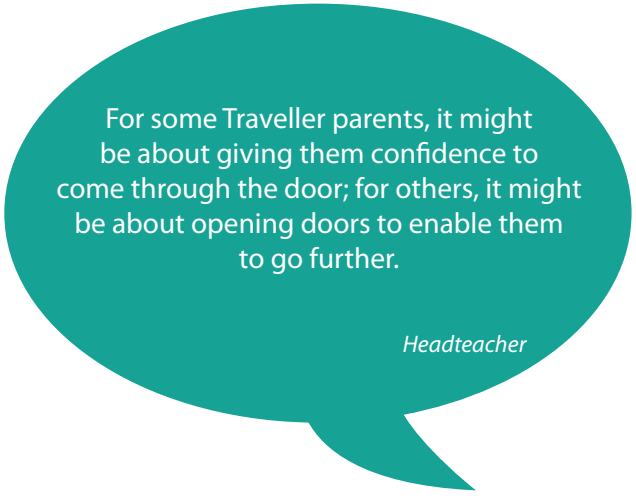
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# Key messages

- All Gypsy, Roma and Traveller parents want the best for their children and want to see them succeed, according to their cultural values, lifestyle and aspirations.
- Because of the persecution and racism experienced every day by these families, in the past they have often removed themselves from mainstream society. This makes establishing relationships with them more challenging.
- Effective partnerships between schools and parents of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children are built upon trust, honesty and mutual respect.
- The school should challenge negative perceptions of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller families and view parents as real partners and co-educators in the education of their children.
- Educational communication and messages to parents and carers presuppose knowledge and skill levels that not all Gypsy, Roma and Traveller parents will have; be clear about these messages and be prepared to be flexible in the choice of media to communicate them.
- Schools need to increase their understanding and appreciation of the different learning styles within the Gypsy, Roma or Traveller home environment.
- The sooner Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils and their parents are engaged in exploring their preferred work pathways, and the role education will play in pathways, the better. Schools can enlist the support and advice of other agencies to achieve preferred outcomes.



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*

## Introduction

This booklet focuses on the vital role that Gypsy, Roma and Traveller parents play, as partners in the education and achievement of their children. It identifies factors unique to these communities, which need to be considered in developing partnerships with Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children, their families and communities, to enable these pupils to optimise their educational opportunities.

Parents are children's first educators and remain their key educators throughout their school career. It is recognised that parents are the most important early influence on their children and the single most important factor in their later success and attainment at school. Parents have a vital role to play in raising the attainment of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children and many recognise that the fast pace of technical and economic change now requires skill sets beyond those traditionally valued. Most Gypsy, Roma and Traveller parents are also concerned about their children losing their cultural identity. This is why it is so vital to develop partnerships between schools and parents.

Effective partnerships with parents and carers can be difficult to establish and equally challenging to maintain, but the impact of these partnerships on the attainment of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children will be particularly significant.

Schools that are effective in raising the attainment of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children recognise that most Gypsy, Roma and Traveller parents want to support their children's education in the same way as other parents, but they may need more help to do so. Such schools make a priority of building and developing their links with parents.



Through the contacts of the outreach worker, we've improved our ability to get across our message of the importance of play and early learning and to increase their understanding, so it's much more of a partnership. We're able to share that information much more freely.

Headteacher, Outer London


# Building and maintaining effective partnerships with parents, carers and community

Gypsy, Roma and Traveller parents may not be as familiar and secure in their knowledge of school and educational responsibilities as many other parents are. It may be the case that Gypsy, Roma and Traveller parents have had little experience of formal schooling or they may themselves have had negative experiences. They may have little communication with others in the local community or may have experienced disruption, hostility or racism within it. Therefore, it is vital to build confidence and trust between schools and parents and carers. Once this is achieved, pupils and their families will feel sufficiently secure and valued to benefit from the multitude of educational experiences that schools can offer. This goal is best achieved by direct, personal contact between school staff and parents. Where schools have established these links, with parents as 'co-investors' in their children's education, it opens doors for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils.

Schools that are effective in raising the attainment of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils make a priority of building their links with parents and the wider community. To be able to build and then maintain these effective partnerships with Gypsy, Roma and Traveller parents, carers and the community, schools need to establish personal contact with these families. Specialist local authority (LA) partners in the Traveller Education Support Services (TESS) are often able to assist schools in bridging this gap. Over many years, TESS staff have built up trusting relationships with the local Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities, enabling them to support schools in forming their own partnerships with parents and the wider community. As many newly arrived European Roma families may have problems with communicating in English, schools will need to seek the assistance of interpreters from the LA English as an additional language (EAL) support service.

For a variety of reasons, communication with parents in multi-ethnic schools often requires greater resourcefulness and a more innovative approach on the part of schools. Parents do not always find it easy to contact schools about their concerns.

*Removing the Barriers (DfES 2002)*



There is mutual respect between home and school, parents feel confident and comfortable about coming into school.

*Teaching assistant*

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 against us, as a travelling family, and we just feel very, very happy here. I would really recommend this school for any family, any colour, and 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*

Recent reports and research have stressed the importance of forming close positive, active relationships with parents to secure successful educational outcomes for pupils. The findings in the report *The shape of things to come: personalised learning through collaboration* (DfES 2005) suggests that:

The biggest gains in terms of learning productivity will come from mobilising as yet under-used resources available to the education system: children, parents, families, communities...

Research on parental involvement, discussed in *Impact of Parental Involvement on Children's Education* (DCSF 2008) identifies two important factors.

- For a child between the ages of 7 and 16, parental involvement in their schooling is a more powerful force than family background, size of family and level of parental education.
- Children whose parents are involved with their children's education make 15–17 per cent more progress in mathematics and reading than other children.

## Potential barriers to engagement

### Negative perceptions

Like most other parents, Gypsy, Roma and Traveller parents take a keen interest in how well their children do at school. However, the education system has left many of them feeling alienated, that they have little influence or are powerless to change things. Some may have had negative experience of the education system as children. Others may have had little or no contact with schools in their own lives.

The types of relationship that currently exist between school staff and parents of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children are likely to be affected by common stereotypes about the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities. Unhelpful and stereotypical views about Gypsy, Roma and Traveller parents and about the wider Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities can be seen in both the local and national media, possibly resulting in poor relationships between schools and the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities that they serve. This negative image within the media only adds to the problem of establishing a trusting relationship between school and parents. Even when schools do manage to establish good relationships between themselves and Gypsy, Roma and Traveller parents, negative media images sometimes adversely affect attitudes. Schools need to challenge these images and make every effort to learn more about the families who are attending the school.

School staff should consider where they stand with regard to addressing and challenging these stereotypes and to be wary of personal bias. Schools must take a lead in ensuring that parents of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children are fully included and, in so doing, acknowledge that:

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- for many people of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller heritages, their negative experience of the education system has often been due to the low expectations, racial prejudice and stereotyping that underpin these experiences;
- many Gypsy, Roma and Traveller parents experience racism in their everyday lives, being the target for media-generated mistrust and prejudice, which has the effect of generating fear and anxiety about identifying themselves and expressing their concerns;
- parents of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children have not had their voices heard in school nor have they been listened to constructively.

The most exciting part of the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller programme was building good relationships with Traveller families, listening to their voice, learning from their educational experiences and understanding their aspirations.

*Headteacher*

Our first task was to re-examine our attitude and ethos. We already considered ourselves a very inclusive school, but it gave us an opportunity. Because of a staff comment, we started placing the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils on the list of vulnerable groups of children; the staff queried this, wondering what was vulnerable about them. I realised that we had to revise our attitudes towards inclusion of the Travellers. When we started looking at our relationship with them, we found that we needed a lot more knowledge about their present needs. So that increased our number of visits to the site. That was very important, to visit and get to know what their present needs were.

*Headteacher*

Schools cannot satisfactorily foster a close relationship with parents and the community unless they understand the social, cultural and racial dimensions of the whole school population. Neither can they satisfactorily comply with their duties under the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000, without an awareness of the ethnicity and cultural diversity of their school population.


### Case study 1: Working with staff perceptions

One school in the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Achievement programme discovered that many of their staff had anxieties about visiting the nearby Gypsy site.

The headteacher decided to address these feelings and concerns through an open and honest discussion with all the staff. These training sessions allowed staff to separate myths from reality and also enabled members of the local community to come into school, to meet staff and discuss with them facts about their way of life.

The school now has a dedicated outreach worker who visits the families on-site regularly. The school has incorporated Gypsy, Roma and Traveller artefacts, supplied by members of the community, into their visitors' waiting area. All the children in the nursery class visit the site, accompanied by staff and other parents.

The headteacher now feels that his staff have a better understanding of the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller community in their area, thanks to their honest expressions of concern.



Because we have a climate where staff can speak and express their wishes in private, and it's secure, it allows you to allay the fears of your staff members. And they are prepared to actually work out in the community, because they themselves have a greater understanding of Traveller culture and history.

*Headteacher, South East*

### Fears about ascription of ethnicity

Schools find building relationships with a hidden community very hard. This is often the case with Gypsy, Roma and Traveller families, many of whom choose to hide their identity. On applying for entry into school, they will often identify themselves as White British. Parents may need persuasion and reassurance to identify themselves correctly as part of a Gypsy, Roma or Traveller community because of the stigma they perceive to be attached to such attribution. They want to protect their children from the negative experiences they have previously suffered. Schools need to develop trusting relationships with parents, to convince them that ascribing their true ethnicity is a safe and good course of action. In 2008 the DCSF produced *The Inclusion of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Children and Young People: strategies for building confidence in voluntary self-declared ethnicity ascription*, a guidance document for schools. This explains the importance of self-ascription for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller parents.

### Parents: Why should I ascribe my child's ethnicity – what's in it for me?

- Most parents across the world want their children to grow up to be proud of their family and its heritage.
- There is nothing to be ashamed of in being a Gypsy, Roma or Traveller.
- It is a human right for the world to respect you for who you really are.
- It is important to children's psychological, social and personal development for them to be proud of their family and its cultural heritage.
- Most parents across the world want their children to have the freedom to be happy and confident in their self-knowledge and to be able to share freely, and to be treated with respect for who they really are.
- Racists will never be challenged and exposed for what they are by the silence of fear.
- Most parents want their children to have happy lives in which they learn to relate to and respect others with different and diverse backgrounds so that they may live together in peace and harmony. This important process is promoted and experienced at school but it requires everyone to have the confidence to be open and honest.
- Parents who tell their children to deny their ethnicity place an unfair burden on their children and a disadvantage that is not suffered by other children.
- Your children have a right to education and it is not conditional on them hiding their ethnicity or cultural identity.
- Your children's happy and successful learning will often need them to draw on and share their life experiences within your family and community. They will not be able to do that if they are fearful about the school knowing who they really are.
- Your children will also be unable to bring home examples of completed work that they and you should be proud of because it portrays a treasured truth about your culture and way of life. This will deny them the happiness that most children experience during their school years.
- When you are invited to the school assembly to celebrate your children's successful achievements, for which they may receive applause, you will be unable to claim the praise and respect for your family's and community's ethnicity and cultural status. Yet another opportunity will be lost to flag your children's and family's positive contribution to the life and work of the school.
- Childhood should be full of happiness and it is short enough without the burden of having to keep a closely guarded secret and living in the fear of 'exposure'.
- If your children go to school in fear of disclosing their ethnic identity they will find it hard to make friends and may feel socially isolated and lonely. This experience should not be part of a happy childhood at school and is seldom part of successful learning.
- Your children's teachers will not be able to help them as much as they would if they knew about their ethnicity and cultural background.
- If your children need additional teaching support, this may not be possible unless the school is fully aware of the ethnicity of the children.
- Most parents across the world want their children to be treated equally and fairly when at school. A hidden identity is a serious threat to enjoying a fulfilled life at school.

Schools can talk to parents about these benefits and use this process to build even stronger partnerships with them, reassuring them that the school takes seriously its responsibilities in terms of its vision and values.

## 8 The National Strategies

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Holding one-to-one meetings with the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller parents has revealed a great deal about their anxieties and aspirations for their children. Passing this information to class teachers has helped teachers be more informed about Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children.

*Headteacher*

Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Schools (HMI) Ofsted reports have for many years stated the need for schools to develop partnerships with Gypsy, Roma and Traveller parents.

...schools should take greater responsibility for promoting and sustaining links with Traveller families.

*Provision and support for Traveller pupils (HMI Ofsted 2003)*

- A key element in ensuring successful outcomes for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils is the successful involvement of their parents.
- The chances of educational failure are increased by lack of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller parental interest in and enthusiasm for schooling.
- Gypsy, Roma and Traveller parents are their child's first educators and remain so throughout their child's school career.



## Case study 2: Engaging parents

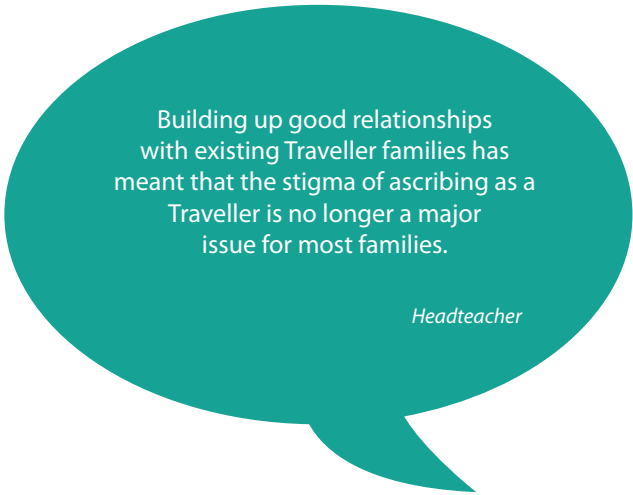
One school participating in the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Achievement Programme decided that it would try to improve engagement with parents. The social and economic backgrounds of the pupils at the school are mixed but levels of deprivation are low, as the area surrounding the school has a high level of employment. There has been a steady increase in the number of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children attending the school, as there is a site nearby. There are currently 11 Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils on roll.

Talking to fathers has been a principal focus for the headteacher, with the aim of finding out about their aspirations for their children. Discussions concerning the learning experiences of the parents were very revealing and made the teaching staff more determined that the experiences of isolation, rejection, anger and fear described by the parents would not be repeated for the children in the school.

Gaining the trust and respect of the parents of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children has been a vital element in the success of the programme. This approach has resulted in a Traveller father giving a talk to a number of classes about his family's lives as Travellers. This, in turn, led to a much greater understanding of prejudice and its effects on people. There has been a greater involvement of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller parents in the life of the school in general. Attendance at parent liaison meetings has risen and children's completion of homework has shown a noticeable improvement.

The school then developed a questionnaire for parents, which was preceded by focus groups of parents who guided the content. A Traveller parent was asked to take part in order to gain the perspective of this group of parents. His contribution allowed other parents to see how the staff value parents from this community as equal stakeholders.

The school is now very confident that all Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children are correctly ascribed.



Building up good relationships with existing Traveller families has meant that the stigma of ascribing as a Traveller is no longer a major issue for most families.

*Headteacher*

# Communication: information-gathering and information-sharing

Schools across all phases have a range of mechanisms for communicating with parents. How and when a school communicates with parents can send clear signals about the level of engagement the school expects and wants from parents, and whether it values their contributions and support.

Interviews with parents of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children suggest that many feel that too often communications from school have focused more on behaviour than learning.

The use of educational jargon put some mothers off: 'I didn't understand what they were saying about SATs,' and others felt intimidated by the teachers' use of 'posh words' or were afraid that they would be made to feel 'ignorant'. Other responses revealed a fear of racist attitudes from people at school.

Most parents care deeply about their children's education and want to know about their academic progress, the development of the curriculum, homework and issues such as setting and banding. In a broader sense, they want useful information about their children's progress and what they can do to help.

*Removing the Barriers: Raising Achievement Levels for Minority Ethnic Pupil, Exploring Good Practice (DfES 2002)*

Parents and carers need information about:

- procedures for contacting the school and relevant personnel;
- key dates and events in the school calendar;
- attendance legislation – the 1908 Children Act supports Gypsy, Roma and Traveller parents' legal rights to travel, with a reduced, minimum attendance of 200 sessions per year (though schools and LAs should seek to secure regular attendance of 380 sessions where possible);
- the school's expectations of children in terms of uniform, dress code, equipment and behaviour for learning, including the rewards and sanctions that the school uses and the circumstances in which these might be used;
- how they can help and support their child's learning;
- the curriculum, expectations of progress and what 'levels' and 'targets' mean in practice;
- provision for distance learning while pupils are travelling and the school's expectations and support for parents.

In common with Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) communities in general, Gypsy, Roma and Traveller families often feel marginalised by the education system.

And in the true nature of a partnership, the school should also offer opportunities to elicit parents' and carers' expectations of what they would like the school to provide for their children and the support they can offer in return. Showing an understanding of the concerns that parents and carers of Black children have about their children's education builds confidence and will strengthen partnerships. Moreover, parents feel that they were not contacted early enough and that the first contact usually arrives as a negative experience in the form of a report of 'trouble'. Rarely are parents contacted with the good news about small learning successes. This may be particularly significant for parents whose own experiences of schooling were negative.

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Many parents believe that stereotypical views of parents of Black children still prevail. It is therefore essential that schools effectively break the cycle of common cultural stereotyping of Black children or their parents that may have contributed to low expectations and poor attainment in the past.

*Excellence and Enjoyment: learning and teaching for Black children in the primary years* (DCSF 2008)

Schools need to make every effort to inform parents of the positive progress their children are making, for example through use of 'good news' cards or text messages home.

The vast majority of parental contact which did take place with Secondary schools however was related to individual issues or problems such as non-attendance or behavioural concerns (initiated by the school) or alleged bullying (initiated by the parents). These meetings tended to be on a one-to-one or small-scale level, usually involving the head of the year.

Derrington, C. and Kendall, S., 2004, *Gypsy Traveller Students in Secondary Schools: Culture, Identity and Achievement*. © Trentham Books. Used with kind permission.

Schools need to take extra care in building relationships with Gypsy, Roma and Traveller parents who are hard to reach. These parents might often feel that school offers little for them or that their children are being unfairly judged. Lack of parental involvement and effective home-school liaison has been a major factor in the low attainment of these pupils in the past.

As with other parents and carers, the parents of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children require consistent and good-quality communication with school staff about how their children are getting on in school.

The following points identified within *Excellence and Enjoyment: learning and teaching for Black children in the primary years, Unit 1: Conditions for learning* (DCSF 2009), apply equally to schools wishing to build effective relationships with their Gypsy, Roma and Traveller parents.

Schools that have developed effective partnerships with parents:

- ensure there is a whole-school policy and practice about verbal and written communication to parents;
- develop a culture where parents feel able to approach school staff and where informal contacts can be made with key staff at regular times in the school day;
- share accurate, relevant and regular information about their child's academic progress with parents and explain how they might support them at home;
- communicate the positive aspects of school life;
- ensure that school staff respond promptly and with care to parents' and carers' concerns and complaints.



### Case study 3: Family learning ICT

To address a recurrent theme for some Gypsy, Roma and Traveller parents that their children were disadvantaged at school because of a lack of formal education and literacy at home, exacerbated by the growing prevalence of ICT-generated homework and GCSE coursework, one school has provided family learning ICT lessons. These sessions were made possible through the consultation between the school leadership team, the LA family learning coordinator and the local Gypsy, Roma and Traveller families.

The sessions were successful in many respects, allowing children, parents and sometimes whole family groups to learn side by side. As a result, a wide range of enthusiastic learners, some of whom were non-literate, acquired basic ICT skills.

### Points for reflection

- What do we know about the present level of engagement of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller parents at meetings, school events and school life?
- How do we, as a school, ensure that we involve parents of our Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children in their child's education?
- In what areas do we need to establish, strengthen or develop further parent, carer and community partnerships?
- How do staff in the school currently address and challenge negative stereotypes of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children and parents?

### Next steps

- Check the quality of communications between all staff (including the leadership team) and parents or carers of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children. Are they effective in developing constructive and respectful partnerships between home and school? How do you know?
- Analyse the quantity and types of communication with parents and carers of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children. Analyse the written communications by tone and content.
- Identify the opportunities provided for involvement in school life for parents and carers of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children. Identify actions that would increase the range, quality and quantity of these opportunities.
- Review the school's parental partnership policy. Develop or improve guidelines for all written communications to parents.
- Set up a forum for parents and carers of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children, where their views can be sought. This would include how they would like to be involved in school life and how they would like to be supported to help their children make progress.

# The Gypsy, Roma and Traveller home-learning environment

Gypsy, Roma and Traveller parents provide a learning environment that is constant and provides continuity for their children as they transfer from one setting or one school to another. Most of a child's day is spent, not in an educational setting, but with their family and the wider community. This holds extra significance for a highly mobile Gypsy, Roma or Traveller child, who may be away from school for many months at a time. Even when a child joins school full-time, the majority of their time will still be spent out of school with their extended family and the wider Gypsy, Roma and Traveller community and this continues to exert a large influence. The site, home and community are very significant learning environments in the lives of these children.

The learning styles within the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities are unique to them and schools need to be aware that, within many such families, children are taught in a less formal but structured manner.



There are some differences between school and home-based learning. Most of these differences become more apparent after the primary phase, as young people enter the adult Gypsy, Roma and Traveller world of work. Much of the secondary school curriculum tends to be viewed by Gypsy, Roma and Traveller parents as irrelevant, at odds with the learning and values encountered at home. They have real concerns that, in the long term, the differences will lead to their children's eventual disassociation from the family and the community. In one way, the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller home-based learning can be seen as an extended work experience, equipping the young person with the necessary skills and values for entry into the adult community. This family learning has been handed down from one generation to the next and, in part, explains the continued existence of these distinct ethnic groups.

In traditional Gypsy, Roma and Traveller homes:

- children learn through participation rather than by decontextualised verbal explanation;
- learning entails temporal and spatial freedom, not always possible at school;
- learning takes place on an inter-generational basis, in contrast to the fixed peer-group experience encountered in schools;
- learning tends to be collaborative, rather than competitive, and does not involve testing;
- learning allows children opportunities to work autonomously and to acquire status from an early age;

- learning carries an expectation that young people make an economic contribution to the family life;
- learning is designed to encourage engagement in adult work activities;
- learning has a clear connection to everyday life, as distinct from being a step towards a qualification that may or may not relate to future work;
- learning enhances the sense of community identity and family membership.

Levinson 2009

For these reasons many Gypsy, Roma and Traveller parents and their children find the cultural differences between learning in school and their own home hard to negotiate. Learning at school strikes some Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children as demeaning because it is not obviously relevant to adult working life. Parents often find homework given by school hard to accept; they feel that when their child is away from school they should teach them Gypsy, Roma and Traveller life skills and values. Because of these fundamental differences in learning styles, many secondary-aged Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children see home education, rather than the learning experience in school, as real education. Schools need to be aware of these potential barriers to learning and to work with parents to convince them of the real benefits offered by school for their children.

## Points for reflection

- What does your school know about the way in which Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children learn within their home environment?
- How can learning in schools be made more collaborative, with fewer constraints on time and space?
- Has the school considered working on an inter-generational approach to learning, perhaps using a functional skills approach?
- How is the school making reference to the home culture, to ensure that the child's sense of community identity is enhanced by being in school?
- How can the school work with parents to identify pathways through secondary education that are relevant to the family's cultural values?

## Next steps

- Work with Gypsy, Roma and Traveller parents and carers as the key to the solution rather than the problem, as the problem could be the result of negative perceptions.
- Respect and value what each party (parents and school) has to offer and work collaboratively, while emphasising the need to appreciate attendance expectations.
- Increase dialogue with parents and carers and recognise that new strategies or policies cannot be implemented without parental consent.
- Match parental aspirations with the personalised offer for every Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupil.
- Communicate to Gypsy, Roma and Traveller parents and carers respect for their cultures and lifestyles and show that this is safeguarded by school policies and action plans.
- Support Gypsy, Roma and Traveller parents and carers in addressing the learning needs of their children; even with possibly poor literacy skills, they are a vital resource to support the learning of their children.
- Work with parents and families to foster a collaborative approach to finding pathways through secondary education that link to their culture and aspirations.

# Establishing relationships in the Early Years

This section focuses on the building of positive crucial early relationships, which school and Early Years setting staff need to make with parents and carers of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children. For additional guidance, see *Building Futures: Developing trust – A focus on provision for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children in the Early Years Foundation Stage*.

Although the headteacher will take the lead in establishing effective partnerships with parents, the staff who first develop and sustain these initial relationships are likely to be Early Years Foundation Stage practitioners. They are uniquely placed to develop strong parent and carer partnership and community links. Parents and carers usually bring their own young children into the school and are made to feel welcome at the start and end of sessions.



Even before children start school, Early Years Foundation Stage practitioners may be working directly with families, as, in many schools, home-visiting will precede school entry. These important introductions to Early Years care and education set the scene for relationships between school and community and can establish the ethos and values of the whole school. These relationships need to be maintained and developed as the child moves through the school. In the case of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils, getting it right from the start applies not just to their first start at school but each time they move into a new one.

All parents and carers can improve their children's development and learning. They have the right to play a central role in making decisions about their own child's care and education at every level. Successful relationships between parents and educators can have longlasting and beneficial effects on children's learning and well-being.



I think the most important piece of advice is to get to know your families, no matter what their cultural background. That provides the information to start the dialogue – and starting the dialogue is really important because there might be fears on both sides, from the school's side as well as the parental side, and if you create the dialogue then you can start improving the attendance because you diminish the fears that they might have.

*Headteacher, EYFS*



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

*Traveller parent*



### Case study 4: Ensuring a positive start

This urban Midlands primary school has developed an excellent relationship with parents and nursery children on the local Traveller site. The children can start in the on-site nursery but then move to the school nursery. By providing a dedicated nursery teaching assistant, who has responsibility for outreach work in the community, the school has been able to make links with the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller families through the use of a mobile library van on the site, organising visits from SureStart and health visitors. This work has also included the setting up of a mother and toddler group. All these initiatives have gradually moved from the Traveller site to the school so that there is a seamless transition for the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller parents and children into nursery at the school. The key factor in all this work has been the role played by the dedicated community outreach worker who is known and, most importantly, trusted by the parents and the community.

Successful relationships become partnerships when there is two-way communication and parents and practitioners really listen to each other and value each other's views and support in achieving the best outcomes for each child.

*Early Years Foundation Stage: 2.2 Positive relationships, parents as partners*



Transition is a very important issue for us and so, from a very early age, and in the ethos of the school, we've always had home visiting. What we were able to do through participating in the Gypsy, Roma and Travellers programme is, in fact, to increase visits to the site and to stress the importance of how important nursery school is to them...and also to lay the foundations to combat any fears or unease that they might have about school. Indeed, transition is, again, very much part of our process so we support it by regular contact with primary school and...joint visits to the site. We share any information that might be valuable through their records and with regular visits to the primary school. But what we also feel is really important is that when the children have transferred they revisit the nursery in their first year, as well. So, again, it's partnership and working together that really does improve relationships with the families.

*Headteacher, London*

## Points for reflection

- Do we know if there are any Gypsy, Roma and Traveller families in our area? Have we contacted the LA TESS to find out?
- How effective is our outreach work in establishing trusting personal relationships right from the start for all pupils?
- Are we proactive enough in visiting Gypsy, Roma and Traveller sites to help families overcome their fears about accessing our settings and schools?
- Do we encourage Gypsy, Roma and Traveller parents to participate in sessions with the children and learn how they can support their child's learning?

## Next steps

- Carry out a staff review of perceptions towards these communities; challenge negative views through training and by meeting the families, possibly on-site in their own homes.
- Work together with the LA TESS to establish close personal contacts with the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller families on Traveller sites.
- Identify a member of staff who can act as the main community outreach worker.
- Audit your toys, books and resources for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller materials to identify gaps; work with the TESS to fill these gaps.

# Establishing relationships in the primary phase

Schools will be at different points in relation to their partnerships with Gypsy, Roma and Traveller parents. However, all schools will need to consider how to develop their engagement with parents, particularly if intervention or additional support is being considered for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children.

An open, honest dialogue with the parents will enable issues to be aired and for relationships to be built on trust and understanding. It is helpful if the meeting or discussion is opened by a headteacher or member of the senior leadership team (SLT), as this signals to the parents its importance to the school. Allowing plenty of time for discussion will help parents to air their views, anxieties and opinions. This will enable any misunderstandings to be addressed at an early stage.



Any meeting at school needs to be organised thoughtfully, in pleasant surroundings, with positive images of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller lifestyles promoted in displays. If it is not possible to hold the meeting at the school, then it should be planned to take place in a location where the Gypsy, Roma or Traveller parent feels more at ease, perhaps on their own site or in their own home.

We have worked hard to foster improved links with Gypsy, Roma and Traveller parents, hosting targeted parents' meetings to discuss their specific needs, how reading is taught at school and how they can support at home. These meetings also targeted support for transition from home to school for Foundation Stage children, and included practical advice on school admissions procedures.

*Primary deputy headteacher*

The discussion might include:

- parental experiences of school;
- what it means to be a successful Gypsy, Roma or Traveller;
- how the school can best support these aspirations;
- what parents feel are the reasons for so many Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils not succeeding academically;
- what the school does do well for these pupils;
- what the school could do better to support them;
- expectations of the pupil, the family, the school;
- expectations about attendance.



Possible areas to be considered for joint agreement between the school and Gypsy, Roma and Traveller parents might include the following issues.

- Children may need to develop different skill sets from those of their parents for a future and fast-changing world.
- Despite disrupted education and hostility shown by some sections of society, Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children and young people have the right to a full-time education, in order that they can make choices as adults in a changing world.
- The school will respect the home-learning styles and appreciate that the child may also be learning other skills and particular literacies required for success within the Gypsy, Roma or Traveller culture.
- Schools needs to be clear in expressing to parents that their approach to learning, shared reading, homework and regular testing does not undermine the learning that is already taking place within the family, but rather complements and adds to it, enabling the child to combine the best of both styles of learning to achieve their full potential.
- Parents need to engage in their children's learning by focusing on the outcomes in practical, concrete terms, pointing out the benefits to the child and the family. Currently the overall educational achievement of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils is the lowest of any group in the UK but there is no reason why this should continue to be the case if everyone works together. Some Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils already achieve as well as other pupils.
- The school has to convince parents that they have high expectations of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils, giving them the chance to achieve the best possible outcomes. If pupils are being targeted for support it is worth explaining that it is not because they are poor achievers but to ensure extra support so that they can catch up and achieve their full potential.
- Parents may need to be persuaded that children will benefit from Quality First teaching alongside their peers, in addition to support given individually or in smaller groups. They may need to know that children will not be penalised through missing out on preferred activities.
- Schools must understand that the parents only want what is best for their children, within the context of their own understanding and cultural experience.

The strategy that we found really worked was...using the increased knowledge we had of their particular needs...with greater contact with the Traveller families, we began to understand what their present needs were with regards to literacy and numeracy. Once we gained the confidence through meetings between the staff and the Traveller parents, we were able to improve the attendance of the Traveller children.

*Headteacher, Outer London*



Despite limitations or gaps in their own literacy skills and their own experience of education, there is still much that Gypsy, Roma and Traveller parents can be encouraged to do to support their children. They can:

- communicate enthusiasm for school, linking it with cultural aspirations;
- provide a quiet space for children to work and somewhere safe for them to keep their school books;
- encourage them to do some homework every night;
- encourage regular attendance and good behaviour;
- congratulate and reward children for good work at school;
- ask questions about the school day and their learning;
- talk to their children about their school work, what they like, what they find difficult;
- allow them to take part in school educational visits;
- discuss targets and what the child needs to do to improve;
- with younger children, tell stories, share picture books and simple educational games.

### Case study 5: Introductory meetings for parents

In a shire county in the West of England, two primary schools had simultaneously identified the need to engage groups of hard-to-reach parents, including those of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils. They worked together to apply and gain funding for Parent Support Advisers (PSA). Initially, the PSAs carried out site visits with TESS staff to explain their role, developing leaflets about their work and going through them with parents. Parents' concerns and interests were noted, to be fed back to the schools and addressed.

The PSAs made themselves available to parents daily, at the beginning and end of the school day, meeting parents in the playground and actively engaging them. Drop-in sessions were held for parents to go through the weekly newsletter, which addressed the expressed need for information other than in written form. Parents were also invited to attend further groups and participate in lessons.

Gypsy, Roma and Traveller parents identified areas of need at the beginning of each key stage. The PSAs therefore planned weekly introductory sessions for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller parents of pupils in Reception to Year 3, where school procedures such as homework and behaviour were explained, the curriculum was discussed and parents were advised on practical ways to support their children. Parents had opportunities to raise any concerns that they had and to express their views.

As a result of the PSAs' role, Gypsy, Roma and Traveller parents' engagement in school has increased; parents now directly participate in lessons, helping with cookery and sewing projects. Parents at the junior school expressed a real sense of support from the school through the PSA. Attendance at parents' evenings has improved.

This project has been crucial in accelerating the ongoing work of the schools in overcoming barriers to parental involvement in their own schools





### Case study 6: Improving the self-esteem of Roma learners

An inner-city primary school decided to improve the engagement and literacy levels of its Roma children as part of the school development plan. The children had been identified as a group among those making poor progress. Staff were concerned about their poor levels of attendance and punctuality, as well as their low self-esteem as learners.

In the first phase, the school established Roma Project afternoons; the group attended sessions with Roma storytellers, musicians and dancers as well as a professional female Roma football player from the local community. Each Roma child took a non-Roma friend to these sessions, and two children from each of the classes without Roma children also attended. All the children fed back to their own classes in order to raise the profile of Roma culture. Corridor displays were also created.

The levels of achievement, attendance and punctuality of Roma children were monitored throughout the term.

During the next phase, levels of achievement, attendance and punctuality of Roma children continued to be monitored, interventions for literacy were started where appropriate, and incentives to improve attendance and punctuality were initiated.

The afternoon sessions with storytellers, musicians and dancers continued and, in addition, schemes of work were designed and trialled in these sessions, for example building a traditional Gypsy wagon, exploring various aspects of Roma culture, history and language. These were used to create schemes of work for PSHE, design and technology and art in the wider curriculum. Resources and books were bought for the school. One year group undertook a design and technology project to create a storybook, based on a Roma myth.

When Gypsy, Roma and Traveller History Month was celebrated across the school, many Roma visitors came in and some classes had a taster session. All classes undertook sessions, learning about Roma culture, history and language, and completed artwork. Displays of the work were put up throughout the school.

A member of the Roma Support Group from the local community worked with the school during both phases. As an outcome of the work the attendance of all the Roma children has improved and parents are attending meetings and functions in school. Rates of progress for this target group show that many of them have made accelerated progress.



## Points for reflection

- Are the parents and carers of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils in your class confident about coming into school to attend meetings and to be fully involved in their children's education?
- Would you be confident about visiting your Gypsy, Roma and Traveller families at home? If not, why not?
- Who should lead at the initial meeting with Gypsy, Roma and Traveller parents and which members of staff should be present?
- Who might be other key partners, for example Family Learning, Children's Centre, TESS? What would be their involvement?
- Are there any local Gypsy, Roma and Traveller role-models who could support the school?
- How will you communicate with parents who cannot or will not attend?

## Next steps

- Establish a regular meeting with Gypsy, Roma and Traveller families to discuss intervention programmes, travel plans, regular attendance and parental attitudes to the benefits of full-time education beyond primary stage.
- Establish specific projects for Year 5 pupils and their parents and families, to support them through secondary transfer.
- Work closely with secondary schools in your area to begin the process of maintaining the trust and understanding that have been established with the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children and families.

## Establishing relationships in the secondary phase

Given the importance of parental support for their children's learning, schools need to consider Gypsy, Roma and Traveller parents' aspirations and expectations and work closely with them. Research shows that many parents are concerned that secondary education can lead to the de-culturalisation of their children in terms of their heritage. Schools need to be sensitive to this issue when meeting with parents to discuss progress in this phase of learning. Many parents have real anxieties about their children losing their sense of identity and learning ways that conflict with home values.

Parental attitudes are clearly an important factor in school retention. The mothers of the retained students believed that secondary education was important because it promised to offer more choice and opportunity for their children. Could more be done to confirm and reinforce this idea through proactive and imaginative work with parents?

*Gypsy Traveller Students in Secondary Schools (Derrington and Kendall 2004)*

There is a particular anxiety that daughters will move away from the traditional paths envisaged for them, and that this will disrupt family life.

*Kiddle, C. Traveller Children: A Voice for Themselves, 1999. © Jessica Kingsley Publishers. Used with kind permission.*



### Case study 7: Parents' contribution to curriculum development

One secondary school in the Midlands decided to develop the curriculum to celebrate Gypsy, Roma and Traveller culture, encouraging parents who visited the school to help not just to celebrate their culture but share it with others.

The curriculum coordinator worked alongside the LA TESS adviser to develop further the themed curriculum. Within units in schemes of work, Gypsy, Roma and Traveller culture and history were made explicit and celebrated.

Two parents came in to school to talk to the children about Gypsy, Roma and Traveller weddings and christenings, as part of religious education. The parents were supported during the planning of this activity. The parents were encouraged to talk about their culture, bringing visual aids, so that all children could understand how these important events are marked and celebrated as part of their comparative religious study on rites of passage.

During Gypsy, Roma and Traveller History Month, a storyteller came in to the school, to work with all Year 7 pupils, telling stories about Gypsy, Roma and Traveller culture, history and traditions. He visited the school over several weeks, working with children from different groups.

All of these activities helped to reinforce tolerance and respect for all cultures, within both the school and the wider community.

## Improving attendance

The issue of irregular or non-attendance by Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils, particularly those of secondary age, has been consistently flagged up for over 30 years (Plowden, 1967; Reiss, 1975; Swann, 1985; Ofsted, 1996, 1999; DfEE, 1999a).

Despite this awareness and the mechanisms introduced recently to raise attendance levels generally, the situation for Traveller students has barely improved and remains an area of 'grave concern'.

*Managing support for the attainment of pupils from minority ethnic groups (Ofsted 2001)*

Secondary schools need to work hard to ensure that Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils transferring to them build on their positive experience of teacher–pupil relationships in the primary phase, to ensure that pupils do not drop out of education at Key Stage 3.

The relationship between Gypsy, Roma and Traveller parents and schools is likely to be particularly challenging to develop. Many Gypsy Traveller parents have little or no education or have had poor quality experiences, especially in secondary schools. They often have few literacy skills making it difficult for them to know how best to support their children. Some parents also do not appreciate the relevance of the secondary curriculum to their children's future and see it as undermining their values and aspirations for their children.

*Aiming High: Raising the Achievement of Gypsy Traveller Pupils (DfES 2003)*

Key factors that have improved the likelihood of successful transfer and good attendance at secondary schools include:

- having an older brother or sister who had transferred successfully to secondary school;
- developing strong relationships with other pupils and a secure sense of self, which appeared to be predominant features. The best attendees were almost all described by their teachers as being popular and good mixers with a secure network of non-Traveller friends in school.

*Derrington, C. and Kendall, S., 2004, Gypsy Traveller Students in Secondary Schools: a Culture, Identity and Achievement. © Trentham Books. Used with kind permission.*

These points illustrate the importance of ensuring that secondary schools put in place resources and develop a culturally relevant curriculum that affirms and recognises the importance to Gypsy, Roma and Traveller young people of their cultural identity. Positive self-esteem is important for effective learning.

I want the kids to be able to read and write, to get a proper job. I want them to learn a lot more than I learned, to get a proper education and not to be a cleaner.

*Traveller parent*

One way in which this can be addressed is by secondary schools showing pupils and parents that they are listening to their concerns and acting upon them.



## Case study 8: Improving attendance

At one school, the headteacher and SLT developed systems to address the concerns of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller families. Working in partnership with Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities has helped them to ensure that the five outcomes of the Every Child Matters agenda are met.

The previous headteacher showed enormous commitment to building strong and lasting partnerships with the community. This has continued, with the new headteacher supporting these aims with innovative approaches.

A key focus is to provide a supportive ethos, in which parents feel able to approach any member of staff with concerns or issues, and families are encouraged to feel that they are full participants in the life of the school. The SLT recognises the importance of a culturally inclusive curriculum and an environment that reflects an ethos of diversity and acceptance. The new headteacher has led initiatives to build on good relationships with the families, including activities that support and value Gypsy, Roma and Traveller culture.

- A practicing Gypsy artist worked with the pupils and parents, delivering art workshops, modelling good practice, raising aspirations and celebrating Traveller culture.
- The LA's TESS has provided CPD training to all new staff and teachers about the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller culture and how to work with families to build effective partnership with parents.
- The school has worked with families, developing IT skills. The parents and pupils took part in making a DVD-ROM that traced the family history of Travellers in the area and this was shown at the local community centre.
- A Traveller storyteller worked with families and pupils using Gypsy, Roma and Traveller cultural stories to enhance knowledge and improve literacy skills.
- The TESS and SLT have worked in partnership to improve self-ascription, focusing on each new intake and communicating with parents to address concerns.
- The school-family link worker targeted the non-attendance of families and supported parents with preventative strategies.
- The school sought the views of both parents and pupils to gain better understanding of the aspirations and values of the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities.
- Traveller pupils are actively involved in the school council.
- There has been strong parental commitment to breakfast clubs, resulting in high attendance of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils.

The SLT was the key driver for the improved attendance, engagement and raised attainment of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils. Actions required to engage and support parent and community partnerships were viewed as a whole-school responsibility. This work has established mutual trust, motivation, a sense of joint responsibility and a greater understanding of and empathy for the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller culture. The headteacher and SLT made it their personal responsibility to meet with parents to gain an insight into their views on education, concerns for their children and aspirations for the future.

## Points for reflection

- What experiences have your Gypsy, Roma and Traveller parents had of secondary schools?
- What do you know about Gypsy, Roma and Traveller parents' aspirations and expectations?
- Gypsy, Roma and Traveller parents have real anxieties concerning their children losing their sense of identity and learning ways that conflict with home values.
- Schools that provide a supportive ethos, led by the SLT, encourage Gypsy, Roma and Traveller parents to express any concerns and issues with all members of staff.
- SLTs need to work in partnership with the LA TESS to encourage self-ascription to provide accurate data and target resources.

## Next steps

- Build on the positive relationships established in the primary phase to ensure that Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils do not drop out of education at Key Stage 3.
- Work proactively with Gypsy, Roma and Traveller parents to reinforce the belief that secondary education offers more choice and opportunity for their children.
- Develop a culturally relevant curriculum that affirms and recognises the importance of cultural identity to Gypsy, Roma and Traveller young people. Encourage Gypsy, Roma and Traveller parents to share their culture with others.
- Ask parents and pupils for their views to gain better understanding of the aspirations and values of the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities
- Establish specific projects for Year 8 pupils and their parents and families, to support them through transition between Key Stages 3 and 4.
- Develop a flexible and culturally sensitive approach, in partnership with other agencies, to ensure access to a personalised and appropriate educational package leading from school to the world of work.

# Partnership and co-educating

Building relationships with parents and carers of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children can be developed beyond basic information-giving, towards parents and carers in a joint role as co-educators. Real home-school partnership views parents as co-investors who need to be engaged in the ongoing process of education. Once the importance of parents and carers as their child's first educators is established, there are clear benefits for children if school staff develop this into partnered co-education.

A first step involves parents and carers in the work of the school, being invited and responding to invitations and being positive about what the school offers. The next stage is for the school to work with parents and carers of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children on educational issues and activities which make changes to the school's curriculum, processes and outlook. The aim is to move from initial engagement of parents and carers, to keeping them involved, to establishing them as co-educators with school staff. The following stages give suggestions for some activities schools have used to develop this partnership.

The following suggestions have been adapted from *Excellence and Enjoyment: learning and teaching for Black children in the primary years*.

## Stage 1: Engaging parents

- Managing communication through clear policies
- Encouraging them to accompany their children on an educational visit
- Offering refreshments after assemblies, sports events, meetings
- Outreach – small meetings on site in their own homes and trailers
- 'Stay and play' sessions in Early Years settings
- Talking with parents on the primary playground (giving specific information, responding to queries, sharing good news, canvassing)
- Parent-friendly reception areas (information and literature easily available and accessible, welcoming reception staff)
- Timed drop-in sessions, for example book or toy library
- Informal workshops, learning or games activities, alongside their children
- Community lunches, especially with a theme
- Inviting parents to join in junior school lunch-times on a class rota basis
- Thoughtfully arranged and targeted parents' evenings
- 'Clinics' staffed by key personnel (home-school liaison and interpreters for Roma parents)



## Stage 2: Keeping parents involved

- Parent advocates – key parents, formal body, friends of the school
- Parent associates (hearing readers, escorting school trips, extended out-of-school visits, community events, fundraising)
- Parent workshops (developing materials, curriculum and interest groups)
- Parents attending curriculum evenings for example Gypsy, Roma and Traveller history events
- Parents in school telling stories, leading craft activities, sharing experiences, contributing to assemblies
- Regular targeted formal parent consultations or focus groups
- Parent governor appointments
- Register of parents' skills and talents
- Celebrating parents' talents and achievements
- Family outings

## Stage 3: Parents as co-educators

- Parents supporting children in the classroom
- Parents learning alongside children, for example GCSE classes, foreign languages, ICT
- Parents as speakers at events
- Parent governor linked with each year group
- Homework partnerships
- Establishment of a parents' group for consideration of strategic developments, working with SLT and governors
- Providing homework activities such as investigations into family history, which engage the whole family
- Parents and older members of the community acting as mentors in school
- School display of role-models, Gypsy, Roma and Traveller parents and carers as achievers



It is not like years ago when we used to go to school. Things have changed and they're changing big time. You need a computer for nearly everything now. The kids need their education to get on in life, get themselves a future. I want better for my kids, than I've had, do you know what I mean?

*Traveller parent*



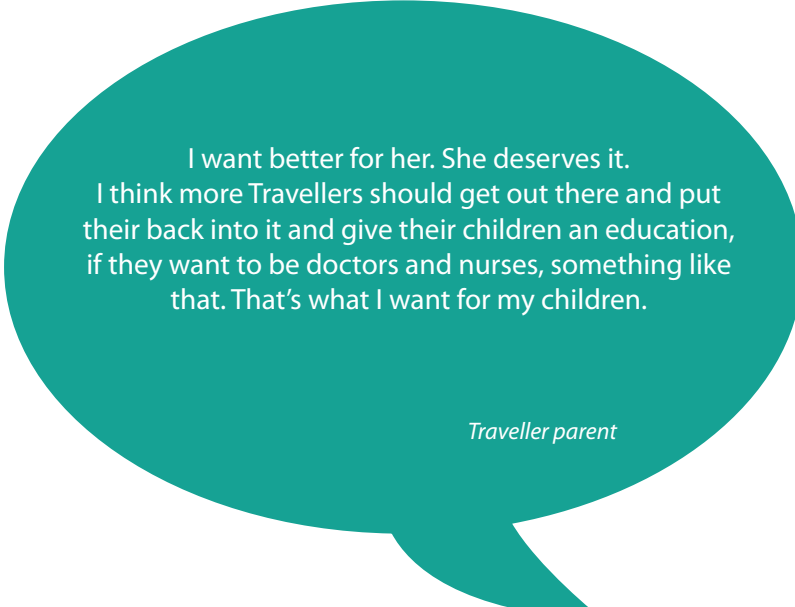
## Points for reflection

- How can we encourage and support Gypsy, Roma and Traveller parents to become effective co-educators?
- What attributes would typify a school that has Gypsy, Roma and Traveller parents and carers as co-educators?
- What would be the benefits for children's attainment and progress?
- What is happening now at each stage in our school? What can we build on and develop?
- What are the potential barriers and how can we overcome them? Do we need to challenge stereotypes or perceptions?
- What additional training will be needed for the whole school, staff and governors?
- How can we keep work with parents high on the agenda?
- How can we share good practice?
- Where can we get support?
- How can we ensure shared ownership and responsibility by parents and the school?

## Next steps

School leaders could:

- organise a professional meeting for staff to:
  - explore the benefits of working in partnership with parents and carers of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children
  - consider pertinent messages from research
  - identify barriers to and strategies for improving partnerships with parents and carers of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children;
- reflect on the self-evaluation form, section 4: Effective partnership with parents and community;
- plan to put reviewed strategies into place, check the impact of the work and decide where the outcomes will be shared with the full staff.



I want better for her. She deserves it.  
I think more Travellers should get out there and put  
their back into it and give their children an education,  
if they want to be doctors and nurses, something like  
that. That's what I want for my children.

*Traveller parent*

# Involving the wider Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities

Since the introduction of the Education and Inspections Act 2006, all schools in England have a duty to promote community cohesion. Ofsted has a duty, which came into effect in September 2007, to report on the contributions made by schools in this area. Schools will contribute to community cohesion through their approach to:

- teaching, learning and the curriculum: promoting discussion about common values and diversity;
- equity and excellence: ensuring equal opportunities for all pupils to succeed at the highest level possible, by removing barriers to access and participation;
- engagement and ethos: providing opportunities to interact and build links with parents, communities and other schools locally, nationally and internationally.

Traveller sites and the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities need to be seen as part of the local community. Schools must make every effort to include them in their actions and planning, to promote community cohesion.

It is clear from recent research that schools that serve their children well also seek to develop active partnerships with the community in which they work. This entails establishing real relationships between schools and the surrounding communities, to ensure that no child feels that they must leave their culture at the gates. If schools are fully to understand their children, they need to have some understanding and knowledge of the communities from which they come. Understanding the local context is vital if schools are to respond to the needs of their Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children.

...the best schools more often than not combine a drive for high achievement with a strong community programme which both promotes, and benefits from, good race relations.

...schools cannot 'go it alone' against the forces of racial inequality, prejudice and social exclusion that are outside their gates but reach into the classroom.

Raising the Attainment of Minority Ethnic Pupils: School and LEA Responses (Ofsted 1999)


## Case study 9: Community cohesion

The headteacher of a school within the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Achievement Programme (GRTAP) identified that one of the most significant achievements in terms of community cohesion was responding to a Traveller suggestion that they have an on-site open day to celebrate Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Achievement Month. So we arranged a visit to the site.

We brought groups of children from the nursery; the Traveller children showed their friends their home, where they lived. Groups from the primary schools, accompanied by both primary headteachers, also visited. We had art groups that came down and showed photographs. We shared food prepared by the Travellers. Next year we thought we'd actually have a street party, which could then involve some of the Travellers who don't have children, so that they feel included, as well.

Involving Traveller parents and the wider community positively and imaginatively in the life and development of the school is vital in raising aspirations and expectations. Recruiting and supporting Gypsy, Roma and Traveller parents to be school governors, inviting them to work in schools as mentors and teaching assistants, naming key staff as contacts for parents are strategies which provide positive role models for all.

*Aiming High: Raising the Achievement of Gypsy Traveller Pupils (DfES 2003)*



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 other children. We are helped by the school to feel like all the children are equal.

*Traveller parent*

## Points for reflection

- How does the school link with the wider Gypsy, Roma and Traveller community?
- What plans has the school made to celebrate Gypsy, Roma and Traveller History Month and how will you involve parents and the wider community in the planning and delivery?
- Have there been any barriers to parent and community participation, including those set up by the school?

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