

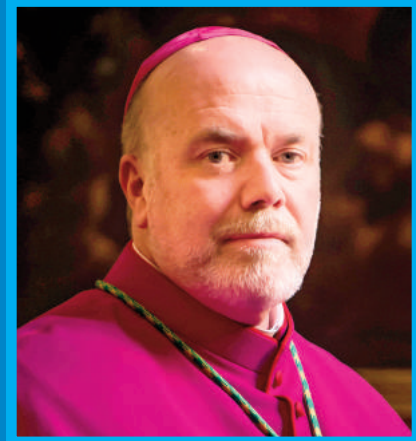


Made in God's image

Supporting Gypsy,
Roma and Traveller
pupils in Catholic
Schools



Foreword



Central to the Catholic faith is the belief that all people are made in the image of God and should hence be treated with dignity and respect. The purpose of the *Made in God's Image* series is to share guidance on how, as a Church, we can support particular minority communities and tackle the challenges that they face. This document is the second in this series. It is designed to be a resource for those working in the Catholic educational sector and tackles the question: 'how can members of the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) community best be supported?'

It is important for readers to be aware that just as there are distinct groups within the GRT community, the issues they face are often varied and ever-changing. The research conducted by the Catholic Education Service for this project has included a consultation with educational professionals to find best-practice examples of ways in which schools can reach out to the GRT community, identify the challenges that they may face, and provide staff with the tools to support and advocate for them.

I would like to express my gratitude to all those who have contributed to the production of this resource with such enthusiasm, openness and drive to give a voice to this often misunderstood community. Special thanks should also be given to Molly Conrad who conducted interviews, undertook research and helped compose this document.

Finally, I would like to dedicate this resource to Saint Christopher, the patron saint of travellers, to Blessed Ceferino Jiménez Malla, the holy patron of the GRT community, and to the Blessed Virgin Mary who accompanies every Christian soul as they journey through their pilgrimage of life.

The Rt Rev Marcus Stock

Bishop of Leeds

Chairman of the Catholic Education Service

Contents

Foreword	2
Introduction	4
Methodology	5
The GRT Community	6
Why is this Resource Important?	8
The GRT Community and Catholic Social Teaching	11
Inclusion, Absences and Transitions	13
Inclusion as a first step	15
Inclusion through Catholicism	20
Early Years	23
Relationships and Sex Education	25
Transitions to Secondary School	28
Trust, Role Models and Key Figures	31
Funding	34
Conclusions	35
Acknowledgements	37
Bibliography	38

Introduction

Made in God's Image is a resource designed to support all those working in the Catholic educational sector to help challenge the stigmas faced by Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) pupils and their wider communities. The aim of this document is to offer guidance on how to promote a spirit of inclusiveness for GRT pupils to learn and flourish in their school environment, be supported in achieving their best outcomes academically, and be taught the skills to thrive when they finish school.

Teachers, support staff and school leaders play an integral role in supporting GRT pupils and their families. Their first-hand experience makes them key figures in tackling some of these issues. They are often able to identify where issues arise and are more likely to recognise the complexities and sensitivities at play because they know their pupils and their parents well.

The reason for creating this document is because school staff have asked for further guidance on what they can do in their role to support the GRT community. School leaders have asked what they can do to support their staff in this area.

Methodology

As part of our research for this project we have conducted interviews with various headteachers of Catholic schools with GRT pupils and staff, as well as the National Catholic Chaplain for the GRT community, Fr Dan Mason. Using the CES Census data for 2020, we also sent out a questionnaire to Catholic schools that serve a higher-than-average number of GRT pupils in order to gain a deeper understanding of GRT experiences in the Catholic education sector in particular.

In carrying out this research we examined the following: GRT attitudes towards Early Years education, Relationships and Sex Education and transitions to secondary school; the significance of the Catholic school sector in supporting the GRT community; the factors that contribute to GRT pupil absences in schools and the most effective solutions; the groups, organisations and people who have made a positive impact on helping GRT pupils to thrive at school.

Through this research, we are able to share good practice examples of work done in Catholic schools to support the GRT community.

The GRT Community

In this document the term 'GRT community' will be used as an umbrella term to refer to all members of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities. 'Gypsy', 'Roma' and 'Traveller' will be capitalised throughout.¹ The term 'GRT' - or 'Gypsy, Roma and Traveller' - represents a diverse collection of communities, including Romany Gypsies, Travellers of Irish Heritage, European Roma, Fairground and Circus Show People and New Travellers. The GRT community is not a homogenous group; whilst members of the various groups that make up the GRT community may share many characteristics, they may also have significant distinctions from one another.

'24% of pupils at our school identify as GRT pupils. The majority are from the Sinti Tribe, a community of Romani Gypsies. Some refer to themselves as Gypsies and others may not want to be termed 'Gypsy' but 'Traveller' instead due to the historical persecution they have faced...Some may also refer to themselves as 'Roma' from time to time. This is why the term 'GRT' can be confusing because 'Gypsy', 'Roma' and 'Traveller' mean different things to different people.'

Paula Strachan, Headteacher at St Teresa's Catholic Primary School, Darlington

What all members of the GRT community do have in common is their status as an ethnic group. Often, groups within the GRT community have long, ancestral histories and also hold on to distinct cultural traditions. Many can track their families back generations. Sadly for some communities these histories can be traced back through times of extreme persecution such as the Porrajmos – the Nazi persecution of members of the GRT community.² This has left scars on the community today which have contributed to difficulties with integration and fear of further persecution.

The Government provides a list of ethnic groups recommended for use when asking for someone's ethnicity.³ Whilst they mention Gypsy and Irish Travellers, they do not specifically mention people who identify as Romany or Roma. The term 'GRT', which will be used in this document to embrace all Traveller groups, includes the Romany/Roma community. This is especially important considering that it is thought Britain has one of the highest Roma populations in Europe.⁴

It is important to include all sub-groups of the GRT community in definitions because different members of the GRT community may give themselves one title on a census, for example, but identify with a different title in their day-to-day lives. They may choose not to disclose their identity or refer to themselves by a title that they feel creates less stigma for

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1. Please note that some documents quoted within this resource use different terms to refer to the GRT community.
 2. Holocaust Memorial Day Trust, Roma and Sinti People.
 3. UK Government, 'List of Ethnic Groups'.
 4. Brown et. al., Migrant Roma in the United Kingdom (University of Salford, October (2013) p.47.

them or reduces the amount of prejudice they may face. For similar reasons some members of the GRT community do not come forward for official documentation, such as the National Census, and therefore there are not accurate numbers on the amount of GRT members in the UK and the number of members in each sub-group.⁵ This can sometimes make it difficult to gain sufficient and accurate data on the GRT community to understand the extent at which they are marginalised and face challenges. Despite this, it is clear that the challenges faced by the GRT community are significant. In the 2019 House of Commons Briefing on Gypsies and Travellers it stated:

'Gypsies and Travellers experience some of the worst outcomes of any group, across a wide range of social indicators. The Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) has published a number of reports highlighting the multiple inequalities experienced by Gypsies and Travellers. An EHRC review in 2015 concluded that the life chances of Gypsies and Travellers had declined since the Commission's previous review in 2010. The contributory factors are complex and often inter-related, but may include deprivation, social exclusion and discrimination.'⁶

More needs to be done to support and empower the GRT community to ensure that they have the means to live a life of dignity.

5. Armstrong and Richards, *Teaching and Learning in diverse and inclusive classrooms* (Routledge, October 2010) p.43.

6. Hannah Cromarty, *House of Commons Briefing Paper: Gypsies and Travellers*, HC 08083 (House of Commons Library, May 2019) p.4.

Why is this Resource Important?

The Church's particular concern for the GRT community

The Vatican document *Guidelines for the Pastoral Care of Gypsies** highlights the Church's 'particular concern for Gypsies who need a specific pastoral care that gives special attention to their culture which, of course, must pass through the paschal mystery of death and resurrection'.⁷ This is not to disregard the fact that the Church teaches that all people are equal in dignity and made in the image of God, but to recognise that those who are not treated as such require particular pastoral and practical attention. This was articulated by Pope Francis when he addressed members of the GRT community in Blaj, Romania: 'whenever anyone is left behind, the human family cannot move forward'.⁸ *Guidelines for the Pastoral Care of Gypsies* is addressed 'not only to all those who - whether Gypsies or not - are involved in this specific pastoral field, but also to the whole Church'.⁹ All Catholics have a responsibility to support those from the GRT community, just as all have a responsibility to love their neighbour, whoever they are.

Catholic Schools and the GRT Community

When asked 'for which reasons do you believe GRT families have chosen to send their children to your school?', 75% of respondents to our questionnaire listed the Catholic ethos of the school as being important. Nearly 69% of respondents also expressed that they felt GRT parents saw the school's Catholic ethos as an extension of their own community's ethos.

Catholic schools are unique in the way in which they can support the GRT community particularly because so many GRT families, whether Catholic or not seem to find similarities between their values and Catholic values:

For me, the most important message for members of GRT communities to hear is that they are valued and loved by God and that they are an important part of the Catholic community. This is something that schools with a Catholic ethos should demonstrate, especially considering how important the Catholic faith is to many Irish Travellers.

Fr Dan Mason, National Catholic Chaplain for the GRT Community

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- * Please note that the term 'Gypsies' is used in this Vatican document to refer to the whole GRT community.
 - 7. Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People, *Guidelines for the Pastoral Care of Gypsies* (December 2005).
 - 8. Pope Francis, *Meeting with the Roma Community* (June 2019).
 - 9. Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People, *Guidelines for the Pastoral Care of Gypsies* (December 2005).

Education as a tool to bring about positive change

According to the Traveller Movement, the 2011 Census highlighted that 'Gypsies and Irish Travellers are three times more likely to have no qualifications and are significantly more likely to be economically inactive compared to the average population for England and Wales'.¹⁰ René Cassin, a human rights charity that advocates for the rights of the GRT community has stated that of the 58,000 people who identified themselves as Gypsies or Irish Travellers on the 2011 census 60% of people over the age of 16 have no qualifications. Those from the GRT community who do take GCSE's perform five times worse than settled children, and in general, GRT communities have the highest rates of illiteracy of any ethnic group in the UK.¹¹

It is worth noting that these statistics could be much higher. Despite the results of the 2011 Census it is estimated that there could be between 90, 000 and 300, 000 GRT people living in the UK.¹² Other obstacles to inclusion which this often-misunderstood community faces are issues around housing and accommodation, poverty, disproportionately high adult and child mortality rates, mental health problems, negative media portrayals and racism.¹³ Despite statistics that show that access to education has been a struggle for members of the GRT population, it is also true that education is a tool which can be harnessed to help tackle many of the challenges faced by the GRT community as well. Pope Francis calls upon the GRT community to embrace education for their children for this reason:

Education is certainly the basis for a person's healthy development. It is well known that the poor level of schooling of many of your young people today is the main obstacle to their access to the world of work. Your children have the right to go to school; do not prevent them from going! Your children have the right to go to school! It is important that the impetus to better education come from the family, come from the parents, come from the grandparents; it is the task of adults to ensure that the young ones attend school. Access to education will enable your young people to become active citizens, to participate in the political, social and economic life in their respective countries.¹⁴

This is also recognised in the Vatican Document Guidelines for the Pastoral Care of Gypsies:

The education given in gaġġ* schools plays a vital role in [the process of integration]. In fact, standard textbooks often portray a historical and sociological perception of the Gypsy population based on prejudices handed down from generation to generation, thereby perpetuating the general attitude of distrust. Likewise, information propagated by the mass media seldom makes the general public aware of the positive values in the Gypsy culture. They more often disseminate negative news

10. The Traveller Movement, A Good Practice Guide for Improving Outcomes for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Children in Education (April 2019) p.8.

11. René Cassin, 'Factsheet: Gypsies, Travellers and Roma in the UK and Europe' (2015).

12. Ibid.

13. Ibid.

14. Pope Francis, Meeting with the Participants in the Pilgrimage of Gypsies (October 2015).

* Non-Gypsy/non-GRT.

which further damages the Gypsy image. The keen and increasingly widespread desire to have minorities respected, should instead be brought about also in this area, without any kind of discrimination. What is valid for all minorities should also be applied to Gypsies. Therefore, a great deal of work is still needed to open up, to inform and to break down mistrust.¹⁵

This mistrust has often been mutual between both GRT and non-GRT people and has prevented real healing from taking place. In a speech to participants in the pilgrimage of Gypsies in 2015 Pope Francis said:

The time has come to put an end to age-old prejudices, preconceptions and mutual mistrust that are often at the base of discrimination, racism and xenophobia. No one must feel isolated, and no one is authorized to trample on the dignity and rights of others. It is the spirit of mercy that calls us to fight in order to guarantee all these values.¹⁶

His reference to mutual distrust seems to be at the crux of many tensions between GRT and non-GRT communities. Through misunderstandings, assumptions and the placing of stereotypes, walls have been built up and many from both sides are unsure how to build bridges. This is where the Catholic faith is important because it brings people from all races into communion with the body of Christ (Galatians 3:28). Catholic schools are spaces where this can be put into practice.

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15. Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People, Guidelines for the Pastoral Care of Gypsies (December 2005).
 16. Pope Francis, Meeting with the Participants in the Pilgrimage of Gypsies (October 2015).

The GRT Community and Catholic Social Teaching

The principles of Catholic Social Teaching (CST) are the driving force behind the mission of the Church in supporting the GRT community. Reflecting on the different relevant principles can aid in understanding and subsequently tackling the challenges faced by the GRT community. To aid this process, each principle includes a quote either from a time that Pope Francis addressed members of the GRT community or from the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People along with a reflection.

Dignity

'Something that angers me is that we are all used to speaking about people with adjectives...And this destroys, because it does not allow the person to emerge.'¹⁷

All members of the school community; staff, pupils and parents must be treated with respect and love. The school must encourage all members of its community to follow Jesus' command to 'love your neighbour as yourself' (Mark 12:31) and recognise that every person is made in the image of God. All members of the school community must be viewed as unique individuals and not judged by preconceived ideas or stereotypes.

Solidarity

'One goes from habitual prejudices to signs of rejection, often without any reaction or protest from those who witness them. This has caused [Gypsies] untold suffering and persecution, especially during the last century. This should stir everyone's conscience and arouse solidarity towards this people.'¹⁸

All members of the school community must feel safe and supported and recognise the part that they play in fostering an environment of welcome, trust and community. Staff and pupils should be given the space to reflect on their words and actions in the spirit of Matthew 25:40: 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.'

The Common Good

'Thanks to Gypsies and their traditions, mankind is enriched with a true cultural heritage.'¹⁹

17. Pope Francis, Prayer Meeting with Roma and Sinti People (May 2019).

18. Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People, Guidelines for the Pastoral Care of Gypsies (December 2005).

19. Ibid.

All members of the school community recognise that in communion with Christ through their ethos, they embody the words of St Paul: 'Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it' (1 Corinthians 12:27). Whilst each member may be different, the school encourages all members to recognise the gifts, talents and cultural joys that each member brings to the school and wider local community in pursuit of a more loving and caring society. When various aspects of life diminish or belittle the dignity of others, for example through the media or television programmes the school community recognises the harm this does and encourages people not to partake.

The Option for the Poor

'Abandoned often by men but not by God.'

All members of the school community are treated charitably and offered support to ensure that their health and wellbeing needs are met. When difficult situations arise, the school looks with empathy upon the people involved, recognises where financial difficulties have exacerbated the situation and finds solutions that offer those involved dignified options.

Peace

'According to the moral and social order, every human being must be able to enjoy his fundamental rights and fulfil his duties. On this basis it is possible to build peaceful coexistence, in which the different cultures and traditions protect their respective values, not by adopting a closed or opposing attitude, but through dialogue and integration.'

All members of the school community foster peace and unity amongst each other, seeking to understand one another's perspectives. Racist or discriminatory language is not tolerated and children from minority groups are not placed on a pedestal or positively discriminated against, but fully integrated.

The Dignity of Work and Participation

'Dear brothers and sisters, as a people, you have a great role to play. Do not be afraid to share and offer the distinctive gifts you possess and that have marked your history.'²²

All members of staff are offered support, guidance and opportunities to grow in their role. Children are supported in finding employment paths that suit them, encouraged to have faith in themselves to pursue their goals, feel proud of their achievements and thrive at school.

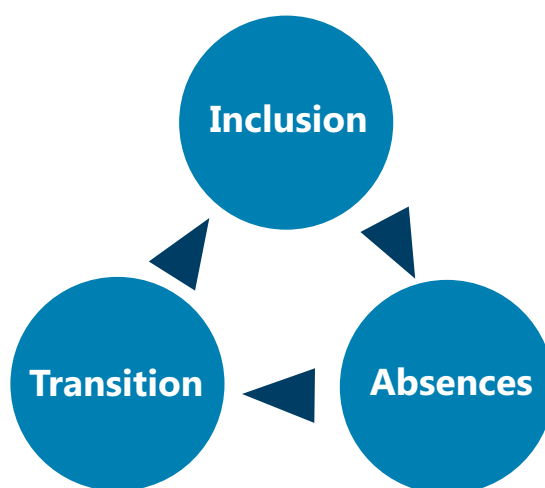
20. Ibid.

21. Pope Francis, Meeting with the Participants in the Pilgrimage of Gypsies (October 2015).

22. Pope Francis, Meeting with the Roma Community (June 2019).

Inclusion, Absences and Transitions

The biggest issues faced by schools when dealing with the GRT community are inclusion, absences and transitions. These three challenges are interconnected and affect each other. For example, fostering an inclusive environment helps pupils enjoy school more because they are welcomed into a community where they feel valued and understood. This reduces absences. Parents are also able to view the school in a more trustworthy light and will be more likely to trust the school's advice on transitioning to secondary school. If GRT children transition to secondary school, they are more likely to send their own children to secondary school which breaks the cycle of absences. This increases the likelihood that schools will have more GRT members of staff in the future and GRT pupils feel more integrated at school, more comfortable attending regularly and inspired by role models from their own ethnic background.



There are both push and pull factors that contribute to lack of voluntary involvement in schools from the GRT community. Some examples can be seen below:

Push	Pull
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Various systems are difficult to navigate. Eg, applying for school meals.2. GRT parents may have had negative experiences at school3. GRT families will be worried that their children may be discriminated against.4. GRT families may feel left out if their culture is not recognised in the curriculum.5. It can be difficult to access school uniforms and transport.	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. GRT families may feel unwelcome in non-GRT spaces.2. GRT children may feel unused to spending their time indoors.3. Some GRT families may not want their children going to school at a young age.4. Some GRT cultures view their trade as more important than school5. GRT families may feel uncomfortable with parts of the curriculum e.g. RSE

Amongst others, these factors have led the GRT community to feel outcast and given them a sense that they are not welcome and cannot integrate. There are also complex reasons why parents may be reluctant for their child to transition to secondary school. Often, they are connected to whether the GRT community feel like valued members of their school family. For many GRT families the opinions of children are highly valued. Their views are respected and acted upon. It is important that GRT pupils feel part of the conversation around going to school.²³

This document will analyse the barriers to inclusion at school and will then focus on particular themes that arose as challenges from our research. These include starting education in Early Years, providing reassurance around Relationship and Sex Education (RSE), smooth transitions to secondary school, opportunities in higher education and employment, and difficulties with funding. Included in each section are practical steps that Catholic schools have taken to mitigate the challenges faced.

23. Gloucestershire Traveller Education Team, *Welcoming Traveller Children to Your School* (Gloucestershire County Council) p.12.

Inclusion as a first step

It is not possible to make significant progress in specific areas with the GRT community without first assessing whether the community feel they can trust the school and that the school takes their culture seriously. To make this happen, inclusion is essential as it welcomes and validates GRT experiences. Schools can do this in various ways.

Challenging Assumptions

It is important for schools to check their own assumptions about the GRT community. It may be useful to offer staff training on unconscious bias as this does not only apply to the GRT community but any other racial group. This is crucial because the way in which school leaders behave feeds down through the whole school to the pupils. It is important to create a culture of listening and understanding, without prejudging.

Our community tends to be judged as a group rather than by each individual person. This is very damaging because it means that often people do not take the time to get to know us and understand our culture...staff need to be trained to deal with discrimination because staff set an example for the pupils to follow.

Maxine Weems, GRT Teaching Assistant, St Teresa's Catholic Primary School, Darlington

I do believe that children mirror the behaviour of adults and so it was important for me that staff set this precedent. Staff work hard to challenge racist language and stereotypes surrounding GRT communities. We often find it helpful when tackling racism to ask the question: 'Would I refer to another racial group in this way?'

Paula Strachan, Headteacher at St Teresa's Catholic Primary School, Darlington

Demonstrating an understanding of GRT culture in school life

By showing an openness to the local GRT culture it can be easier to understand why they may feel excluded from or unable to engage with school life. Engaging with GRT parents and gaining their trust is crucial in reducing pupil absences from this community. If GRT families feel that their culture adds richness to the school's identity, they are more likely to feel welcome and are more likely to keep their children in the education system.

Traditionally this nervousness to integrate had resulted in low school attendance, but at Holy Family, we have managed to turn this around and we achieved it by setting out on an ambitious programme of training and learning about the Traveller community.

Dawn Summers-Breeze, Headteacher at Holy Family Catholic Primary School, Bristol

Taking attendance seriously and expecting the best from every child

From our research it was clear that attendance also had a correlation with expectations of the pupil. Some GRT parents can be unsure about their children taking part in assessments or exams because they do not want their child to feel disappointed or overly challenged. This can be because of their own experiences as a child in the education system. Some have felt that they were expected to do badly at school and that they would not have many achievements. When confidence is instilled into GRT pupils, and parents reassured, GRT children are more likely to have better attendance records and do better academically. It is also important for schools to encourage transparent communication from GRT parents about when their children will not be in school. This demonstrates to GRT parents that their child is a valued member of the school and that the school has faith that their child can do well when they attend class.

Many Gypsy families are also very reluctant for their children to take exams. I have been very keen to speak of exams as a way to celebrate how far each child has progressed during their time at school.

Paula Strachan, Headteacher at St Teresa's Catholic Primary School, Darlington

Viewing things from the child's perspective

If a GRT pupil is new to the school, it is important for the school to recognise that this could either be the first time they are in a school environment, or that they have been to many different schools and they need time to get used to how each school runs things. It can often be the 'small' things that make positive differences for a new child. Good practices which schools employ to make all new children feel 'at home' and part of their class, such as putting names on coat pegs and drawers, are going to be particularly helpful in helping GRT children feel welcomed.²⁴ It may be useful for new children to have a buddy to welcome them to the school. Many GRT children take the responsibility of being a sibling very seriously. If they have a sibling lower down in the school, it may be useful to allow the older child to spend time with their younger sibling at various times throughout the day to aid the transition process.²⁵ It is important to recognise that like all children starting at a new school they will make 'mistakes' such as calling out, finding it difficult to sit still and understanding what language is acceptable to use at school.²⁶

Family is everything to these people and it is a joy to see Gypsy Roma and Traveller children finding their younger siblings, checking that they are having a good day and giving them lots of cuddles in the playground.

Carol Hind, Headteacher at St Patrick's Catholic Primary School, Lancashire

24. Gloucestershire Traveller Education Team, Welcoming Traveller Children to Your School (Gloucestershire County Council) p.24.

25. Ibid, p.24.

26. Ibid, p.21.

Listed below are some questions to consider as part of school self-evaluation to aid the process of integration:

Are the school's attendance policies clearly communicated to GRT parents at the beginning of their child's time at school?

Has a member of staff been designated to meet members of the community regularly?

Does the curriculum include aspects of GRT culture within it? For example, are there books for children to read that positively portray Gypsy, Roma or Traveller characters?

Is GRT culture celebrated in classroom displays and is a particular flag connected with a local GRT community's heritage displayed with other flags when learning about race and ethnicity?

What are the GRT pupils' home environments like and does school mirror this in any way? For instance, if children spend most of their time outside on a camp, perhaps a focus on outside learning would be beneficial?

Is the language of the local GRT community celebrated and is there someone who is able to translate common phrases?

What local customs does the local GRT community take part in that the school can embrace?

What values are integral for the local GRT community? Are there any areas of school life that make them feel uncomfortable?

Some GRT families may feel concerned about their children going on school trips to environments that they are unsure about. Are they reassured when this is raised and informed that if they do not want their child to attend a school trip their child can still attend school?

When children are encouraged to bring certain resources or objects in from home, is this clearly communicated with GRT families and are spare resources available for any children who cannot bring things from home?

Some GRT communities travel more than others. How can the school engage GRT children who are currently travelling?

Is a whole-school ethos of inclusion encouraged, where all groups are celebrated and none placed on a pedestal?

Is dual registration at another school encouraged?

Does the school have a close relationship with other schools that GRT pupils are dual registered with so that assessment results and progress targets can be shared?

Have school admissions policies been reviewed to ensure that they do not inadvertently contribute to GRT parents not choosing to send their children to the local Catholic school?

Have the literacy skills of GRT parents been identified and supported?

Are alternatives to sending letters identified and used, such as telephone calls or face-to-face meetings?

Can the school be flexible with parents' evenings and find time with parents to discuss their child's progress?

Are positives about their child's time at school highlighted when speaking with parents?

Does the school have a good relationship with the local parish community and the parish priest?

Is GRT history month celebrated and Roma Holocaust Memorial Day commemorated at school?

Every school will be different and will face their own unique challenges. It may be useful to read some first-hand stories from headteachers to offer some ideas.

Case Study Examples:

On the ground, schools should take a pragmatic approach. Look at what small changes you could make which would have a massive impact. This could involve highlighting a member of staff responsible for minority relations or adapting the curriculum slightly to suit the needs of a particular community. For example Traveller children tend to grow up spending a great deal of time outdoors so we became a Forest School so that we could incorporate this into our curriculum and pedagogy.

Dawn Summers-Breeze, Headteacher at Holy Family Catholic Primary School, Bristol

Every child at our school is special and their culture celebrated whatever their ethnicity may be. This whole-school ethos has reduced Gypsy pupil absences. One of our Reception topics is 'Houses and Homes' and we have toy vardos in our early years department to play with. We also have many books which have Gypsy children as the main character and year 6 study a novel about the Gypsy community. During GRT Awareness Month we took the whole school to the local camp.

The Shira Rom showed us around a beautiful old vardo, telling us all about how Gypsies used to live and compared it to the trailers that they live in now. What was humorous about the trip was hearing some settled children remark: 'It's strange that

the Gypsies live so nearby and yet we do not have any Gypsy children at our school'. We place such an emphasis on celebrating but not singling communities out, that these children had no idea that they had 8 Gypsy children in their own class! This is something we are very proud of.

We respect that a part of Gypsy life is to travel, with many fathers travelling as far as Australia and New York for work. When the children travel, we give them a scrapbook to document their experiences. Once back at school, they share their stories with their class. This really improves literacy skills and enables children to still be engaged with education and therefore, excited to come back to school. We also have a display of a map and a Gypsy flag where children can 'pin' the countries where they have travelled to. We ring those who are travelling every fortnight to get an update from them about their child's education as many children are dual registered at another school.

Paula Strachan, Headteacher at St Teresa's Catholic Primary School, Darlington

At St Patrick's, we believe that every day of education is really important and that all pupils should be encouraged daily to be the best version of themselves. Some pupils are dual registered at another school so that when their families decide to travel they are still receiving an education. For this system to work at its best, schools who have GRT pupils registered with them really require support in understanding the GRT community and recognising the need to question certain preconceived ideas they might have about them. We have also invested in an online learning platform so that children can stay engaged with schoolwork whilst they are travelling.

Carol Hind, Headteacher at St Patrick's Catholic Primary School, Lancashire

It is important to note that some GRT parents - especially if they feel that there are barriers to sending their child to school - may opt to take their child out of school. Out of concern for the child The Traveller Movement suggests that the government makes off-rolling more difficult to do and ensures that the monitoring system for elective home education is more robust.²⁷

Fostering inclusion is integral to supporting the GRT community in Catholic schools. It is the cornerstone to building trust and subsequently giving the GRT community reasons to have confidence in their decision to send their child to school. With trust, absences are decreased and the possibility of transitioning to secondary school is increased. GRT parents are more likely to be engaged with the curriculum and understand its importance in their child's development.

27. The Traveller Movement, A Good Practice Guide p.7.

Inclusion through Catholicism

The Catholic faith is shared by many members of the GRT community. This is a unique way in which Catholic schools can foster inclusion. Just as biblical stories were passed on via the oral tradition, many groups within the GRT community pass on stories and their culture in the same way. This is something that can be discussed in class.

Guidelines for the Pastoral Care of Gypsies recognises the use of music and visual aids as effective ways to celebrate GRT traditions: 'the use of music – which is greatly appreciated and often used by Gypsies – at pastoral meetings and liturgical celebrations is an extremely effective aid that should be encouraged and developed. Finally, given that Gypsies have a highly developed visual memory, printed and video teaching aids, with meaningful pictures, and the whole range of material offered by modern technology – if well adapted to the Gypsy mentality – can provide invaluable, and even indispensable, assistance.'²⁸

What's more, baptisms, First Holy Communions and Confirmations are often celebrated by Christian members of the GRT community. This can be something Catholic schools can celebrate as well. Various GRT communities may have a devotion to the rosary or a particular Saint. These aspects of their faith can also be celebrated at school.

Blessed Ceferino Jiménez Malla

Ceferino Jiménez Malla was a Spanish Romani Martyr, and is patron of the Romani people. When describing Bl Ceferino, Saint Pope John Paul II said: 'he knew how to sow harmony and solidarity among his own, also mediating conflicts that sometimes blur the relationship between non-Roma and Roma, showing Christ's love knows no boundaries of race or culture'. He displayed his rosary as his weapon and refused to give it up. He could be a notable figure to conduct assemblies on and celebrate during GRT History Month.



Many biblical narratives are based around travelling to different places and often not being welcomed. Jesus teaches us to welcome the stranger, befriend them and learn about them. Notable biblical stories that can be shared in school are:

Noah – he had to leave his home and everything he was used to. He lived in an area where people were unkind to him. He trusted God and went on a journey bringing all his belongings and his family and animals. This may be significant to certain GRT communities if horses or other animals are an important part of their culture.

28. Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People, *Guidelines for the Pastoral Care of Gypsies* (December 2005).

Nativity – this is a story that includes many journeys: Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem and then to Egypt, the Wise Men travelling to Bethlehem and then leaving another way. Shepherds as outcasts being told to go and find Mary and Joseph. Each story has different intricacies and discussion points about travelling, belonging and how it feels to not be welcomed. These stories could aid as discussion stimuli.

Ruth – ‘Where you go, I will go; where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God’ (Ruth 1:16). This story may be more relevant for secondary pupils. It highlights the theme of loyalty in difficult times.

The Good Samaritan – Bl Ceferino is sometimes referred to as a Good Samaritan, who, as an outsider, helped those in need. Pupils could discuss the parable of the Good Samaritan and what it meant to be a Samaritan during the time of Jesus. Pupils could compare and contrast the stories of Bl Ceferino and the story of the Good Samaritan.

Can key figures in the GRT community be invited to attend school Masses? If members of the GRT community serve at their local parish - as extraordinary ministers for instance - can they be invited to serve at school Masses?

In the Vatican document *Guidelines for the Pastoral Care of Gypsies*, pilgrimage is listed as a special way in which the GRT community celebrate their faith: ‘in the life of Gypsies, pilgrimages have a special place, because they provide ideal opportunities for family reunions. Often the “holy places”, which are pilgrimage destinations are in fact often connected with family history. Thus an event, a vow, a prayer journey, are lived as an encounter with the “God of (their) Saint” that also strengthens the loyalty of a group.’ Having a relationship with the diocesan youth service may be useful. Many diocesan youth services run pilgrimages to Lourdes and other holy sites and many run retreats for young people which GRT families may be interested in.

Case Study Example:

Many Travellers that I have met have questions about their Catholic faith. With the rise of Evangelical Traveller Churches I have found that Catholic Travellers have become hungry for answers and knowledge about what makes being a Catholic distinctive. I enjoy using my sermons as an opportunity for catechesis. Jesus always started by using a story that everyone could identify with, and I try to do this in my preaching. One example which really stands out for me is a reflection by Revd Ted Witham on the translation of ‘rooms’ as ‘stopping places’ in John 14:2:

‘According to Jesus, in his Father’s household, ‘there are many stopping places’. (John 14:2) Jesus compares himself to a dragoman, going ahead of the caravan and preparing each night’s stopping place (John 14:2-3). He returns day by day to guide us there.’²⁹

29. Revd Ted Witham, ‘Caravans and the Way’.

The idea that Jesus Himself uses caravans and stopping places, something so relatable to the GRT community to describe the love of God is inspiring. GRT culture can be recognised at the heart of this scripture passage, and the GRT community – as St Pope Paul VI stated in the homily he preached at a Traveller site in Pomezia in Italy – can be found 'at the heart of our Church'.³⁰

Fr Dan Mason, National Catholic Chaplain to the GRT Community

The Catholic ethos of the school is something which has bonded the Sinti Tribe with us. At our 60th Anniversary Mass, we invited the Shira Rom to join us as a key figure in our local community.

Paula Strachan, Headteacher at St Teresa's Catholic Primary School, Darlington

30. St Pope Paul VI, Campo Internazionale Degli Zingari (1965)

Early Years Education

Just over 62% of respondents to our questionnaire noted that encouraging GRT parents to start their children at school in Early Years was either essential or at least very useful at encouraging pupils from the GRT community to attend school and feel integrated within the school setting. Evidence shows that the earlier a child enters the school system, the earlier the school can put supportive structures in place and help to prevent issues later on in school.³¹ It can also encourage GRT parents to access some of the health-related services on offer in or through the schools setting.³² Children become more used to school routines and are able to grasp concepts more easily. It is clear that setting the foundations in Early Years can really benefit the outcomes of a GRT pupil not only throughout primary school but through secondary school as well:

In terms of soft outcomes, increased engagement in Early Years settings could be a potentially significant factor in (i) maintaining a connection with the school and education in general, and (ii) empowering pupils to engage and achieve in relation to literacy and numeracy at primary school, so increasing their potential to successfully transfer to, and remain at, secondary school. Initial presence at primary school (often based on a successful experience in an Early Years setting) is an essential building block for subsequent positive educational experience and performance.³³

It is important to have a strong relationship with the local GRT community in order to progress in this area. Each community will differ, and it is crucial to have honest conversations with GRT parents to gain a deeper understanding of what might be making them reluctant to send their children to school in Early Years.

Examples of how to engage GRT parents:

- 1) Open mornings or workshops where the school can provide information on the benefits of an Early Years Education.
- 2) Ensuring that GRT parents feel comfortable with the school setting and that parents are made aware of outdoor learning.
- 3) Employing members of staff from the GRT community can provide reassurance. This could include encouraging GRT parents to become midday supervisors or parent helpers.
- 4) Regular communication with parents around the curriculum and where possible, including GRT culture in certain subject areas.

31. 'Research over several decades has accumulated indicating that early years education can have a positive effect on children's educational, cognitive, behavioural and social outcomes, in the short and long term, particularly if the quality is good' Edward Melhuish and Julian Gardiner, Study of Early Education and Development (SEED): Impact Study on Early Education Use and Child Outcomes up to age four years (Department for Education, September 2018).

32. Wilkin et al, Improving the outcomes for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils: final report (Department for Education, May 2010).

33. Ibid.

Case Study Examples:

In the past, we found that absences were particularly prevalent in Early Years. Now, 45% of pupils in our Early Years cohort are Gypsies. Gypsy parents are incredibly protective of their children and often trust from fathers is key to building positive relationships. Parents can be concerned about sending their children to school at such an early age, to an environment that is very different to life on a camp, being cared for by people who are often not Gypsies. We are extremely blessed to have a member of staff from the Gypsy community in our nursery, fondly known by parents and pupils as Aunt Maxine. Having someone from their own community working in our nursery has given many Gypsy parents the reassurance they needed to trust St Teresa's. She helps translate certain phrases that the children would use at home from their native language which has proved very useful. It is also fantastic for the children to have a member of staff from their own community to look up to at school. We have found that children who join us in Early Years are more settled and make more progress as they move through the school. This is something Gypsy parents have recognised and now, more and more want to see their children start with us in nursery.

Paula Strachan, Headteacher at St Teresa's Catholic Primary School, Darlington

Understanding the various cultures within the GRT community can help us recognise why perhaps there can be problems with absences or transitions at school and help us find solutions. When speaking to some parents from the GRT community, I began understanding why some parents are reluctant to send their children to Early Years. Some children have often only experienced life in caravans and trailers on a camp, where the majority of their day is spent outside. To then be sent into a school building can be a huge step. For them, school can feel like a very enclosed space which can make the transition into education quite difficult. To combat this, we have ensured that our Early Years curriculum has a strong focus on outside learning. We have built a forest school so that children are learning where they feel most comfortable. This has really helped the process of encouraging GRT pupils to begin their education in Early Years.

Carol Hind, Headteacher at St Patrick's Catholic Primary School, Lancashire

Relationships and Sex Education

More than half of respondents to our research believed GRT families are reluctant for their children to receive lessons on Relationship and Sex Education (RSE). This was further clarified by case study evidence.

There is no standard view within the GRT community on how Relationships and Sex Education should be approached. Comments in our questionnaire included:

“The GRT community have their own traditions and language that they choose to share with their children, they do not acknowledge pregnancy or the growth of a baby in the same way as we do at school so we have to be very sensitive to this to avoid issues.”

“They feel they should be able to share this information with their children and appear to not trust school”

“They are afraid we will teach their children something they do not want them to know, we share with these parents what will be taught and how, until now they have been able to withdraw their children but going forward it is part of the statutory curriculum so will be more difficult.”

“Our GRT families want to be involved with the conversation about RSE and have agreed to join the forum.”

“This community are very precious about their culture and about not exposing their children to the wider world of sex and relationships. It is not openly talked about. We have had many discussions with our GRT community in terms of managing this.”

This is an incredibly sensitive issue and speaking about sex can be a taboo area for some members of the GRT community. Often it is seen as a topic that a mother shares with her children in the comfort of their own home. For others sex and relationships have religious connotations and therefore they trust Catholic schools to teach RSE in a way that resonates with their own core values. In *A guide for professionals working with Gypsies, Roma and Travellers in Children’s Services* written by Friends, Families and Travellers it notes:

Questions relating to sex may cause embarrassment and shame amongst some members of the travelling community...Many Travellers wouldn’t expect to be asked questions about sex and may feel caught off guard. If it is necessary to ask questions about sex, give forewarning to the respondent, explain its relevance and account for cultural attitudes towards speaking about sex when analysing the response.³⁴

34. Sweeny and Matthews, Friends, Families and Travellers: A guide for professionals working with Gypsies, Roma and Travellers in Children’s Services (January 2017) p.12.

For some communities this is especially important because matters around sex and puberty are not spoken about between genders. Some GRT pupils and parents may feel more comfortable if their children get changed for PE in an area without the opposite sex.³⁵ This can be a reason why it is useful to appoint a designated member of staff assigned to support the GRT community as they can sometimes be a more trusted figure to discuss these matters with. It is especially important to build trust in this area now that the RSE curriculum has changed.

It is crucial to understand the sensitivities at play regarding RSE because if not dealt properly, parents can be inclined to remove their children from school completely which can affect their child's wellbeing and progress long term. It is important to recognise that building trust with the community in general can really aid in dealing with this issue specifically. If the community trust that the school values them and is honest with them in other areas, they are more likely to recognise that the school wishes to walk beside them and find a middle ground.

Open and honest communication is key. This could be in the form of discussing the proposed RSE curriculum with GRT parents or a leading figure of the local GRT community. It could also include consultation sessions with parents to see which aspects of the RSE curriculum they feel comfortable with and which parts they are against to debunk any assumptions that have been made. In some GRT communities, information is still often passed on via word-of-mouth and therefore it is important to ensure that the content of the RSE curriculum has not been interpreted inaccurately. If the local GRT community are Catholic, it may be worth stressing that Catholic schools are required to deliver RSE in accordance with the teachings of the Church. It may be useful to make the parish priest or pastor that serves the local GRT community aware of the school's RSE curriculum so that they can work collaboratively with the school to offer reassurance.

Case Study Examples:

We have undertaken a considerable amount of work to engage parents very early on in the development of the curriculum to ensure that parents are not only comfortable about the content of the curriculum but also to make sure that parents understand why RSE is an essential part of a child's formation. RSE is important in teaching not only what a healthy relationship looks like but also about keeping young people safe. Whilst our teaching on RSE is in line with Government guidelines, these families feel protected by our Christian values. They trust that we will teach RSE in a way where our faith remains at the centre of everything we do.

Carol Hind, Headteacher at St Patrick's Catholic Primary School, Lancashire

35. Gloucestershire Traveller Education Team, Welcoming Traveller Children to Your School (Gloucestershire County Council) p.21.

Constant communication with the Shira Rom and the Gypsy parents is especially important with regards to Relationship and Sex Education. This is particularly sensitive to the extent that if a Gypsy family does not trust the school with RSE, they may withdraw their child from school entirely. Sex is something which is not discussed between men and women in the Sinti Tribe and if something deemed inappropriate is playing on the TV at home, it will be turned off. Often Gypsy mothers want to educate their children on matters such as puberty and growing up. I was extremely grateful to the Shira Rom for giving me permission to discuss 'A Journey in Love' together. Again, this open communication has been invaluable. Our school's Catholic Christian ethos has helped in this area as well...Because literacy levels amongst Gypsy parents are not particularly high, a lot of information still is communicated via word-of-mouth and can subsequently get misconstrued. Clarity is key when sending information out and we read through any documentation with parents if needed.

Paula Strachan, Headteacher at St Teresa's Catholic Primary School, Darlington

Transitions to Secondary School

For 75% of respondents, getting pupils to successfully transition from primary to secondary school is one of their greatest challenges. In the Traveller Movement's document *A Good Practice Guide* they highlight transitions to secondary school as a key concern that requires 'much more parental reassurance and involvement'.³⁶

From our research it was identified that some groups within the GRT community culturally have different aspirations to those who are not part of their community. This can sometimes mean that going to secondary school is not something that is considered an important life goal or necessity.³⁷ Instead, they would see secondary school age as a time where boys should be taking more responsibility within their family's trade and where girls concern themselves more with tasks at home. Evidence from interviews with teachers suggests many in the GRT community view primary school as important because children are able to learn basic literacy and numeracy skills required to partake in the family trade and therefore do not see their educational career as something that progresses past primary school.

Some GRT parents view secondary school as a place where their children will be exposed to more racism, and where values will be shared that they would view as immoral. Preventing their children from attending secondary school, for them, is an act to protect their children from being hurt. There may be reluctance to send their children, especially their daughters to a mixed school. Similarly to issues around RSE, some communities do not want their children spending more time than what they would deem necessary with the opposite sex. To do so could be viewed as an erosion of their culture's moral code.

Often, members of the GRT community who have been to secondary school themselves are more likely to send their children to secondary school. However, transitions to secondary school are still low. Therefore, more is needed to build momentum in this area. Of those who do attend secondary school, the majority are male, and they often only stay at school for a few months or years.

To make GRT parents feel more comfortable sending their children to secondary school it is important to have a very close working relationship with the local primary schools. This is especially important if the secondary school is mixed. If GRT parents are very trusting of the primary school that they sent their children to, it is crucial that secondary schools form very close bonds with the primary headteacher and that any designated GRT keyworkers or Governors liaise with one another.

36. The Traveller Movement, *Good Practice Guide* p.11.

37. Mulcahy et. al. *The Underrepresentation of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Pupils in Higher Education: A Report on barriers from early years to secondary and beyond* (Kings College London and LKMco, 2017) p.31.

It may be useful for primary schools to begin to talk about secondary education earlier than they might with non-GRT pupils. However, it is important that this topic is discussed between the school and GRT parents first before the school discusses it with GRT pupils. This is because GRT children may feel disloyal to their parents discussing secondary school in class when it is something that they feel their parents might not want for them.³⁸

Conversations about secondary school could begin in year 5 so that GRT parents have a prolonged period of time to discuss options with their child and with the primary school. This can help both primary and secondary schools tailor a transition plan or arrange extra visits to the feeder school for GRT pupils if required.³⁹

Parents may need to be shown examples of the importance of the Catholic ethos for the secondary school. This can perhaps be demonstrated by inviting various key figures from the local community to school Masses. It may also be useful to outline the school's behaviour and bullying policy to reassure parents that racism of any kind is not tolerated, and that rewards and sanctions are distributed fairly. It may be relevant to specifically highlight that the school is aware of racial slurs such as 'pikey', 'gyppo' or 'tinker' and will take the use of this language very seriously.⁴⁰

Case Study Examples:

In the Traveller community it is accepted that most children will not receive a secondary education and it is extremely worrying that this acceptance is now appearing to be shared by both local and national government. Education is one of the strongest methods of not only breaking the cycle of poverty but successfully integrating minorities into the wider community. Therefore, it's time those in power took the issue of education for Traveller children more seriously than they currently do...It is far too easy for those in the Traveller community to use the home-schooling argument to opt out of secondary education and everything we have seen here at Holy Family points to the fact that parents who have been to secondary school are far more likely to send their children there as well.

Dawn Summers-Breeze, Headteacher at Holy Family Catholic Primary School, Bristol

Consulting various Gypsy Roma and Traveller families, has informed me that some do not feel comfortable sending girls to an environment where men will be present. Male Sixth Form pupils are seen as men by many in the GRT community. Often they would prefer to send their children to a single-sex secondary school. To encourage transitions to secondary school we have held meet-and-greets with the heads of year 7 from local feeder schools. We have also worked with keyworkers from the council's GRT service to help with attendance and transitions into secondary school. We never

38. Gloucestershire Traveller Education Team, Welcoming Traveller Children to Your School (Gloucestershire County Council) p.28.

39. Ibid, p.28.

40. Ibid, pp.6, 18.

used to have girls going to secondary school, but this is gradually changing. Because we have gained the trust of the Gypsy Roma and Traveller communities, it would be fantastic in the future to have a secondary classroom on our own school site. I feel that certain parents would be much more comfortable sending their children to secondary school in this circumstance, however this is not something that is possible at the moment.

Carol Hind, Headteacher at St Patrick's Catholic Primary School, Lancashire

There is increasing recognition by members of the Travelling Community of the importance of literacy and numeracy and there has been a large increase in the number of Traveller families that want their children to read and write. Learning skills that can be applied practically at work or for the family business is highly regarded. For example, learning basic literacy and numeracy skills is important for passing a driving theory test...Whilst the intake of GRT pupils at primary level is on the rise, this is not true when it comes to transitioning to secondary school. Often children from GRT communities do not transition to secondary school because the boys would be expected to work with their dads and the girls would be expected to look after the home and to help care for their siblings.

Fr Dan Mason, National Catholic Chaplain for the GRT Community

Trust, Role Models and Key Figures

Trust between school and the GRT community is essential. For a community that has experienced discrimination, a non-GRT space can be unsettling to navigate and many parents can feel extremely nervous about doing so. Every respondent of our questionnaire listed either the fact that they had a member of staff from the GRT community, that their school had a good reputation amongst members of the local GRT community or that the Catholic ethos of the school as reasons why they believed GRT families decided to send their children to their school. These three answers are all rooted in trust and knowing in some form that the school will be a place of familiarity. This could be because the religious character of the school resonates with them, or that they know they will not be isolated because there are people who understand their culture who are parents or teachers.

Headteachers, governors, members of staff and parish priests are incredibly important figures in the pursuit of building trust with the GRT community. It is important to exhibit a charitable curiosity with the community and hold ongoing discussions with them to build a positive support network.

One of the recommendations from the Traveller Movement is that schools should attempt where possible to employ members of staff from the GRT community.⁴¹ It may also be beneficial to encourage GRT parents to be parent helpers. Not only does this help GRT parents and pupils feel more comfortable, but it is a fantastic way of demonstrating to GRT pupils that there are members of their community who have retained their culture and yet thrive in an education setting and see the benefits of it. Furthermore, it is equally important for there to be excellent non-GRT role models that demonstrate acceptance and openness towards the GRT community to dissolve the hostility that has caused stark separation and stereotypes on both sides in the past.

Teachers who are proficient in the local GRT language can be helpful. Often they are an asset to school especially if the school has a large number of GRT pupils. They contribute to the flourishing of the school and its pupils.

Case Study Examples:

Because I am from the same community as many of the parents in our nursery, many of them trust that their children will have an adult around them each day that understands their culture. I feel very privileged to be able to instil confidence in parents that St Teresa's is a place where their children will be treated as equals to the other children and where all of us strive to give the children the best start in life. The experience I have gained from being a TA has given me the confidence to put certain methods into practice with my own grandchildren and it has helped my own children

41. The Traveller Movement, Good Practice Guide p.7.

understand the importance of education as parents themselves. This can be passed down over generations.

Maxine Weems, Teaching Assistant, St Teresa's Catholic Primary School, Darlington

We are extremely blessed to have a member of staff from the Gypsy community in our nursery, fondly known by parents and pupils as Aunt Maxine. Having someone from their own community working in our nursery has given many Gypsy parents the reassurance they needed to trust St Teresa's. She helps translate certain phrases that the children would use at home from their native language which has proved very useful. It is also fantastic for the children to have a member of staff from their own community to look up to at school.

Paula Strachan, Headteacher at St Teresa's Catholic Primary School, Darlington

College, Higher Education and Employment

In order to have GRT role models in school, especially teachers, higher education is something to bear in mind. Research conducted by Kings College London found that in 2014 3-4% of the GRT community aged 18-30 accessed higher education in 2014. This is compared to 43% of 18-30 in the national population.⁴² From our research and interviews it is clear that it is not the norm for GRT pupils to go to college or university. When it does happen, it is sometimes because of a need for mothers to provide for their family or because GRT parents are recognising the need for official qualifications to get a particular job.

Being a single mother myself led me to make the same decision as my mother, and I took my daughters to both primary and secondary Catholic schools so that I had the time to make a living for my family in the retail sector. I was very aware that as a single mum, I would need to be providing for my family for a long time and I wanted to make sure that I was in a fulfilling job that I loved...I began training at college and had a placement at St Teresa's two days a week until I gained my qualifications and began working there full-time.

Maxine Weems, Teaching Assistant at St Teresa's Catholic Primary School, Darlington

In order to encourage members of the GRT community to consider college or higher education as an option, both primary and secondary schools need to reassure GRT pupils that they are good enough to strive to study at university or college. It may be useful for secondary schools to begin talking about university and college options early on at school. In the research conducted by Kings College it also highlights that 'some GRT individuals who do enter HE are motivated by a desire to address issues in their communities or more simply,

42. Mulcahy et al, The Underrepresentation of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Pupils in Higher Education: p.5.

to work in their communities once they set out on their chosen career path'.⁴³ Rather than shying away from the difficulties faced by the GRT community, secondary schools can harness it as a way to instil confidence in GRT pupils that they have the power and intellect to be part of the change.

'Today your culture is in a phase of change; technological development renders your youth increasingly aware of their potential and their dignity, and they themselves feel the need to work for the personal human advancement of your people.'

Pope Francis' Address to participants of the pilgrimage of Gypsies (2015)

For those members of the GRT community who do decide to access higher education, this process can be isolating and they may be the only person at their university or on their course from the GRT community.⁴⁴ Below are some questions for universities to consider:

Are GRT experiences, history and culture topics which are included in the curriculum of relevant subjects?

Does the university discrimination policy list the GRT community as an ethnic group?

Are there routes for students to go down that will offer financial support throughout their academic journey?

Are there options for online/distant learning?

Does the university have a GRT society? Is there a GRT lead available for pastoral support?

Do teacher training colleges have relationships with schools that have a large population of GRT pupils to organise placements for GRT students and to advertise teaching as a profession for GRT pupils?

Does the university engage with the local GRT community and local schools with GRT pupils? Perhaps GRT university students can do talks at schools about their experiences at university or college?

Are members of staff offered training on the GRT community and their experiences?

Members of the GRT community who feel called to work in childcare or as a teacher, or to study at a higher education institution must be supported in their decision. They must be made aware that higher education is an option for them and they are worthy of it.

43. Ibid, p.46.

44. University of Sussex HEIM, 'Gypsy, Roma and Travellers' Experiences of Higher Education' (July 2017).

Funding

One of the protected aspects of the GRT community is their ability to move around for work especially during the summer and autumn months which means that many GRT children will not be on the roster for the start of term and then the school cannot receive the funding for absent GRT pupils who may join the school later than the term begins.

One of the biggest challenges faced at St Patrick's is that of attendance. The school finds itself in a Catch 22 position whereby it has to choose between being either hammered for a poor attendance record or lose funding by not counting the children on the roll as starting in September. It's a choice between a poor attendance record and having teachers in the classroom and ultimately, I have to choose the latter.

Carol Hind, Headteacher at St Patrick's Catholic Primary School, Lancashire

We were able to fund a specific focus on Traveller integration but not every school is this fortunate. If those in government are serious about fostering community cohesion, funding for minority outreach in schools is essential.

Dawn Summers-Breeze, Headteacher at Holy Family Catholic Primary School, Bristol

If GRT families also choose to not take up Free School Meals provision, the school also misses out on pupil premium. Even if the uptake of FSM is done in an anonymous way, this would hugely benefit schools as claiming pupil premium really benefits the wider school community. Funding can also be an issue when encouraging GRT families to send their children to an Early Years setting.

One difficulty we face with Gypsy children starting education in nursery is that none of them qualify for pupil premium spend or any kind of benefit and so cannot access any two-year-old funding. With more funding from central government and support from the local authority we could make even more progress.

Paula Strachan, Headteacher at St Teresa's Catholic Primary School, Darlington

Funding is also something which the Traveller Movement raises as a challenge. They have listed earmarking funding for the GRT community as essential. They recommend that ring-fenced and monitored funding to local authorities 'to provide services to support the educational inclusion, engagement, transitions and opportunities of GRT communities' is re-introduced. Where funding is difficult to access, it may be useful to encourage school uniform donations and distribute these discreetly. Some schools may want to fundraise in order to provide breakfast clubs if discussion with their local GRT community indicate that this would be useful. Consulting the local authority to advise on accessing funding is important. They may help the school find grants or may offer council award budgets. The Charles Plater Trust may also be able to offer funding for a particular project at school.

45. The Traveller Movement, Good Practice Guide p.7.

Conclusions

Consequences of implementing changes

There may be difficulties that arise from implementing even very effective, positive changes at school. Whilst many of them will be beneficial to schools and the GRT community, schools must be aware of the negative impacts that a GRT pupil may face through juggling their home and school cultures.⁴⁶ Therefore, it is important to continually review the situation at school and check in with GRT pupils and their families to ensure that trust is continually reinforced. It is important to be mindful that for some GRT pupils, they may be the first in their family to move through the whole school system and this can feel quite isolating. They may require reassurance or advice from a trusted staff member about their journey through education and what steps to take after they have gone through the school system.

Some may feel that their decision to go to school or go into higher education is placing their family business in a vulnerable position or that they are letting down their family's culture and values.⁴⁷ This requires sensitivity, communication and family involvement where appropriate to help diffuse tensions or uncertainties. It may be useful for there to be a room in the school where pupils know that they can go to seek pastoral support.⁴⁸ If a member of staff is assigned to offer guidance on future careers it is important that they understand the complexities at play for GRT pupils and families.

Maintaining a close relationship with all families at school is crucial in tackling any issues that arise from any changes implemented. From our interviews, it was clear that perceptions of the GRT community often stem from negative portrayals of GRT people in the media. It may be the case that for some settled families, assumptions about the GRT community are shaped mainly from these portrayals. Therefore, it is important for school to become a place where assumptions are challenged and all families are reassured that every pupil is a valued member of the school community, equal to their peers and will be encouraged to reach their full potential. Constant dialogue with all parents – including prospective parents - can create a natural space for them to voice any concerns they may have so that the school can provide reassurance when needed.

Breaking Stereotypes

Communication and dialogue within an understanding, welcoming and non-judgemental environment is key to supporting the GRT community. At Catholic schools, pastoral care and empathy should be at the heart of school policies and action plans, where seeing the child and their community as made in the image of God informs them about what steps to take to make school the best environment it can be for teachers, parents and children.

46. Siobhan Gould, 'Promoting the social inclusion and academic progress of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children: a secondary school case study', in *Educational Psychology in Practice*, vol 33, issue 2 (Routledge, June 2017) p.138.

47. Ibid.

48. Gloucestershire Traveller Education Team, *Welcoming Traveller Children to Your School* (Gloucestershire County Council) p.23.

Since many of the challenges with supporting the GRT community have stemmed from wrongful assumptions about GRT groups and inaccurate stereotypes from the media, it seems apt to conclude this document with some positive stories about the GRT community from individuals who want to destigmatise this often very misunderstood group and shed light on the positive experiences they have had working with the GRT community.

Recently, a group of Gypsy mums clubbed together to buy gifts for a settled family who had recently gone through a bereavement. They see it as their duty as Christians to always care for families in need. Families from the GRT community are so incredibly generous. As the Christmas period gets closer, our school becomes awash with Christmas donations from the GRT community in particular. Also, quite a few families from the Travelling community work at the local food bank. Family is everything to these people and it is a joy to see Gypsy Roma and Traveller children finding their younger siblings, checking that they are having a good day and giving them lots of cuddles in the playground. Some settled families are unsure about sending their children to a school that has so many children from the GRT community because of stereotypes that they might have of them. However, I can proudly say that they are the loveliest, kindest, Christian people you will ever meet, and these stories of generosity are the stories that I wish we were hearing in the media.

Carol Hind, Headteacher at St Patrick's Catholic Primary School, Lancashire

I truly believe that to support the GRT community, it is crucial for leaders to identify the community, work with them and be willing to learn from them. I asked the Shira Rom what he wished he could tell non-Gypsies and he said: 'Don't talk to us like we are children. We are educated and intelligent people in our own right. We have a different culture that professionals need to be aware of'. It is ironic that our local Gypsy community are the ones who have taught me so much as a teacher. At St Teresa's, it is a joy to arrive at school each day and see love in action, where people from all different walks of life, cultures and traditions come together in unity with such respect for one another, and with one common goal: that we all care so much about our school family.

Paula Strachan, Headteacher at St Teresa's Catholic Primary School, Darlington

There are many things that I have learnt from the Traveller families that I have met and journeyed with. The way that family is treasured can be seen even in the most difficult of moments. When I was Parish Priest at Our Lady of Good Counsel, Wickford, I spent time with families who were being evicted from the nearby Dale Farm Traveller Site and I admired how these families kept their equanimity, remarking that the bailiffs have a job to do and need to support their own families. Their understanding of the value of family life for the settled and non-settled alike is moving. There are many ways in which GRT communities can enrich our schools and churches. Their sense of community and welcome, their love of family and their generosity to those less fortunate than themselves should be an example to us all.

Fr Dan Mason, National Catholic Chaplain for the GRT Community

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