

Inclusion and Opportunity Service

Supporting new GRT children in your school or setting



A guidance leaflet to aid successful transition of Gypsy, Roma, Traveller and Showmen children into schools, with the aim to secure positive relationships, mutual understanding and respect for everyone involved.

Introduction

Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) and Showmen pupils have the same rights as any other young person to access their education. As a result of their long history of racial prejudice, some families are reluctant to disclose their true ethnicity and there is still a need to encourage families to be confident in ascribing to the appropriate ethnic group. Below are some groups which Gypsies and Travellers fall into.

- Gypsies
- Scottish Travellers or Gypsies
- Welsh Gypsies or Travellers
- Roma
- Travellers of Irish heritage
- Fairground/Showmen families
- Circus families
- New Travellers
- Bargee or canal-boat families



Within Norfolk, our service works predominantly with Gypsies, Travellers of Irish heritage, Showmen/Fairground families and Roma.

Some of these families are settled on council sites or sites which are privately owned. Some are housed, whilst others are highly mobile families, travelling around the country for considerable periods of time due to family commitments, shortage of authorised site provision, and/or economic purposes.

GRT children are considered nationally, to be the most vulnerable group within the education system as attainment and achievement is still low for the majority of pupils. It is important to understand that, given the appropriate learning opportunities, these children can, and do, make good progress. We must be mindful of not developing a stereotypical view. Therefore, staff in schools and settings should value and respect the culture and lifestyle of these families, to ensure pupils positively engage in their education and reach their full potential from the Early Years right through to Higher Education.

Opening the door to quality education and a warm welcome...

Initial key points to bear in mind

- **Show a genuine interest** towards parents who enrol the child into your school – they may not have positive memories of their own school experience and may be genuinely fearful.
- **Parents may not be literate**, and help may be needed when filling in admission forms and noting down school contact numbers.
- **Do not assume** families have access to the internet for letters, online school updates and payments of school lunches; ask and offer an alternative if this is an issue.
- **Be clear about attendance** and always let parents / carers know your school policy and the expectations around this. Please be aware of any work commitments the family may have.
- **Dates Of Birth** – parents may not be certain of their child's DOB. As a school you may need to contact local authorities or a previous school, to gain access to this information. Pressing the parents on this issue may not be beneficial.
- **Year groups** - parents may request siblings be placed in class together. If this is not possible, explain clearly why and reassure parents that their children will still be able to spend time together during certain times of the day, like break and lunch times.

First impressions are very important and for GRT families this is especially crucial in order to help families feel comfortable coming into the building. It is important that children are made to feel part of the school community as a long-term pupil and not a child just 'passing through'. GRT pupils may have varied opinions towards school, based on their prior experience, or from parental fears, cultural beliefs or being under threat of eviction. The role of school staff is to ensure that children feel valued and everyone is happy to welcome them into their new classroom.



'the other children have made labels for their coat peg so they know which one is theirs. I have all the bits here for you to make one too... and this will be your peg, next to Emily's...'

A member of the support staff talking to a new GRT pupil



A few kind words to welcome them and showing a genuine interest, can make all the difference and result in a successful transition into your school.

...I want my kids to have a better time than I had. I hated school and left when I was only 12 because of bullies and being singled out as a Gypsy... teachers didn't really care much back then...



...things are different now to when we were kids. They need to learn to read and write because there is the internet and computers. They need to do better than when we were young, to get a job now they need to know that kind of stuff...

Be the school that the child remembers... for the right reasons...

- Welcome – place familiar artefacts within the entrance to school. Displaying photos depicting positive images may make all the difference.
- Have culturally reflective books and resources in your school – we have some culturally reflective resources and books to lend schools and settings. Seeing familiar items in school and positive images within books will inspire the children to share their culture and be proud of their ancestry.
- First impressions – a named coat peg, tray, any other equipment will make children feel part of the school and encourage a sense of belonging; consider offering a school jumper, PE bag or book bag to the child on their first visit.
- Entry mid-term – bear in mind this could possibly be the child's second or third school this year. Allow time for the child to become familiar with their surroundings, take time to explain expectations, school rules, break-time and assembly procedures.



An example of how schools and settings can encourage celebrating the GRT culture

This display was put together by primary school children to celebrate Gypsy, Roma and Traveller History month for the month of June.

Some GRT pupils wrote about their own experiences of travelling for fairs, buying and selling traditional clothing, shoes and Crown Derby china. They brought in, and shared photographs and poetry books which detailed their culture. They spoke about their family line of work and produced a short quiz of Romany words for others in the school to try to guess the meaning of.

As a direct result, the pupils planned, scripted and delivered an assembly to the rest of the school to share pride in their family history, culture and way of life. At the end of the assembly they gave other children the opportunity to ask questions about their traditional way of life and the items they had displayed.



Things to consider within the classroom:

GRT children may find certain things are unfamiliar to them. It's worth considering whether the child knows what is expected of them rather than thinking that they might be pushing the boundaries...

- **PE/ swimming** – changing in front of other children may be an issue to them, even for the youngest children within the school. Offer another area to change if children look uncomfortable or refuse to change.
- **Sex Education** – please be aware that the majority of GRT families have a strong preference for their children **not** to participate in any form of this lesson. Parents are allowed to withdraw their children from this element of the new RSHE curriculum up to the age of 16 years when the child is able to make this decision for themselves.
- **Taking things home** – the child may be moving on suddenly or may not have the space to take paintings, models or reading books home. If they look unsure, consider offering them a special place to keep their things safe in school.
- **Sitting on the carpet** – many children living in the confined space of a trailer may not be allowed to sit on the floor as they would be taking up precious space in the living area. Therefore, sitting on the floor at school may not feel right to them. This might mean they are not used to sitting on a hard floor surface; consider offering a cushion for them to sit on until they feel more familiar with the expectations within the classroom.
- **Language** – children may sometimes use inappropriate language; for example, when asking for the toilet. This could be common language used within the family and not considered bad or rude. In this situation a simple and calm explanation, modelling appropriate language, will have the best outcomes 😊
- **Running water** – some Traveller children, particularly those living roadside, may find a running tap or flushing toilet the height of amusement! Please be patient and consider why they may be fascinated.
- **Homework** – getting help with homework from an adult may be a problem for some children. They may not have access to the resources needed to complete tasks or simply may not have a table to work at. Consider offering an alternative arrangement and make allowances for the possibility of no internet access.
- **Responsibilities** – most children, even the very young ones, are likely to have some sort of responsibility at home, such as collecting water, feeding chickens, horses, and dogs; also helping with jobs like cleaning, washing and taking care of younger siblings. Please be mindful of this when setting homework or expecting children to stay behind after school for clubs or after school activities.

- **Making friends** – most children like making new friends, but may not be the case if the child thinks they may be moving on sometime soon. GRT children are likely to only want to play with their sibling as this will be the constant friend in their life. For this reason, the children may group closely with other Traveller children they are familiar with in the school.
- **Being still** – due to the outdoor lifestyle of Traveller children, many may find it difficult to sit still for long periods of time, and practical lessons may engage them more fully. Additionally, make the most of the children's knowledge of the outdoors, animals, birds, nature and the changing seasons. Encourage them to share their experiences of the great outdoors.
- **Highly mobile families** – having difficulty washing clothes and personal hygiene may not be a choice for some families. Living roadside can be one of the most difficult things during the winter months. If possible, try to overlook if children are not in uniform and consider this may not be a choice, but a necessity, and is not the child's choice to appear differently dressed to others within school. Some school staff have discreetly offered the use of a school washing machine and dryer during the winter months and shower facilities too. By choosing your wording carefully you are less likely to cause offence and have a successful outcome.

Further advice and support:

Staff from the **Inclusion and Opportunity Service** are available to offer friendly advice on welcoming and supporting a GRT child within your school or setting. We have highly skilled staff with many years' experience, working within the community. We offer in-house, cultural awareness training from the Early Years and across all key stages including Higher Education. We have a dedicated outreach team working with families and schools to support school admissions, encourage positive attendance, ascription and retention. We can loan resources and culturally reflective books in order to demonstrate a high level of inclusive practice and this includes a range of guided reading books.

Other services available, not specifically for GRT pupils:

- **PIVATS** - assessment training for staff working with children falling well below age related expected progress. This is a bespoke service tailored to meet the needs of your school and meets the requirements of Ofsted, to demonstrate a high level of support for vulnerable pupils within your school.
- **Distance Learning Packs (DLP's)** - Advice for highly mobile children or children missing school due to ill health. Guidance on putting together a pack of appropriate work for children who are not attending school, including a handbook of legal requirements and in-depth guidance
- **Certificate of Competence in Educational Testing** - Registered with the British Psychological Society, a qualified member of staff can carry out educational testing, related to children displaying dyslexic tendencies.



Useful information – further reading on inclusive practice:

A Good Practice Guide for Improving Outcomes for Gypsy Roma Traveller Children

[TTM Good Practice Guide Education web.pdf \(travellermovement.org.uk\)](https://www.travellermovement.org.uk/TTM_Good_Practice_Guide_Education_web.pdf)

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

https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20101228201603/http://nationalstrategies.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/node/248709?uc=force_uj

Building Futures: Developing Trust

https://www.foundationyears.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2011/10/Developing_Trust.pdf

Contact us at Norwich Professional Development Centre, Norwich, NR7 9QL

Tel: 01603 303323 and ask for a member of the GRT team