



Promotion  
of Roma/Traveller  
Integration and  
Equal Treatment  
in Education  
and Employment

## SEMINAR ON EDUCATION

### Northern Ireland

Project led by



Project financed by



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## 1. Context

The population of Irish Travellers living in Northern Ireland is 1,710 (*TableKSO6, Census 2001*). Whilst it is known that there are also Roma living in Northern Ireland (both longer established Roma groups with family ties to English Rom and more recent refugees and asylum seekers from Eastern Europe), little research or information is available about these groups.

Irish Travellers are defined in the Race Relations (Northern Ireland Order) 1997 as *'the community of people commonly so-called who are identified (both by themselves and by others) as people with a shared history, culture and traditions including, historically, a nomadic way of life on the island of Ireland'*.

Prior to the 1980s the government policy towards Irish Travellers was based on the assumption that Travellers were a 'problem' and combined repressive measures to inhibit the practice of nomadism with neglect in respect of service provision.

The government had established committees to examine the 'problem' of Travellers and Gypsies in 1948 and 1954. These committees (on which Travellers were not represented) called for greater attention to be given by the police to Travellers.

In 1985 an Advisory Committee on Travellers (ACT), comprising representatives of statutory and voluntary bodies and (for the first time) Travellers was established to advise the Minister of the Environment on the needs of Travellers (its main focus was on the accommodation issues) but was wound up after ten years on the grounds that it had proved ineffective.

In 2000, a Promoting Social Inclusion (PSI) Working Group on Travellers was convened by the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM). The PSI Working Group, consisting of representatives of government departments and Travellers Support Groups, was tasked to develop a new and co-ordinated response to the widespread social exclusion experienced by Irish Travellers. The Working Group made 33 recommendations for change including the establishment of an implementation body. This body, has been convened as the Travellers Thematic Group within the government's Race Forum.

The Final Report of the PSI Working Group on Travellers (Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister: 2000) noted that the current position of Travellers is one of multiple disadvantage. More specifically, this included the following features:

- **Long-term unemployment:** Research suggests that only 11 per cent are in paid employment of one form or another. Moreover, of those who are economically active, 70 per cent stated that they have had no paid work in the last ten years;
- **Low Levels of Educational Attainment:** Over 90% of Travellers have no GCSEs or their equivalents or higher, whilst there are also high levels of illiteracy among the Traveller community. This is exacerbated by the high levels of non-school attendance where the majority of Traveller children do not continue to attend school regularly after primary education;
- **Poor living conditions:** Irwin and Dunne (University of Ulster: 1997) found that Travellers were eight times as likely to live in overcrowded conditions in comparison with the general population in Northern Ireland. Moreover, many Travellers still have extremely limited access to basic amenities such as running water, electricity and sanitation including some of those still living on serviced sites;
- **Low Health Status:** A mortality rate for Traveller children up to the age of 10 found to be ten times that for the population as a whole while life expectancy of Travellers is around 20% lower than that of the general population. Only 10% of the Traveller population are over 40 years of age and only 1% are aged over 65 The PSI report also draws attention to reports of lower levels of child immunisation and the higher incidence of hospitalisation of Travellers for conditions that could be effectively treated at a much earlier stage;
- **Extensive prejudice:** Connolly and Keenan's study 'Racial Attitudes and Prejudice in Northern Ireland' (NI Statistics and Research Agency 2000) found that 40% of people do not actually believe that the nomadic way of life of Travellers is a valid one that should be supported by Government. Moreover, over half of the population (57%) did not want Travellers as residents in their local area and 66% would not willingly accept Travellers as a work colleague.

These findings reflected those made by a series of reports issued since the 1980s by voluntary organisations, public authorities and academic sources. Clearly there had been no significant reduction of disadvantage over following decade and more.

The PSI report also drew attention to the definition of institutional racism arising from the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry in England: *'the collective failure of an organisation to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their colour, culture or ethnic origin. It can be seen or detected in processes, attitudes and behaviour which*

*amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness, and racist stereotyping which disadvantage minority ethnic people'. The report also noted that the emphasis is on the outcomes of actions rather than the intentions: 'Moreover, the notion of institutional racism is not meant to imply that all or even most individuals within a particular organisation are themselves personally racist. Rather, its focus is on the organisation as a whole'.*

Another form of institutional racism which is explained in the PSI Report is sedentarism which *'...relates to all of those ideas and practices that are based upon and tend to reproduce sedentary modes of existence as the norm The effect is that those who adopt more nomadic ways of life, such as Travellers, tend to be disadvantaged. This is particularly the case where policies, practices and services are developed which do not take into account their appropriateness for those with a nomadic lifestyle'.*

A report from the Equality Commission (2002) *'A wake-up call on race – Implications of the MacPherson Report for Institutional Racism in Northern Ireland'* commented that *'We are confident from our interviews...that many organisations have yet to look at race in a serious fashion; even the public sector equality duty of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 too often caused only a cursory examination of the issue'.*

The Education Reform (Northern Ireland) Order 1989 requires that all children of compulsory school age in grant-aided schools should have access to a balanced and broadly based curriculum, with their progress regularly assessed and reported to their parents. These provisions apply to all children including Traveller children.

The Department of Education has noted that: *'The Education of Traveller children presents considerable challenges to schools in Northern Ireland: marginalisation of the Traveller community and associated social and cultural factors have resulted in, for most Traveller children, unequal educational opportunity, adverse influences on school attendance and achievement, and a lack of inclusion and integration, and recognition of diversity'*

*(EOTAS/SSPPR Education and Training Inspectorate Report, Department of Education, 2000).*

The Department of Education has a specific policy on the education of Traveller children (Policy Circular 1993/37) which states that it is considered in the best long-term interests of both Traveller and settled children that they should be educated together, but makes an exception

for what is primarily a school for Traveller children in Belfast. The circular is currently under review.

The Department of Education has acknowledged some of the concerns expressed by the Traveller community regarding the education system:

*'In terms of non-attendance at school, we found that it tended to be caused by three key factors: disillusionment arising from what some Travellers felt to be poor expectations of teachers and thus the poor levels of education they felt they received; a fear among the children of being bullied, especially at secondary schools; and for some of the children especially, a view that education was just not relevant to them and what they intend to do in the future'*

*(Racial Equality in Education Conference Report, Equality Commission for Northern Ireland and Department of Education, 2002).*

The following problems have been identified by the Department as needing to be addressed in some schools:

- *'A learning environment which is uninviting and unchallenging for Traveller children;*
- *Learning plans which are insufficiently detailed and not properly focused on meeting the learning needs of Traveller children;*
- *The development of learning activities designed to stimulate and challenge the children;*
- *Being able to access advice and support...at the point of immediate need'.*

*(Putting Traveller Education Centre Stage, Department of Education and the Forum for the Education of Travellers' Children (NI), 2000).*

The Race Relations Order (Northern Ireland) 1997, amended by the Race Relations Order (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2003 makes it unlawful to discriminate, either directly or indirectly on racial grounds in the area of education.

Discrimination by either public or private educational establishments in relation to an application for admission to a school, college or university or in the treatment of existing pupils in those establishments is prohibited. This prohibition applies to all levels of education, from primary to tertiary. Education and Library Boards and the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) are under a further duty not to discriminate when exercising any of their statutory functions under the various Education Orders.

Aside from these specific measures there is a general duty on public sector educational establishments to 'secure that facilities for education and any ancillary benefits are provided without racial discrimination'. This general requirement should, therefore, persuade educational establishments to 'equality-proof' their provision. Article 3 of the 1997 Order outlaws segregation on racial grounds as amounting to direct discrimination.

The Equality Commission and the Department of Education have published a good practice guide concerning *Race Equality in Education* (2001), aimed at policy makers and others within the education sector, which contains information about the law and the implementation of good practice strategies on issues such as harassment and the language.

As a racial group, Irish Travellers also come within the scope of Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. This requires Departments and other public authorities in carrying out their functions in Northern Ireland to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity between persons of different racial groups. It also requires Departments and other public authorities to have regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion and racial groups. In effect, this requires public authorities concerned with the provision of education to equality-proof the development, implementation and review of policies.

A *Forum for the Education of Travellers Children* has been established by the Education & Library Boards and the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools, which provides opportunities for education personnel (excluding the NGO sector) for the sharing of information and good practice, the provision of in-service training courses for teachers and the establishment of a network of contacts with groups and organisations involved in supporting Travellers.

A small number of local Education and Library Boards have appointed Traveller Liaison Teachers and dedicated Education and Welfare Officer posts with the Traveller community. However, a series of recent financial crises experienced by many of the Boards has led to funding for some of these posts being cut.

Inter-cultural curricular materials have been developed for use at Key Stage Levels 1 and 2 (primary school) and Key Stage Level 3 (Secondary School). These include a CD-ROM and an Internet website. However, there is no information in the public domain as to how widely used these resources are, the extent to which teachers have been trained in their use or how effective they are in changing attitudes among children.

Early years provision has predominantly been made available by the voluntary sector, including the Toybox Project (involving Save the Children, NI Association of Pre-School Playgroups and Traveller Movement NI) and a Pre-school Playgroup managed by Barnardos. Traveller Support Groups have also piloted projects for older children including an Alternative Education Project, After-School Clubs and Youthwork projects.

## **2. Brief description of the seminar**

The format for the seminar included inputs from a number of key speakers (see Background documentation used, below), followed by simultaneous discussions at eight roundtables (see Roundtable Programme below). Key recommendations from each of the roundtables were fed back into a plenary session '*The Way Forward*' (see Conclusions below).

A profile of the key speakers is outlined below:

### **Peter Graham**

After university in Belfast, Peter began his career as a school teacher in Carrickfergus in the late 1960's. Since then he has had a varied career, mainly in the voluntary/community and education sectors. Posts held have included Research Fellow at the Ulster Polytechnic, Chief Executive of the Youth Enterprise Scheme (a venture capital company for young entrepreneurs) and Director of YouthAction, Northern Ireland. Peter has been a lay magistrate for ten years and a Justice of the Peace for over twenty years.

Peter joined the Education and Training Inspectorate in 1999 and has lead responsibility for the education of Traveller children. His other interests include the Youth Service and Alternative Education/Education Other Than At School (EOTAS).

### **Pat Holmes**

Pat Holmes is Principal Adviser Co-ordinator for West Midlands Education Service for Travelling Children (WMCESTC). She has an education background in schools and teacher training and has held a variety of posts in WMCESTC before becoming its manager in 1986. In 1980 she founded the National Association of Teachers of Travellers (NATT).

Pat has worked for many years within the European Network promoting improved education for Gypsy and Traveller children. She is co-author, with Christine O'Hanlon, of "*The Education of Gypsy and Traveller Children - towards inclusion and educational achievement*" (Trentham Books: 2004) ISBN 1858562694.

Pat has also written contributions to numerous publications and books including “*Home School Work in Multicultural Settings*” edited by John Bastiani, (Taylor & Francis: 1997), ISBN 1853464287 and “Fighting Exclusion through ODL” (Open and Distance Learning) in *New Learning* edited by Armando Rocha Trindade, (Universidade Aberta, Portugal) ISBN 972-674-325-7

## **Laura Lundy**

Laura Lundy is a Reader in the Graduate School of Education at Queen's University, Belfast and a Barrister at Law. Until October 2003 she was a senior lecturer in the School of Law at Queen's. She is a former Equal Opportunities Commissioner for Northern Ireland and was chairperson of the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission's Working Party on Education Rights for the Bill of Rights (2001).

In 2003, Laura acted as adviser to the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education on her mission to Northern Ireland. She was one of the coordinators of an international exchange programme on the theme of "Gender, Sexuality, Family and Human Rights" in conjunction with Cornell Law School, New York and the Universities of Kingston and York in Canada.

Laura is a member of the European Education, Law and Policy Association and is on the editorial advisory panel of the *Education Law Journal*. Her research focuses on education law, children's rights and issues of social inclusion. She is the author of *Education Law, Policy and Practice in Northern Ireland* (Belfast: SLS, 2000) as well as numerous articles and reports on education law. She is a member of an inter-disciplinary team which has just completed a major project on children's rights in Northern Ireland for the Northern Ireland Commissioner on Children and Young People.

## **Siobhán McAlister**

Siobhán McAlister is currently a researcher working within the Gender Equality Unit of YouthAction NI on an action research project concerning the lives of diverse groups of young women living in Northern Ireland. Prior to this she was a Research Associate within the Institute of Child Care Research at Queen's University, Belfast and one of a team of eight researchers working on research commissioned by the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People examining children's rights in Northern Ireland.

Siobhán's research interests lie primarily in the domain of children and young people and include: the rights of children and young people;

gender equality; youth crime and justice; social exclusion and research methods with vulnerable and 'hard to reach' groups.

### **Dr Robbie McVeigh**

Derry-based human rights activist and researcher on racism and sectarianism, equality and human rights. Robbie is the author of *Harassment--It's Part of Life Here: Policing and Young People in Northern Ireland* (1994), *Travellers, Refugees and Racism in Tallaght* (1998), *A Place of Welcome? Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Northern Ireland* (2002), *Between Reconciliation and Pacification: The British State and Community Relations in the North of Ireland* (2002), and *Misli, Crush, Misli: Irish Travellers and Nomadism* (2004); co-editor, with Ronit Lentin, of *Racism and Anti-racism in Ireland* (2002).

He has recently completed the research report '*Travellers and Public Education in Northern Ireland*' for the Commission for Racial Equality as part of the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia special project "*Roma, Sinti, Gypsies and Travellers in public education*".

### **Jane Rooney**

Jane Rooney is the Education Coordinator with Pavee Point Travellers Centre, along with her colleague Rosaleen McDonagh is a member of the Joint Working Group for the Traveller Education Strategy.

Prior to working in Pavee Point she worked as an Account Director in Public Relations Consultancies in Dublin. Jane worked for many years on a voluntary basis with agencies such as St Vincent de Paul, Galway Social Services and the Outreach programme in University College Dublin.

### **David Simpson**

David Simpson has worked for Save the Children since 1998 as its Assistant Programme Director. He was a member of the Promoting Social Inclusion Working Group on Travellers in 2000 and currently sits on the Race Forum's Traveller subgroup and on the executive committee of Traveller Movement NI. David also represents Save the Children in a strategic partnership with the NI Pre-school Playgroup Association and Traveller Movement which delivers the Toybox project to Traveller children aged 0-4 years.

### 3. Conclusions

#### *Access, Attainment and Curriculum*

- It is of critical importance that Traveller children have access to effective education. This will require an improvement in the attainment and educational development of Traveller children.
- There is a need to recognise the positive. Better attainment, development, co-ordination and capacity building had achieved some positive outcomes e.g. parents wanting schooling for their children. There is a need to celebrate these achievements.
- It is essential to address racism and discrimination against Travellers in the wider society.
- It is important to make progress on other issues which impacted on Travellers access and attainment to education such as accommodation provision, healthcare and racism.
- Racist bullying needs to be addressed in a context of anti-racism training and integrated with initial and other ongoing teacher training. Teachers should be sensitive to issues and know how to deal effectively with incidents of racist bullying.
- Further investigation is needed in respect of access to school transport issues.
- The Council for Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment and the General Teaching Council should co-operate in examining the National Curriculum with a view to enabling it to be more flexible and more relevant to the needs of Traveller children of secondary school age who do not wish to pursue academic options. Specifically, there should be greater flexibility to explore learning points that are relevant to Travellers and access to vocational education. The process of revision of the curriculum should ensure the participation of Travellers, the Youth Panel of the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People, the Forum for the Education of Traveller children and the Department of Education.

- With respect to school admissions, there is a need to remove barriers to registration and to change from the current system of calculating numbers on an annual basis to a system of linking numbers registered per term as the basis for additional per-capita grant aid for Traveller children. This would constitute a positive action measure which would promote a more flexible response from schools to the registration of Traveller children.
- The link between education and employment needs to be promoted and demonstrated to Travellers.
- There needs to be greater flexibility in education systems to accommodate the cultural needs of Travellers
- Research should be undertaken on the inclusiveness of non-Traveller specific primary schools (in the Belfast area) to examine the reasons why they do not take Traveller children.
- Action must to be taken to improve the attainment levels of Travellers within schools, whether they are educated alongside others or separately.
- After-school clubs and homework clubs are important supports and access to these for Traveller children needs to be resourced.
- The advantages and disadvantages of segregation and integration, in the light of the best interests of the child, need to be researched.
- Consideration should be given to how Traveller children should be mainstreamed in education from the outset to avoid life-time segregation.
- There is a need to further explore how best to overcome the perceived lack of relevance of education to Traveller children from age 12/13 years. Research should explore the impact of gender differences, peer pressure, parental involvement, type of qualification sought, and relevance of alternative education projects.

### ***Partnerships and Strategy***

- It was crucial to develop partnerships to ensure consistency, continuity, sharing of information and added value:
  - between parents and schools;
  - between Traveller Support Groups and schools;

- between government departments and NGOs including Traveller Support Groups to develop strategy on all aspects of education and training;
  - cross-border partnerships with other statutory and voluntary organisations working with Travellers.
- It was also important that issues of capacity and resourcing must also be addressed to enable effective partnership.
  - A dedicated Education Working Group should be established and led by the Department of Education involving all key actors including Travellers, statutory and voluntary agencies (including Traveller Support Groups). The Education Working Group should be based on partnership principles and be tasked to:
    - develop a strategy for Traveller education with clear high-level outcomes;
    - set priorities for action (with a clear action plan) and expenditure;
    - ensure the collation of base-line and time-series data on attendance and attainment;
    - and establish indicators of success.

Links should be established with counterparts in the Irish Republic and Britain to share information and practice. The Education Working Group should also consider where additional research is needed. The Department could discuss its proposals for partnership at the Travellers Thematic Group.

- The Travellers Thematic Group should examine progress made on the PSI recommendations to date, including a review of the response to the Department of Education's recommendation on St Mary's (as part of its brief to keep policy and practice under review).
- There is a need for a dedicated staff team working on Traveller issues within the Department of Education headed by a senior person within the Department so that there is a clear line of accountability for driving change and achieving progress on Traveller issues.
- There was a particular need for the Department of Education and the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, in consultation with the Northern Ireland Pre-School Playgroup Association and other relevant voluntary agencies, together with the Traveller community, to develop a strategy on access to pre-school education. This process should examine targeted provision, how

money is best spent and set targets for pre-school up-take by Traveller children.

### ***Participation***

- Travellers must be involved in meaningful consultation and the views expressed during such consultation must be acted upon.
- Strategies need to be developed to enable Travellers (and male Travellers in particular) to participate in decision making on education issues and in school life generally. Such strategies will also require capacity-building with Traveller parents to enable them to have an effective voice. Specifically, there is a need to support male Travellers to engage more with educational provision.
- It is essential that safe learning environments are created for Traveller children.

### ***Training***

- Further need was identified for teacher training at all levels (from pre-school onwards). Training should incorporate developing relationships with parents, diversity and anti-racism training and should involve Travellers' groups with the Department / ETI leading.
- There is a need to create a central resource pool for teachers and others involved in the education of Traveller children.
- There should be more cultural awareness and anti-racist training for teachers, management and those responsible for developing the curriculum.
- Consideration should be given as to how in school support for Traveller children can be provided without the creation separation classrooms for Traveller children or their withdrawal from class.
- The value of education should be promoted by specific actions targeted at Traveller parents, bearing in mind that many parents will have had a poor experience of school education..
- There is a need to recognize endemic discrimination that exists in Northern Ireland against all racial groups, specifically recognising the prejudices against Travellers.

### ***Transition***

- Targeted activity is needed to ensure Traveller children had the appropriate skills developed to enable them to cope with transition. It was also important to create welcoming harmonious learning environments for Traveller children at post primary level.
- Buddy/mentor systems have had positive outcomes and should be explored for their relevance to the Traveller community.

### ***Monitoring***

- Monitoring in the education system needs to incorporate:
  - appropriate ways of enabling children to participate in tests;
  - recording comparable information between schools to measure progress for Traveller children;
  - recording comparable information to measure attainment between Traveller children and non-Traveller children.
- There is a need to facilitate the effective transfer of children's educational record as they move from school to school across and within jurisdictions.. Existing profiling systems used in other jurisdictions should be examined for their applicability to the situation of Travellers in Northern Ireland.

### ***Process***

- It was important to collate current good practice and positive experiences and share this (among Traveller community and education practitioners).
- Education Other than at School should be evaluated in comparison to mainstream post primary formal education
- Further inter-agency working is required to promote better access to education taking into account other issues e.g. access to accommodation, which impact on Traveller participation.
- The Traveller Thematic Group of the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister should identify good practice, specifically with regard to partnership working, and share this.
- There is a need for a dynamic approach by public authorities to Section 75, which incorporated a Traveller audit. Research, perhaps an investigative audit, should be undertaken by the Equality Commission to investigate the extent to which Section 75 has led to improved access to public authority service provision for Travellers.

- There is a need to identify clear actions and who is responsible for these.
- In addition baselines need to be set and data on used to inform action plans (good chart from the West Midlands as model).

### ***Resources***

- Resources should be identified for Traveller Support Groups who have developed good practice in work with the Traveller community so as to enable them to be sustainable. Good practice can be shared by practitioners within and across sectors.
- Resources are needed to ensure that initiatives can be followed through to completion and outcomes. Government Departments should consider mainstreaming resources for Traveller children until disadvantage with respect to access and attainment is eradicated.
- The issue of transport to enable access for Traveller children to schools should be examined.

## 4. Programme

09.45am Tea/Coffee and Registration

10.15 am Chair: **Introduction**  
Laura Lundy (Reader in the Graduate School of Education at Queens University Belfast)

10.30am **Overview of access for Traveller children to education**  
Siobhán McAlister (Researcher, Youth Action)

10.45am **The Role of Roma Traveller Associations in the fight against discrimination: Presentation of Good Practice**  
Jane Rooney (Education Worker, Pavee Point Travellers Project)

11.00am **Attendance and Attainment**  
Peter Graham (Department of Education Inspectorate)  
Dr Robbie McVeigh (An Dúchán Research Services)

11.20am Discussion session and feedback

12.30pm LUNCH

13.30pm **Transitions and Participation**  
**Transition from Pre-School to Primary School through to Secondary School**

Paddy Mongan (Project Worker, An Munia Tober Alternative Education Project) and David Simpson (Assistant Programme Director, Save the Children)

**A Partnership approach to transition in the West Midlands**

Pat Holmes (Co-ordinator, West Midlands Consortium Education Service for Traveller Children)

14.00pm Discussion session and feedback

15.00pm Coffee/Tea break

15.15pm **The Way Forward**

16.00pm **Close**

## 5. Background documentation used

### 5.1 PRESENTATIONS

#### INTRODUCTION

Welcome:

I am very grateful to the Equality Commission for asking me to participate and chair today's seminar. Last year, I was part of a team which conducted research on children's rights for the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People (NICCY). It was very clear to me that one of the most urgent issues within education, from a children's rights perspective, was educational provision for Traveller children and that is the key focus of today's seminar - **to consider ways of promoting integration and equality of opportunity for the Travelling community in education.**

In a moment we will be listening to an overview of the main problems and concerns. Before we do that, it is worth recognising that there have been achievements in the past. For example, the Department of Education was the first Department to have a strategy on Travellers (Circular 1993/37: *The Education of Children from Travelling Families*).

The Promoting Social Inclusion Working Group on Travellers established in 1999 included twelve recommendations on education (more than for any other sector) in its final report. All but one of these recommendations was accepted by the Department. However, since then (as I learned from the various interviews I conducted as part of the research for NICCY last year) there has been considerable frustration amongst Travelling community, the voluntary sector and the statutory sector about the lack of progress in taking these issues forward.

The key problems are well known and widely accepted. What is needed is more detailed direction as to what needs to be done in practice to resolve these and agreement about who should be taking these actions forward.

Northern Ireland is not alone is facing these issues. A similar search for solutions is also going on across Europe. Research for the Council of Europe carried out by Jean Pierre Liegeois, (Director of the Gypsy Research Centre at the University of Paris) has emphasised the need for both co-ordination and consultation:

*“It is piecemeal measures which most often fail; a holistic and comparative approach is thus required.... Co-ordination will foster the expression and mutual complementarity of ideas, methods and authority, towards the attainment of agreed goals. Consultation would help to avoid repetition of failed experiments and perpetual starting over from scratch, with all the accompanying disillusionment”.*

Co-ordination is needed: not just within government agencies but also greater co-operation between the various sectors - particularly the voluntary and statutory sectors.

It is very heartening then that we have such broad representation and indeed such an impressive turnout at the seminar today.

We are going to begin with a short overview of some of the main issues affecting Travellers in education, collated as part of the research the conducted on behalf on the NICCY.

It will be presented by Siobhan McAlister who was one of the members of the research team who carried out research with children in the Travelling community about their experiences in school. Siobhan is currently working as a researcher for Youth Action.

**Laura Lundy**

Reader

School of Education

Queens University Belfast

Supported by:



# KEY ISSUES AFFECTING TRAVELLER CHILDREN'S EDUCATION: FINDINGS FROM THE NICCY RESEARCH 2004

Siobhán McAlister  
(YouthAction:NI)



Siobhán McAlister  
(Youth Action NI)

## Outline

- Background to the research: remit, research themes and methods
- Key priorities in education
- Key issues to emerge from professionals, children and young people from the Travelling community



## Remit of the Research

- To identify areas where children's rights were ignored or underplayed when measured against the UNCRC and other human rights documents
- To inform the Commissioner in determining his priorities for office



## Research Themes

- Implementation of the UNCRC
- Family life and alternative care
- Health, welfare and material deprivation
- Education
- Play and leisure
- Criminal justice and policing



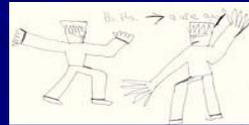
# Data Collection

- Participatory research with over 1,067 children in 27 schools across N.I
- Focus group discussions with vulnerable groups of children & young people (n=107)
- Interviews and focus groups with over 350 professionals
- Review of existing research, legal & policy documentation
- Statistical analysis



# Priorities in Education

- Participation in decision-making
- Education for Traveller children
- Bullying
- Special Educational Needs
- Children educated outside school
- Religious segregation and the impact of the conflict



# UNCRC & Traveller Children

- 1995 & 2002 – Committee on the Rights of the Child expressed grave concern about the unequal enjoyment of various rights.
- UNCRC Arts. 28, 29, 2, 20 – Right to effective education; non-discrimination; respect for the child's cultural identity



# Right to Effective Education

- Inadequate statistics:
  - Admissions & selection;
  - Suspensions & exclusions;
  - Attendance & achievement;
  - Segregated vs. integrated.
- Access to mainstream schools:
  - Admissions criteria;
  - Difficulties of integrating;
  - Structure of school day & school culture.
- Continuity and sustainability of educational provision
- Racially-motivated bullying (discrimination)
- Lack of respect for child's cultural identity



## Non-discrimination

*"There's a girl inside our school and when I play with her [another girl] tells me, she comes and she says "why are you playing with Travellers? She's a Knacker, you're not a Traveller, you're a boffer [settler]" ... she doesn't want me and her to play together and she just keeps coming over and is pushing us and all this. We end up having to fight back with her and we get shouted at and she tells her side and we don't get to tell our side" (Girl, aged 11)*



## Respect for Child's Cultural Identity

- Response from teachers if report bullying: *"They shout at you"* (Boy, aged 8)
- Discriminatory language/actions of teachers: *"You can come by taxi, bus or horse and cart for all I care, just get here on time"* (Girl, aged 14, quotation used with permission of YouthAction:NI)



## Traveller Children Priorities

- *"Build lots of brand new big houses, like big large ones, with big gardens"* (Boy, aged 12)
- *"Make a site for travellers near here, round here"* (Girl, aged 12)
- *"More teachers to teach us"* (Girl, aged 11)
- *"I'd like to be a hairdresser quicker"* (Girl, aged 12)
- *"For people to be nice to ye"* (Girl, aged 10)
- *"To help all the homeless people on the street and give them money and all that"* (Boy, aged 10)



**Jane Rooney  
(Pavee Point  
Travellers  
Project)**

### This Presentation will address:

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- Traveller Education in the Republic of Ireland, current provision
- The Role of Traveller Organisations with regard to Education Policy for Travellers. The importance of partnership with the Department of Education and Science
- A Vision for the Future: Report on Consultations with Traveller Parents and learners to inform the Traveller Education Strategy



## Traveller Education Current Provision

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- Pre-schools for Travellers: 48 Traveller only pre-schools catering for 500 children.
- Primary Schools: The Department of Education estimate close to 6500 Traveller children enrolled
- Support by Resource Teachers for Travellers provided for 5,700 Traveller children
- Special Schools for Travellers Approx. 160 Travellers attend one of the three special schools. They have a pupil teacher ratio of 14:1



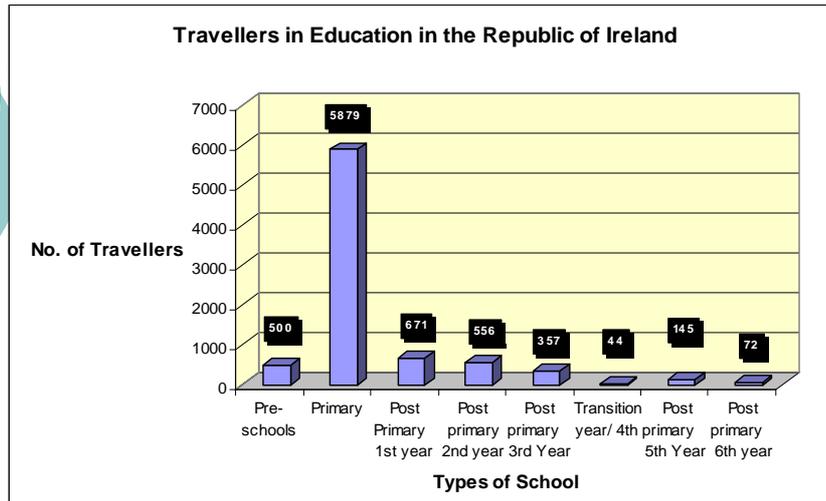
## Traveller Education Current Provision

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### Post Primary level

- Approx. 1,700 Travellers currently attending post-primary school out of a total of 3,500 Travellers aged between 13 and 18.
- Junior Education Centres for Traveller children aged 12 – 15 years, there are currently 4 such centres with approx.100 children attending
- Senior Traveller Training Centres 32 Senior Traveller Training Centres, 981 Travellers (as of December 2004). 25% of participants are under 18.

## Travellers in Education in Republic of Ireland



Source: Dept. of Education estimates for 2004/2005

## The role of Traveller Organisations

- For many years Traveller Organisations have provided **Community Education** in response to the needs of the Community eg. Primary Health Care model, providing after school-supports for parents and children, Youth work programmes.
- **Advocacy role** in promoting Equality of Education for Travellers, in representing the voice of the community and ensuring that their voice is heard
- Traveller Organisations have for many years **lobbied** for equality of outcomes for Travellers in Education and expressed concerns regarding Traveller Education in terms of equality of outcomes, data collection, lack of interculturalism in the curriculum and has pushed for the inclusion of Travellers in mainstream education



## The role of Traveller Organisations Towards a partnership with the Department of Education and Science

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- In 1998 the **Advisory Committee on Traveller Education** was established. This was the first time Traveller organisations were part of the partnership process at a policy level on Traveller Education.
- This Advisory Committee was the first to call for a **Traveller Education Strategy**.
- In 2003 a joint working group was established for a Traveller Education Strategy. Membership from the Education Disadvantage Committee (EDC) and the Advisory committee on Traveller Education (ACTE).
- This group consists of representatives from Pavee Point, the National Traveller Women's Forum, the Irish Traveller Movement. These representatives have been an integral part of this group in developing the Traveller Education strategy



## The Future Role of Traveller Organisations

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- It is vital that that Traveller organisations continue to be an integral component of a partnership process to **monitor and oversee** the implementation of the Traveller Education Strategy
- Traveller Organisations need to be resourced in order for participation of Travellers, to ensure full implementation of the Education Strategy if real change is to take place within the community



## Consultations with Traveller Parents and Learners

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### Why?

- Traveller Education Strategy was being Developed.
- The Three organisations felt that a consultation had to take place with Traveller learners and parents so that the voice of the community was heard.
- Support from the Joint Working Group



## Process of Consultation

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- Undertaken and Organised by the three Traveller Organisations.
- Five regional consultations: Dublin, Sligo, Cork, Kilkenny and Tullamore in 2004
- A national seminar day took place to explore further the themes arising from the regional seminars
- 450 people attended the seminars from Traveller organisations, Senior Traveller Training centres and other training initiatives for Travellers



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## Workshops facilitated by Travellers themselves

- The themes of these workshops were:  
preschools, primary school, post-primary,  
Traveller specific Training, Adult education and  
Third Level



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## Recurrent Themes

- **Access to education**
- **Negative attitude to Travellers**
- **Segregation in provision**
- **Additional Resources and Supports**



## Recurrent Themes

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- **Invalidation of Traveller culture**
- **Ethos in schools**
- **Parental involvement**
- **Outcomes for Travellers**



## Key Strategies identified

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- **Strategy One: Change Attitudes in Educational Settings**
- **Strategy Two: Involving Traveller Parents**
- **Strategy Three: Quality of In-School Experience**

## Key Strategies identified

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### **Strategy Four: Full Interculturalism**

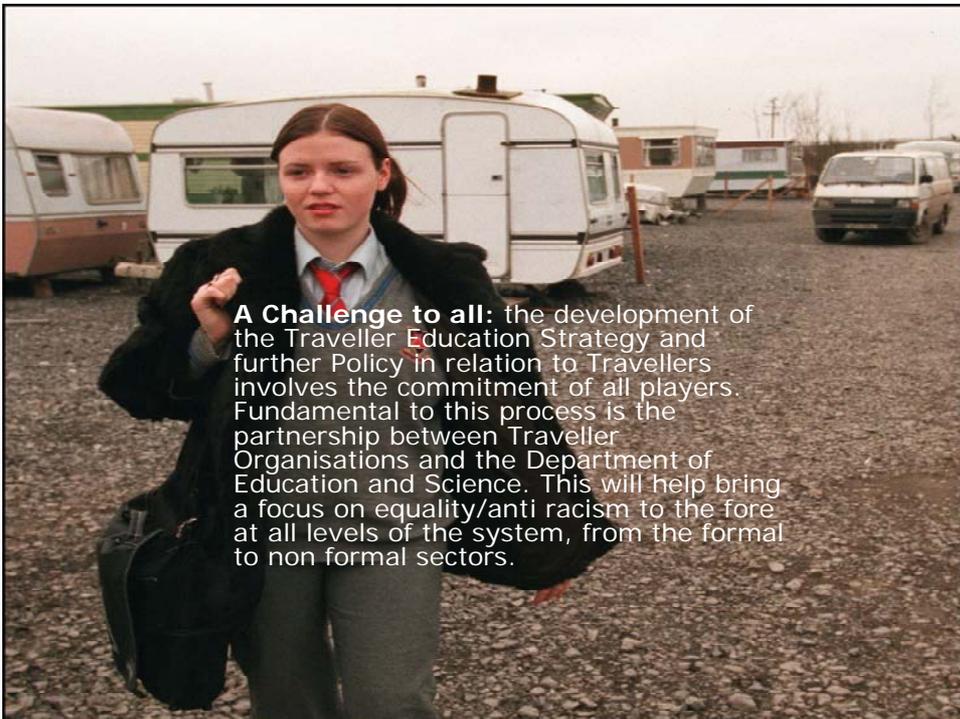
**Strategy Five: Multi Agency Approaches** Building multi-agency approaches to the issues in recognition of the complexity and plural nature of the factors that impact on Travellers' education.

- **Strategy Six: Education Provision for Nomads**
- **Strategy Seven: Inclusion** Providing services to Travellers in an inclusive, integrated setting. Resources should be based on need and not Traveller identity.

## Conclusions

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- **Radical/Real Change rather than Reform**
- **Inclusion in a changed system:** the ending of parallel systems of provision such as Traveller only primary schools, Junior Education Centres, Senior Traveller Training Centre models. Inclusion of Travellers in mainstream provision must involve inclusion into a changed system, one that values Traveller identity and cultural diversity



**A Challenge to all:** the development of the Traveller Education Strategy and further Policy in relation to Travellers involves the commitment of all players. Fundamental to this process is the partnership between Traveller Organisations and the Department of Education and Science. This will help bring a focus on equality/anti racism to the fore at all levels of the system, from the formal to non formal sectors.

**eti** The Education and Training Inspectorate  
Promoting improvement

Roma EDEM Seminar

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22<sup>nd</sup> June 2005



**Peter Graham**  
(Education & Training  
Inspectorate)

**eti** The Education and Training Inspectorate  
Promoting improvement

CONTENT

- ▶ Introduction- the Education and Training Inspectorate
- ▶ Current State of Play
- ▶ Positive Points
- ▶ Shortcomings-What still needs to be done

## INTRODUCTION

- ETI provides inspection services and information
- ETI provides objective professional evaluation
- ETI regards the purpose of inspection

## CURRENT STATE OF PLAY

- May-June 2004, a team of ETI inspectors
- Survey intended
- Around 700 Traveller children
- Evidence base
- Expectation was that survey

## POSITIVE POINTS

- Each ELB has well-structured.....
- Forum for the Education of Traveller Children(NI).....
- Traveller Support Teachers.....
- Almost all staff.....
- Issue of poor attendance.....
- Broaden the curriculum.....

## SHORT COMINGS

- Teachers
- All agencies/professionals
- More regular meetings of ELBs and Traveller support groups
- Better use made of data on Traveller children

## **Peter Graham (Education and Training Inspectorate)**

### **SLIDE 1 Content:**

- Introduction-the Education and Training Inspectorate
- Current State of Play
- Positive Points
- Shortcomings-What still needs to be done

### ***SLIDE 2 Introduction: The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI)***

- ETI provides inspection services and information about the quality of education and training to 3 government departments, DE, DCAL and DEL
- ETI provides objective professional evaluation based on the findings of inspections
- ETI regards the purpose of inspections is to promote the highest standards of learning, teaching and achievement throughout the education and training sectors

### **SLIDE 3 Current State of Play**

- May-June 2004, a team of ETI inspectors undertook a survey of the educational provision for Traveller children across all 5 Education and Library Boards
- The survey intended to identify the quality of provision available to support Traveller children in mainstream schools
- Around 700 Traveller children are currently being educated in schools across NI
- Evidence base- visited 17 schools;(about 20% of all schools with TC) observed 52 Traveller children in classrooms; interviewed the principal's of all of the school's; held discussions with 48 teachers,

classroom assistants, SENCOs, Traveller Support Teachers, ELB staff, and reps from DE and CCMS

- Expectation was that the survey would provide a baseline/benchmark to track the development of Traveller children, and would help inform ELBs in their future work with Traveller children

**SLIDE 4: POSITIVE POINTS (as time is limited I have selected just a few points for illustration)**

- Each of the ELBs has well-structured and effective criteria for the support of Traveller children. They exhibit considerable effort and energy in working towards the inclusion of Traveller children in mainstream education
- DE, CCMS and the ELBs are working well together in what is known as the Forum for the Education of Traveller Children (NI), and have jointly produced useful intercultural educational materials at Key Stages 1,2, and 3.
- The Traveller Support Teachers employed by the ELBs are highly motivated, dedicated and work hard to produce teaching materials specifically for Traveller children
- Almost all teachers, principals, classroom assistants and SENCOs display a deep commitment in working towards the welfare of Traveller children. Schools are making considerable efforts to integrate Traveller children whilst respecting their own unique culture. There is anecdotal evidence that there is less victimisation and bullying of Traveller children than in previous years
- Teachers, EWOs and ELBs have worked hard to address the issue of poor school attendance by Traveller children. This is beginning to pay dividends with a minority of primary schools reporting the attendance of TC is now above 80%

- Post-primary schools are making good efforts to broaden the curriculum at KS4 in an effort to retain Traveller children in education

### **SLIDE 5 Short Comings-what still needs to be done**

- Teachers- more explicit planning for individual TC; greater use of baseline assessment and tracking of TC progress and attainment
- More opportunities for teachers of TC to come together, share ideas, exchange good practice and expertise
- As schools on their own cannot address all the disadvantages found amongst TC, there is a need for all agencies/professionals concerned to work more closely together to share information and expertise
- The ELBs and Traveller Support groups should meet more regularly to discuss ways of improving Traveller education. Issues to be discussed include: parent condoned absences; necessity of TC undertaking public examinations and assessment tests; how to tackle low expectations that many Traveller parents have for their children
- The data on TC collected by the ELBs needs to be used to more effectively track progress and attainment

Dr Robbie McVeigh  
An Dúchán Research Services



*Dr Robbie McVeigh  
(An Dúchán Research Services)*

### Attendance and Attainment

- Current state of play
- What is working?
- Outcomes and shortcomings

## **EUROPEAN MONITORING CENTRE ON RACISM AND XENOPHOBIA**

*"Roma, Sinti, Gypsies and Travellers in public education"*

Research report on *'Travellers and Public Education in Northern Ireland'* for Commission for Racial Equality

What are the views of the public education authorities on segregation and its affects on the children of the groups in question?

Sets the context for our own appraisal of the 'attainment' of the state and statutory agencies with responsibility for Traveller education in the north.

### **Brown v. Board of Education, 347 U.S. 483 (1954):**

Segregation of white and Negro children in the public schools of a State solely on the basis of race, pursuant to state laws permitting or requiring such segregation, denies to Negro children the equal protection of the laws guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment -- even though the physical facilities and other "tangible" factors of white and Negro schools may be equal.

Race Relations (Northern Ireland) Order 1997 specifically identifies Irish Travellers as a 'racial group'. The Order also makes clear the unlawful nature of imposing racial segregation:

- (2) For the purposes of this Order segregating a person from other persons on racial grounds is treating him less favourably than they are treated.

***A Shared Future***  
**Policy and Strategic Framework for Good Relations in Northern Ireland:**

*'Separate but equal is not an option. Parallel living and the provision of parallel services are unsustainable both morally and economically'*

(A Shared Future p. 15).

The Government response to the PSI recommendations was that it '*did not accept the PSI Recommendation to close St Paul's*' (original emphasis):

*'The Government ... has no plans at present to phase out the school. It is successful in delivering quality education and the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools is strongly opposed against any steps to force closure of the school.... until the integration of the Traveller community into the general community reaches a stage where the parents of Traveller children choose to send their children to other mainstream schools, leading to the non-viability of St Mary's, the school should remain open'* (OFMDFM 2003: 51-52).

The current DENI position is:

*'It is incorrect to describe the provision at St Mary's Primary School as racially segregated. It is not a designated "Traveller School" and there are no such schools in Northern Ireland. St Mary's is a Catholic Maintained school which, as is the case with all grant-aided schools in Northern Ireland, is open to all children.... While it is the Department's policy to encourage the integration in school of Traveller children with other children, there are no plans to phase out provision at St Mary's for **so long as there is demand for places in the school from the parents of Traveller Children**' (research communication 7 October 2004).*

The CCMS position is:

*'From an organizational point of view we have one Primary school in Belfast which is specifically for Traveller children (this is a response to parental demand). All our other schools, nursery, primary and post-primary are open to all irrespective of religious, ethnic or cultural background. In view of the nature of the Traveller lifestyle we therefore have schools in certain areas of the country where the proportion of Traveller children would be greater than elsewhere'* (research communication 7 October 2004).

The position of the BELB, which buses Traveller children to and from the segregated school, is:

*'Transport for Traveller pupils within the BELB is targeted provision for Traveller pupils in all Belfast schools where requested or required.... Transport for pupils from the Travelling community attending Belfast Board schools can be provided if requested or required under targeted provision. This is in line with promoting social inclusion- supporting the community to access the schools of their choice both at primary and secondary level'* (research communication 26 October 2004).

The ETI (Education and Training Inspectorate) effectively ignores the fact that St Mary's is a *de facto* segregated school – although it does acknowledge that, '*The children come exclusively from the Travelling community*'. This appears particularly problematic given the controversy that the segregation has provoked.

**Current state of play:**

- **Segregation is maintained.**
- **Bussing is maintained.**
- **No effective monitoring of achievement but currently poor**

## **What is working?**

- **The Legal Context**
- **Policy Context**
- **Resourcing**
- **EOTAS**

## **Outcomes and shortcomings**

**There are four core issues which recur in the broad analysis of Travellers and public education in Northern Ireland:**

- *integration/segregation*
- *evaluation*
- *resourcing*
- *partnership.*

## **Conclusions:**

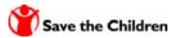
- **The philosophy of ‘special circumstances’ and ‘parental choice’ must be repudiated**
- **Traveller educational equality is inseparable from Traveller equality. Justice for Travellers in education is inseparable from broader struggles for justice for Travellers**
- **Equality of outcome is the only metre of success or failure.**

Roma EDEM Education Seminar  
22 June 2005



# Transitions

David Simpson  
Save the Children



**David Simpson**  
*(Save the Children)*

## Transitions

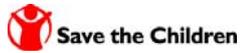
- Only 18 % of Traveller children access pre-school or nursery, compared to 56% of children overall (**DE, 2000**).
- 59% of Travellers (16-24) leave school with no qualifications, compared to 17 % of the 16-24 population overall (**2001 Census**).



# Transitions

- The Department of Education should establish a targeted initiative aimed at promoting use of integrated (off site) nursery and pre-school provision by Travellers

(PSI Final Report, August 2000).



# Transitions

## Action and Timescale

- To initiate a specific 2/3 year drive to enhance participation of Traveller children in integrated nursery and pre-school education, during the period April 2003 - April 2005 .

Lead Department:

**The Department of Education**



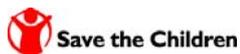
# Transitions

- Toybox - early years development through play for children aged 0-4
- Toybox aims to increase children's enrolment in pre-schools and nurseries
- SELB 'preparedness for school' project
- Good local practice, but...
  - short term funding
  - lack of joined up approach
  - lack of resourced strategic vision
  - lack of clear targets



# Transitions

- Supporting the transition to post-primary
- Building a strategy around good practice
  - Afterschools and homework clubs
  - Inclusion in Education Project
  - Munia Tober AEP Project
- Segregation: not simply a matter of parental choice



# Transitions

## Summary

**There is a need to:**

- Develop a drive for greater uptake of pre-school education
- Develop and sustain Toybox project
- Establish a clear strategic vision with real targets
- Establish an interagency education forum
- Tackle difficult issues

## TRANSITIONS

This presentation aims to explore a few of the issues relating to the transition into primary school, and from primary into post-primary. Of course there's also the transition from post-primary into whatever lies ahead – a job, no job, marriage and family, a sense of social inclusion or not – but time precludes looking at this in any detail and perhaps it leads neatly into the seminar later this year around employment.

One starting point is to look at a couple of key statistics, one from each end of the school continuum. There are very few statistics available in relation to Traveller children's education – indeed, that's one of the problems – and the accuracy of those statistics that there are is also an issue. But these two statistics do at least indicate the extent of the problem or challenge with education:

- In 1999, only 18% of Traveller children were thought to access pre-school or nursery, compared to 56% of children overall (**DE,2000**)
- 59% of Travellers (16-24) leave school with no qualifications, compared to 17% of the 16-24 population overall (**2001 Census**)

When I came across the first of these statistics in 2002 it seemed likely that the gap was already widening. The pre-school expansion programme was starting to offer a place for every child whose parents wanted one. On the other hand, almost all Traveller children who went to pre-school did so in 'on site' Traveller support group provision and these were under increasing pressures, for funding or other reasons. The Newry Traveller pre-school in particular had already closed.

It's obviously too simplistic to say that there's a direct correlation between these two statistics, between the lack of pre-school opportunities and the lack of qualifications by school leaving age. But it is reasonable to say that there's a general correlation, and that participation by Traveller children in good quality pre-schooling is a significant factor in future educational opportunities.

In 2000, the Promoting Social Inclusion working group on Travellers, which I was part of, made a recommendation about this.

The core of that recommendation was:

- The Department of Education should establish a targeted initiative aimed at promoting use of integrated (off site) nursery and pre-school provision by Travellers.

Although the recommendation did go on to talk about improving support to 'on site' provision where necessary, we focused on integrated provision because we felt it was more educationally desirable, more sustainable, and would make transition for children to integrated primary schools easier than if they were coming from a Traveller-only pre-school environment. The 'targeted initiative' was intended to include a focus on working with parents to provide the confidence that their child would be safe, respected and happy in an integrated setting, and that practical barriers – e.g. transport – would be examined.

This consideration by the PSI group of the different elements of the 'integrated versus Traveller-only' debate in relation to pre-schools is of particular relevance when contrasted with the elevation by statutory bodies of 'parental choice' over other determinants when considering the issue of primary education for Traveller children in Belfast. I'll come back to that issue in a few minutes.

In its response to the PSI report in 2002, Government accepted this part of the pre-school recommendation, undertaking:

- To initiate a 2-3 year drive to enhance the participation of Traveller children in integrated nursery and pre-school education, during the period April 2003 – April 2005

and pointing out that flexibility of funding by the Pre-school Education Advisory Groups was already being applied for Traveller children, although this was largely in Traveller-only provisions.

It seems regrettable that two-and-a-half years later, and five years after the recommendation was first made, there has in fact been no Government 'drive' to increase Traveller children's participation in pre-school, and that the existence of funding flexibility for places is still being put forward as *the* indicator of progress. This seems incomprehensible when everyone concerned acknowledges the significant advantage which a Traveller children with experience of pre-schooling has over a child who hasn't had that experience, at the point when both enter primary school.

The main 'good practice' in this area currently appears to be the Toybox project, a three-year partnership between NIPPA the early years organisation, Save the Children and Traveller Movement NI. Funded by the Children's Fund and Save the Children, and with eight development

staff, the project provides a one-to-one home-based play and early years development service for Traveller children aged 0-4. Working in Belfast, Derry, Strabane, Coalisland, Armagh, Dungannon, Newry and South Armagh, Toybox is presently working with 120 children from 90 families. One specific objective of the project, by developing relationships with parents and pre-schools and nursery schools, is to increase the enrolment of Traveller children in pre-schools in both 'on site' and integrated settings, and there are strong indications that some progress is being made.

Among other good practice initiatives, one being planned for September 2005 is the Southern Education & Library Board's 'preparedness for school' project, which aims to develop an induction pack aimed at schools and parents for children eligible to be enrolled in pre-school or primary school, and to include in-service training for school staff around the help which children and parents may need. Alongside this the Southern Board hopes to develop a set of standardised measurements of children's school readiness, which will show the extent to which children attending pre-school do better, and it intends to use this to actively promote the benefits of a pre-school experience.

So there is some evidence of good practice happening, although it is critically hampered by short term funding, patchy co-operation or the absence of joined up working, and – it would seem – the lack of a strategic vision, underpinned by adequate resources, which is capable of setting clear targets for raising the participation of Traveller children in pre-school on a North of Ireland-wide basis and thus providing a springboard for equal participation with settled children by the time they enter into primary education.

Five years after the Department assessed participation in pre-school within the population overall at 56%, it has now risen closer to 95%. Has the gap for Traveller participation closed? Obviously not. Has the level of Traveller participation increased from its 2000 estimate of 17%? The fact is that no-one at the moment knows for sure, though any really significant increase seems unlikely, and the Toybox is the most likely contributor to any increase.

While pre-school participation is not a panacea for the education challenges Travellers face, it is such an obviously critical area that there remains an urgent need for the targeted initiative promised three years ago by the Department. There is a need for statutory funding (from Education and Health) to guarantee the future of Toybox as a regional initiative after its three-year funding ends, given the universal recognition of the valuable role it is playing. There is a need for the elements of partnership, between voluntary and statutory, and across statutory boundaries, which sometimes currently exist but only at a local

project level, to be scaled up to meet this challenge. And through that partnership, for real targets to be set and for good local practice to be rolled out on a regional basis as Toybox has been.

Moving on to consider some of the transition issues of the primary / post-primary interface, it is clear that – at a local level – there are also some examples of improved practice. St. Mary's primary school in Belfast, for example, partners with post-primary schools for a three-day induction process in the final term for P7 pupils due to transfer. St. Joseph's secondary school in Coalisland will be liaising with the local Traveller support group about children due to transfer in September 2005.

Are these examples of improved practice common to all schools that transfer and receive Traveller children? As with the issue of transition and school readiness at pre-school and primary level, there is little evidence of a strategic approach, or of the setting of targets, or of the development of a working partnership approach with local Traveller support groups and other voluntary organisations as a critical resource in the transfer and retention of children in post-primary schools. It may be that the recent work of the Education & Training Inspectorate in reviewing practices in schools which have Traveller children will lead to guidelines for good practice, but without the setting of targets at Board level and across the North of Ireland it seems unlikely that progress, where made at all, will ever be more than painfully slow.

The fact that many children either never make the transition to post-primary, or begin their withdrawal from formal education shortly after transition, should not be attributed simply to Travellers' lifestyle or culture. Of course this is a real factor, and some elements of it, such as decent accommodation and the prospect of employment, lie beyond the particular remit of education to address. But there is a need to tackle what can be tackled, and to drive forward through Government a strategy that builds on good local practice where it exists – things like afterschools projects and homework clubs, and part school/part training initiatives as in Derry and the Southern Board's proposed 'Inclusion in Education' project, and the existing Munia Tober alternative education project for young women in Belfast – and to develop these local examples on a regional basis with adequate resources and clear and measurable targets for improvement. A lot of the good practice, although under-resourced, and an equal measure of the commitment, resides within the voluntary sector, and if there was one single element that would make a sea-change to developing a more strategic approach it would be the creation of real, equal partnership between the statutory and voluntary sectors.

The issue of primary to post-primary transition can't be discussed honestly without reference to St. Mary's. It's an indication of the

sensitivity that surrounds this issue that the Department has recently produced a research study on Traveller children's experiences in post-primary schools without mentioning St. Mary's at all or exploring whether children's experiences of primary education in a Traveller-only environment had any impact on their subsequent adjustment to post-primary school. It seems almost incredible that, while both the Department and CCMS state their commitment to integrated education for Traveller children, they have elevated parental choice in favour of St. Mary's to a position greater than it enjoys in any other education context.

St. Mary's is a good and caring school, providing good education by committed teachers to Traveller children in Belfast. Education & Training Inspectorate reports consistently show that standards are rising. And parental choice is important but not the only important issue. It might be more valid and certainly honest to argue that St. Mary's exists because Traveller children wouldn't get a better education in any other primary school in West Belfast, and that their education is more important than integration. But then, why aren't there Traveller-only primary schools outside Belfast or Traveller-only post-primary schools? There's just a suspicion that the existence of St. Mary's prevents having to deal with the probable opposition of some schools and some in the settled community to significant numbers of Traveller children enrolling in other schools in West Belfast. It's inconceivable that a similar solution would be found to deal with any other minority ethnic group of children.

This is a complex issue, and calling for the end of segregated schooling shouldn't be used as a slogan. But neither should parental choice be used in that way. There's a need to examine honestly, and perhaps to conduct some research, on whether or not there are specific social and educational benefits to having a Traveller-only primary school, and whether there are any social and educational impacts – good and bad – for children's subsequent transfer to integrated post-primary schools. At least the best interests of children should stand alongside parental choice as factors in the debate, and the Department should actively explore what an active integration strategy would involve rather than simply holding up Travellers' parental choice as though (on this one issue) it were a holy grail.

There's only been the opportunity in this presentation to touch on a small handful of the issues that relate to school transitions. Its intention has therefore been to suggest a few of the problems, some of the good practice, what might be needed to decrease one and increase the other, and provide an opening for further discussion within smaller groups.

So, to summarise some of the key points, there is - I believe – a need:

- To develop a specific drive to increase Traveller children's participation in pre-school education, including working with parents to build confidence and commitment towards this
- To ensure that the proven success of the Toybox project is sustained after its scheduled end in Autumn 2006
- To set clear and measurable targets for Traveller children's participation and attainment levels, and so to provide a framework for good practice existing at a local level, within an overall strategic vision
- To make a commitment to real partnership between statutory and voluntary education providers and Travellers themselves, at a strategic as well as project level, and including some form of interagency education forum
- To create the basis of trust and respect within which difficult issues can be fully discussed.

**David Simpson**  
Save the Children

## A Partnership approach to transition in the West Midlands

By Pat Holmes, Principal Adviser  
Co-ordinator, West Midlands  
Consortium Education Service for  
Travelling Children



**Pat Holmes**  
**(West Midlands Consortium**  
**Education Services for**  
**Travelling Children)**



- What is the current situation
- What is working well
- What are key barriers to attendance and attainment

Outcomes and Shortcomings



## Time Line of Intervention



- Late 1960's – Voluntary initiatives
- Early 1970's – Research into needs
- Mid 1970's – A joint statutory response coordinated action to support access and continuity



1980's / 90's –Realising the West Midlands Consortium Partnership approach.  
14 Local Education Authorities.



- “A shared response to shared communities”
- Management
  - West Midlands Consortium Education Service for Travelling Children (WMCESTC) an education and field welfare support service
  - Rapid responses to mobility
  - Mainstreaming action
  - Data for information, planning and Pupil Education Record Transfer.
- } Joint workings



2000 / 05



- CRE Gypsies and Travellers: A strategy for the CRE 2004 – 2007
- Introduction of Race Relations Amendment Act 2000
- Childrens Act and Every Child Matters 2004
- Framework for Local Authority Inspections  
Delivering services to Gypsy and Traveller families and their children.  
Reviewing and restructuring WMCESTC's work streamlining for accelerating mainstreaming and developing the models of responses to the education and continuity of education for the mobile communities.



NEWSFLASH  
DfES Inclusion, Equality and Diversity Data  
Consultation



- Ethnic status in PLASC reporting was secured January 2003
- Gypsy / Roma
  - Travellers of Irish Heritage
- The new consultation document proposes Traveller **status** inclusion, eg Fairground, Circus, Bargee, New Travellers, families who **travel**
- The consultation will also inform the commissioning process for The Schools Census 2007.
- Moves towards seeing the work
- Removing discrimination in procedures and practices
  - Responding to communities who are mobile



## What works?



- Dedicated resources human and material
- Working across Local Authority boundaries in a coordinated way
- Economy of scale allowing quality provision
- Working in partnership
- Working interagency
- Working with parents
- Signposting services to parents
- Advisory and direct support roles
- Assessment tools
- Relevant Teaching and Learning resources including accurate and informative cultural images



## What works?



- Training / Professional Development delivery including Cultural Awareness / whole school inclusion strategies
- Good practice Guidance
- National and European networking and development
- Working with providers, eg EYDCP  
National initiatives and projects Sure Start, Children's Fund and Connexions
- Pupil Education Record Transfer system
- Data for diagnostic and planning purposes (attendance, attainment, ethnicity, gender, special needs) "narrowing the gaps"



## What works?



- Transfer between levels
- Continuity strategies including Distance Learning Work
- Inclusion in strategic work in LEA's / LA's equality, diversity, across directorates, performance and improvement, Education Development Plans etc
- Ofsted inspections – preparation outcomes



## Barriers



- Levels of institutional and personal prejudice and discrimination in parts of some local authorities and some schools
- Over dependency on WMCESTC by some authorities, EWO Services and schools
- Some ineffective implementation of Admissions policies
- Exemption of denominational schools from Admissions procedures
- Where lack of coordination across LA services leads to contradictory policies and practices which undermine children's education, eg shortfall of accommodation, poor practice eviction procedures



## Barriers



- Prescriptive Curriculum
- Attendance and attainment reporting which undermine school actions for inclusion
- National Assessment Tests and Examination Boards and Timing
- Interest in progress at Key Stages and not between stages
- Lack of investment in Distance Learning (IT) for regular and seasonal Travellers
- Lack of school places in some areas
- Elective Home Education (EOTAS) arrangements at national policy level and local implementation level



## Barriers



- Special Needs assessment procedures (for mobile children)
- At Secondary level curriculum in Years 7, 8 and 9 difficult to maintain children in school



## Barriers



- Reluctance of some parents to allow / support full participation in school life
  - Visits
  - Residentials
  - Swimming
  - After School Club
- Parental inexperience, fear, reflection of Sec Ed "Traveller children don't go to secondary school"
- Parents who see Sec Ed only as a tool to undermine the continuity of the traditional social and economic structure of the Traveller community



## Barriers



- "The boys can go to school but the girls have to child mind, clean, look after sick relative"
- "The girls can go to school but the boys have to learn to earn a living with their father"
- "He's not going to school, he's off travelling with his uncle to learn our ways"
- "I'm not going if he's not going today"

## **5.2 Key Stakeholders in Traveller Education**

### **An Munia Tober**

An Munia Tober (the name is taken from the cant term 'the good road') is a merger of the Belfast Travellers Support Group and Belfast Travellers Education Development Group. It works to build the capacity of Travellers, advocates for Traveller issues, seeks to achieve positive change and runs a series of projects to provide a more holistic service to the Traveller community in the Belfast area.

### **Barnardos**

Barnardos is a UK-wide charity working with vulnerable children and young people. The organisation's Tuar Ceatha Project has managed the only registered pre-school service (in Belfast) for Traveller children since 1994.

### **The Children's Law Centre**

The Children's Law Centre was opened in September 1997, founded on the principles laid down in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. It works in partnership with children and other agencies committed to releasing children's rights.

### **The Council for Catholic Maintained Schools**

The Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) is the advocate for the Catholic Maintained schools sector in Northern Ireland. CCMS represents trustees, schools and governors on issues such as raising and maintaining standards, the school estate and teacher employment.

### **The Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment**

The Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) was established is a non-departmental public body reporting to the Department of Education in Northern Ireland advising government on the curriculum, ensuring that the qualifications and

examinations offered by awarding bodies are of an appropriate quality and standard, offering a diverse range of qualifications.

### **The Department of Education**

The Department of Education (DE) is responsible for the central administration of education and related services in Northern Ireland. Its primary statutory duties are to promote the education of the young people of Northern Ireland and to secure the effective execution of its policy in relation to the provision of the education service.

### **The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland**

The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland has responsibility for implementing the legislation on fair employment, sex discrimination and equal pay, sexual orientation, race relations and disability discrimination. The Commission is also responsible for overseeing the statutory duties on public authorities to promote equality of opportunity and good relations.

### **Forum for the Education of Traveller Children**

The Forum for the Education of Traveller Children comprises representation from the Department of Education, the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools and the Education and Library Boards.

### **Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People**

The Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People's main role is to safeguard and promote the rights and best interests of children and young people.

### **Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities**

The Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities (NICEM) is a voluntary sector membership umbrella organisation working on behalf of ethnic minorities in Northern Ireland

## **The Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission**

The Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission is a statutory body created by the Northern Ireland Act 1998. It has a range of functions including reviewing the adequacy and effectiveness in Northern Ireland of law and practice relating to the protection of human rights, advising on whether a Bill is compatible with human rights and promoting understanding and awareness of the importance of human rights in Northern Ireland.

## **Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister**

The Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) is one of eleven government departments. Its responsibilities include the Programme for Government, economic policy and equality and human rights.

## **Save the Children**

Save the Children works in more than sixty countries around the world, using research, advocacy and practice work with communities to enhance children's enjoyment of their rights. In the North of Ireland, two significant aspects of Save the Children's programme are the themes of children's access to quality education and of Traveller children's right to non-discriminatory treatment are

## **Traveller Movement (NI)**

Traveller Movement (NI) is an NGO umbrella group comprising of Travellers, Traveller Support Groups and statutory and voluntary organisations, which supports and co-ordinates work with Travellers

## **5.3 Key Developments**

### **The Education Reform (NI) Order 1989**

The Education Reform (NI) Order 1989 requires that **all** pupils of compulsory school age in grant aided schools should have access to a balanced and broadly based curriculum, with their progress

regulated, assessed and reported to their parents. These provisions apply to all children including Traveller children.

### **Department of Education Circular 1993/37: Policy and Guidelines for the Education of Children from Travelling Families**

The principles underlying this Circular emphasises equality of access to education, understanding of and sympathetic to the way of life of Traveller families, respects and values the uniqueness of Traveller culture and that it is in the best interests of both Traveller children and settled children to be educated together. There are exceptional circumstances in the case of St Mary's primary school in that, consistent with government policy on parental choice and efficient use of resources, the Department will support the continued existence of this Traveller only school.

### **Race Relations (Northern Ireland) Order 1997**

The Race Relations Order recognises Irish Travellers as a racial group. It defines the Irish Traveller community as *“a community of people commonly so called who are identified (by themselves and others) as people with a shared history, culture and traditions, including, historically, a nomadic way of life on the island of Ireland.”*

### **Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998**

In addition to the Race Relations Order, Travellers as a racial group also come within the scope of Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act. This requires designated public bodies in carrying out their duties to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity and to have regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between persons of different racial group

### **Promoting Social Inclusion Working Group on Travellers**

Promoting Social Inclusion is a specific initiative within the Government's policy of New Targeting Social Need that aims to bring together different Government departments, agencies and voluntary bodies to put in place more targeted and additional action to effectively tackle issues facing certain groups. The needs of

Travellers were one of the first issues to be addressed within the Promoting Social Inclusion initiative, in June 1999. *The Final Report of the PSI Working Group on Travellers* contained twelve recommendations specifically addressing education issues.

### **Denied a Future?**

*Denied a Future?* is a wide-ranging report published by Save the Children which describes the law, policy and practice with regard to education provision for Roma/Gypsy and Traveller children in a number of European Countries.

### **Government Response to the Promoting Social Inclusion Working Group 2001**

Government published its response to the PSI Working Group on Traveller's in 2001, stating that the recommendations that it accepted will be implemented within the context of the Race Strategy. The actions arising from these recommendations will be included the action plan which will be developed to implement the Race Equality Strategy and progress on implementation will be monitored and reviewed by the Race Forum.

### **Race Strategy 2003**

The draft Race Strategy was prepared by a working group set up under the Promoting Social Inclusion element of the New Targeting Social Need policy. The group was established in February 2003, chaired by the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister and included representatives from Government Departments, relevant statutory agencies and voluntary organisations working with the black minority ethnic and Traveller communities and the Equality Commission.

### **Race Forum and Traveller Thematic Group**

The Race Forum was established in 2003 as a result of recommendations from the PSI Working Groups on minority ethnic people and Travellers. The membership consists of representatives of minority ethnic communities alongside Departments, statutory bodies and the voluntary and community sector.

The Forum has established a number of issue based thematic groups. The first of these was the Travellers Thematic Group. The Group will monitor and review progress on the Government's response to the PSI recommendations, input to the development of the Race Equality Action Plan, facilitate a partnership approach, provide an exchange of information, keep the effectiveness of current Traveller provision under review and make recommendations, through the Forum, for change.

### **Common Funding Formula 2005**

New funding arrangements were introduced in April 2005 to ensure that all schools will be funded through a single formula and budgets will be calculated on a consistent, fair and transparent basis. Other elements include support for children of the Travelling community. Each full time pupil designated in the school census as being of the Traveller community will generate an additional allocation for the school equivalent to the 0.5 of the basic Age Weighted Pupil Units (AWPU).<sup>1</sup>

### **5.4 Department of Education Policy And Guidelines For The Education Of Children From Traveller Families (Policy Circular 1993/37)**

The circular is presently under review.

Representatives from Department of Education, Council for Catholic Maintained Schools and the 5 Education and Library Boards (who are members of the Forum for the Education of Traveller Children) are currently considering a revised policy.

Once a draft has been agreed it will be screened in line with current Equality Commission guidelines with a view to integrating equality issues with policy formulation (mainstreaming)

The revised draft policy will be subject to full and meaningful consultation with all affected groups.

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<sup>1</sup> Current rates are AWPU £1,728.49 + £864.24 (Weight applied to pupils identified as Travellers - x 0.5).

## **I Introduction**

1. In 1989, the Council of the European Communities adopted resolutions (Ref Nos:89/C 153/01 – 02) whereby EC member states recognised the key importance of school provision for Gypsy and Traveller children and undertook to promote measures to overcome obstacles to their access to schooling, within the constitutional and financial limits of their own specific educational policies and structures. This Circular describes the legislation and policies which apply in Northern Ireland and puts forward guidelines for ensuring equality of educational opportunity for children from Traveller families. The term ‘Traveller’ includes Travelling people settled in housing.

## **II Legislation**

2. The Education Reform (Northern Ireland) Order 1989 requires that all pupils of compulsory school age in grant-aided schools should have access to a balanced and broadly based curriculum, with their progress regularly assessed and reported to their parents. These requirements apply to Traveller children as to any other child.
3. The legislation provides the statutory right for parents to express a preference as to the school they wish their children to attend. In making admissions decisions, Boards of Governors are required to comply with the preferences expressed by parents, insofar as they can be met within published admissions criteria (subject to physical capacity, or where they school is a grammar school and compliance would not be in the child’s educational interests.) Parents may appeal against admission decisions to local tribunals appointed by Education and Library Boards. Traveller children enjoy the same right to full-time education as any other children and Traveller families must be fully supported in taking up their educational rights, with due regard being paid to their preference of school.

## **III POLICY PRINCIPLES**

4. Education for the children of Traveller families can only be effectively provided in a non-discriminatory environment which -
  - Is understanding of, and sympathetic to, the way of life of Traveller families;
  - Respects and values the uniqueness of the Traveller culture; and
  - Positively welcomes Traveller children, not only for the contribution each child brings, but as an opportunity for all pupils to develop and share experiences for their common benefit.
5. It is in the best long-term interests of both Traveller children and settled children that they should be educated together.
6. There are exceptional circumstances in the case of St Mary's Primary School, Belfast, where sufficient numbers of children of Traveller parents are being educated together for the school to be viable. Consistent with Government policy on parental choice and the efficient use of resources, the Department will support the existence of this school as long as demand continues to justify it. This does not, however, affect the entitlement of Traveller parents in West Belfast who wish their children to attend other schools in the area to have their preference complied with, subject to physical capacity.

#### **IV GUIDELINES**

7. Nomadism is an integral and positive part of the Traveller culture and should not be regarded as an obstacle to education. Among the strategies which should be considered by providers are distance learning, mobile support (such as bus classrooms) and school record transfer systems.
8. Pre-school educational activities for young Traveller children, involving their parents, should be supported wherever possible, in order to help them work from an early age towards the acquisition of basic skills.

9. Schools attended by Traveller children should have whole-school policies, both within class teaching and in the wider extra-curricular and pastoral contexts, which acknowledge the Traveller culture and seek to promote self-confidence and pride among Traveller children. Where possible, they should undertake school-based, staff development programmes focusing on the needs of Travellers and designate a member of staff to co-ordinate Traveller matters.
10. Schools should liaise with the families of their Traveller pupils, to advise on educational opportunities, answer parental concerns and expectations, assess the needs of individual families and, in consultation with the Educational Welfare Service, devise strategies to minimise attendance difficulties. In some areas, for example, Boards have found it of value to make special arrangements for home to school transport for Traveller children.
11. Primary schools with Traveller children should establish links with local secondary schools with the aim of easing the transition to secondary education.
12. Boards should take into account the needs of Traveller children, and the schools which they attend, when drawing up schemes for curriculum support and advice. They should ensure that adequate classroom support is made available for teachers of Traveller children and should consider the provision of other (e.g. peripatetic) support where appropriate. They should ensure that teachers of Traveller children from different schools have opportunities to discuss matters of common concern and should liaise closely with the Regional Training Unit in the planning of appropriated in-service training courses. They should consider ways in which their Youth Services might contribute towards the educational and personal development of Travellers.
13. Boards and schools with Traveller children should consider what special arrangements might be necessary to enable these pupils to complete their homework, e.g. by supervised study in school or through the establishment of "homework centres".

14. Boards and the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools should secure regular liaison with Travellers and their support organisations, together with staff from other agencies with an interest, to co-ordinate approaches to meeting the educational needs of Traveller families and ensure the most effective dissemination of information about the rights, opportunities and responsibilities of Traveller children and their parents.
15. Boards should consider, in consultation with Traveller support groups, how best to sponsor the development of teaching resource materials for schools relating to Traveller life and culture (particularly in the contexts of Education for Mutual Understanding and Cultural Heritage) and of appropriate materials for school-based staff development.

## **V CONCLUSION**

16. In the preparation of the Circular, the Department has consulted widely with a range of organisation with an interest in securing effective education for Traveller children and would wish to acknowledge the helpful contributions made by respondents. It is clear that in many cases, special provision for Traveller children is already being made and is meeting with success. The Department has sought to draw from examples of such good practice, both within Northern Ireland and elsewhere, in framing the above guidelines and it will be monitoring future developments.

## **6. List of participants**

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Ken Fraser, Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister

Michael Gannon, Corpus Christi College

Jim Glackin, Equality Commission for Northern Ireland

Liz Gough, Belfast Education and Library Board

Peter Graham, Department of Education Inspectorate

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Derek Hanway, An Munia Tober

Dame Joan Harbinson, Equality Commission for Northern Ireland

Donna Heaney, Equality Commission for Northern Ireland

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Nan Purcell, Traveller community

Owen Purcell, Traveller community

Alice Quinn, An Munia Tober

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Education

David Simpson, Save the Children

Jackie Simpson, Department of Education

Kathryn Stevenson, Children's Law Centre

Carmen Stewart, NI Pre-School Playgroup Association

Patricia Stewart, Equality Commission for Northern Ireland

Anne Marie Stokes, Traveller community

Julia Stokes, Traveller community

Mary Stokes, Traveller community

Edel Teague, Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission

Deirdre Vaugh, Staff Commission for Education and Library Board

Michelle Wilson, Equality Commission for Northern Ireland

7. Picture of the event

