

# **Improving educational outcomes for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils**

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# The research

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Three year research project (2007-2010) commissioned by the (then ) DCSF.

**Aim:**

to investigate the issues faced by Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils and explore ways of improving educational outcomes for this group.

**Conducted by:**

the National Foundation for Educational Research (NfER) with Chris Derrington and Brian Foster (Consultants).

# Methodology

- A review of UK and international literature over the last ten years.
- Data analysis of entire national cohort of pupils ascribing to WIRT and WROM ethnic codes:
  - attainment, attendance and exclusions data
  - over 5 year period
  - compared to a control group of similar pupils.
- Progress mapping
  - 200 questionnaires sent twice (in 2007 and 2009) to primary and secondary schools with relatively high numbers of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils.
- In-depth case-study visits
  - 15 schools (ten secondary and five primary)
  - face-to-face interviews with headteachers, governors, school staff and LA staff.
  - focus groups with parents, pupils, other school staff.

# Key findings from the Literature review

## Outcomes improve where...

- Whole school policies specifically reference Gypsy Roma Traveller pupils
- Training for new and practising staff developed with community involvement
- Recognition of impact of social, cultural and economic issues
- Flexibility within the curriculum
- Increased coordination across Children's Services
- Community involvement in developing policies and practice at local and national levels

# Changing ethnic codes between Y6 and Y11

Changes to Ethnicity Code	Irish Traveller	Roma – Not EAL	Roma - EAL	National
	%	%	%	%
Yes	67.8	69.1	85.1	20.8
No	32.2	30.9	14.9	79.2
<b>N</b>	<b>366</b>	<b>651</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>584360</b>

# Ascription

- TESSs in the South East were aware of additional 40% Gypsies, Roma and Travellers ascribed to other groups.
- Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils were significantly more likely to change their ethnic ascription than pupils in other minority groups
- TESS coordinators
  - not dependent on ethnic ascription alone
  - used close links with families, extended family groups, community organisations and other agencies to identify families.

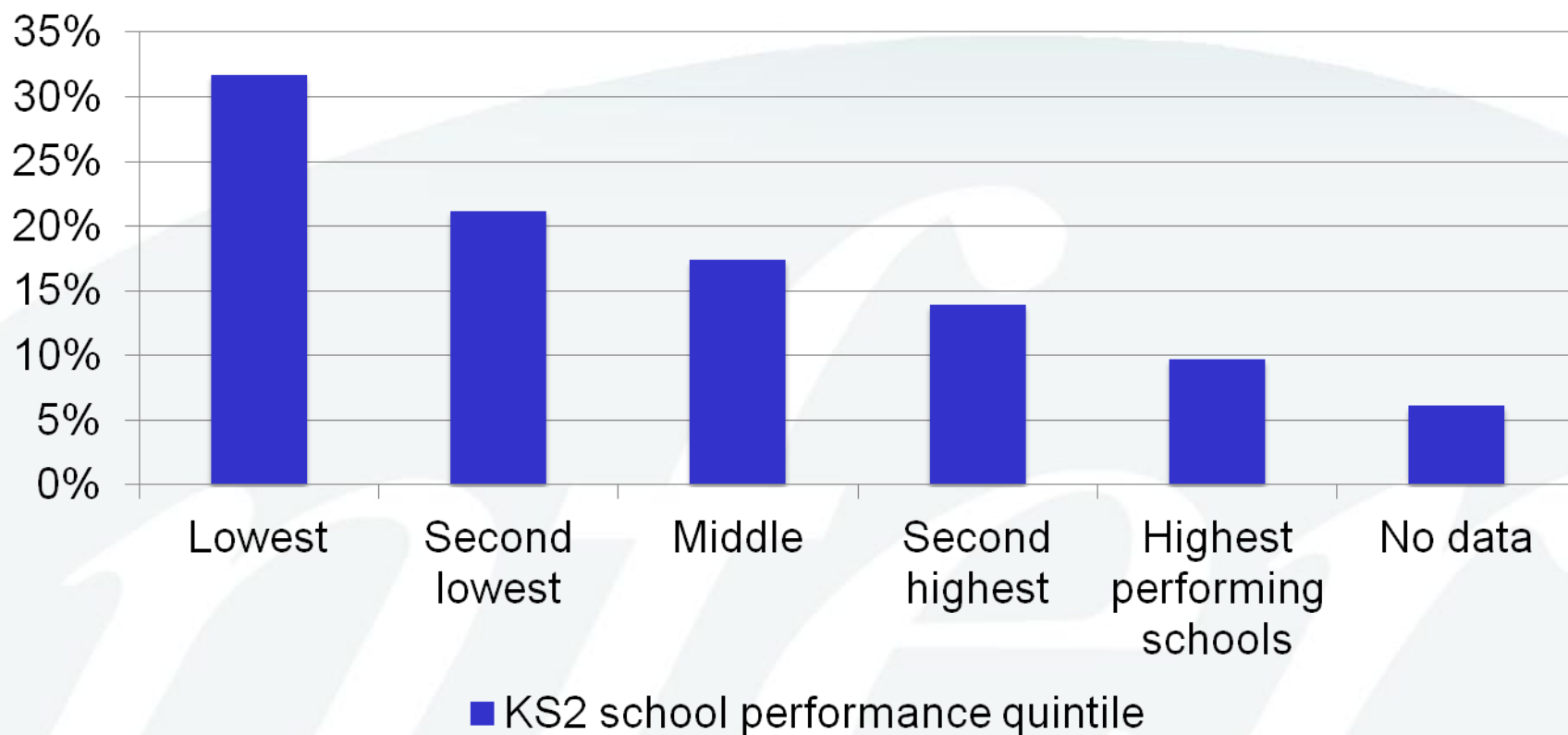
# Comparison group

Matched by:

- previous attainment
- FSM
- SEN
- in similar attaining schools.

# Data analysis

## Schools attended by Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils



# Data analysis

There was **no significant difference** between the average progress made by Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils when compared to the average progress of comparators

But there may be cultural factors influencing the characteristics of the GRT cohort.

- High level of SEN may be a result of misinterpretation of cultural factors
- Poverty may be a result of social exclusion
- Parental disadvantage may contribute to low prior attainment
- Low levels of progress made by both groups

# Attainment

## Statistical analysis found:

- Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils are more likely to attend schools with lower than average rates of achievement.
- Fewer than 10% of Gypsy, Roma Traveller pupils were among the top 50% of achievers at KS4.
- Poverty, low prior attainment, educational disruption and high levels of SEN identification all contributed to underachievement.

# Attainment – school survey

## Schools recognised:

- tension between family aspirations and those of the school, with pupils sometimes caught in the middle.
- those who had parental support
  - made most progress and
  - were most likely to remain in education post-16.
- need to raise expectations of pupils, their families and their own staff.
- primary schools felt they had made more progress in establishing dialogue with parents.

# Attainment – school survey

## Change between questionnaires:

- In 2007 schools sought to raise attainment by pupil level interventions (by TAs or TESS staff).
- By 2009, they focused more on pupil tracking and National Strategies interventions
- Personalisation (especially with a vocational component) was the key to engaging and retaining pupils.

# Attendance

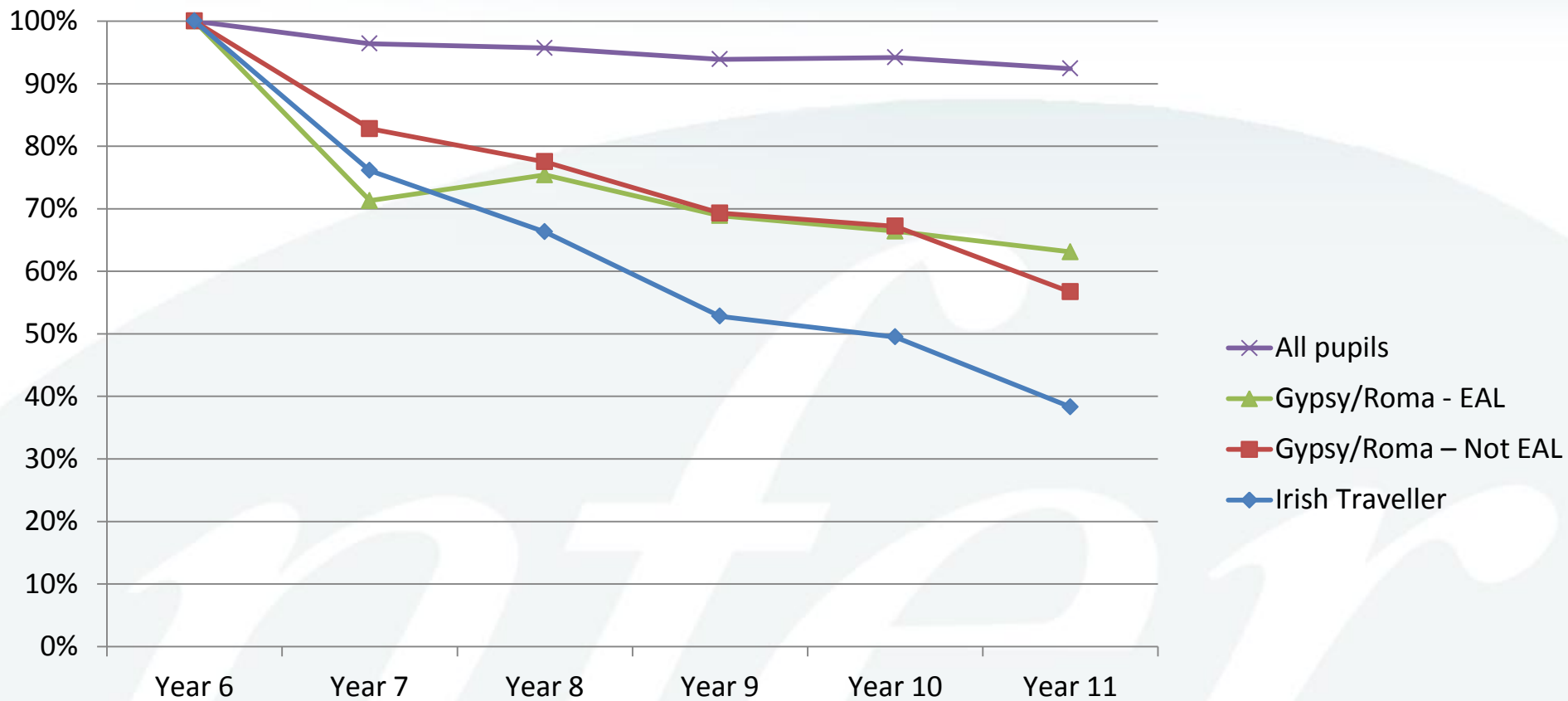
- Nationally, in both the primary and secondary phases, Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils have significantly higher levels of absence from school than pupils from other ethnic groups.
- Travellers of Irish heritage in both primary and secondary schools have slightly more absences than either Gypsy/Roma pupils, or Roma pupils with English as an additional language (EAL).

# Exclusion

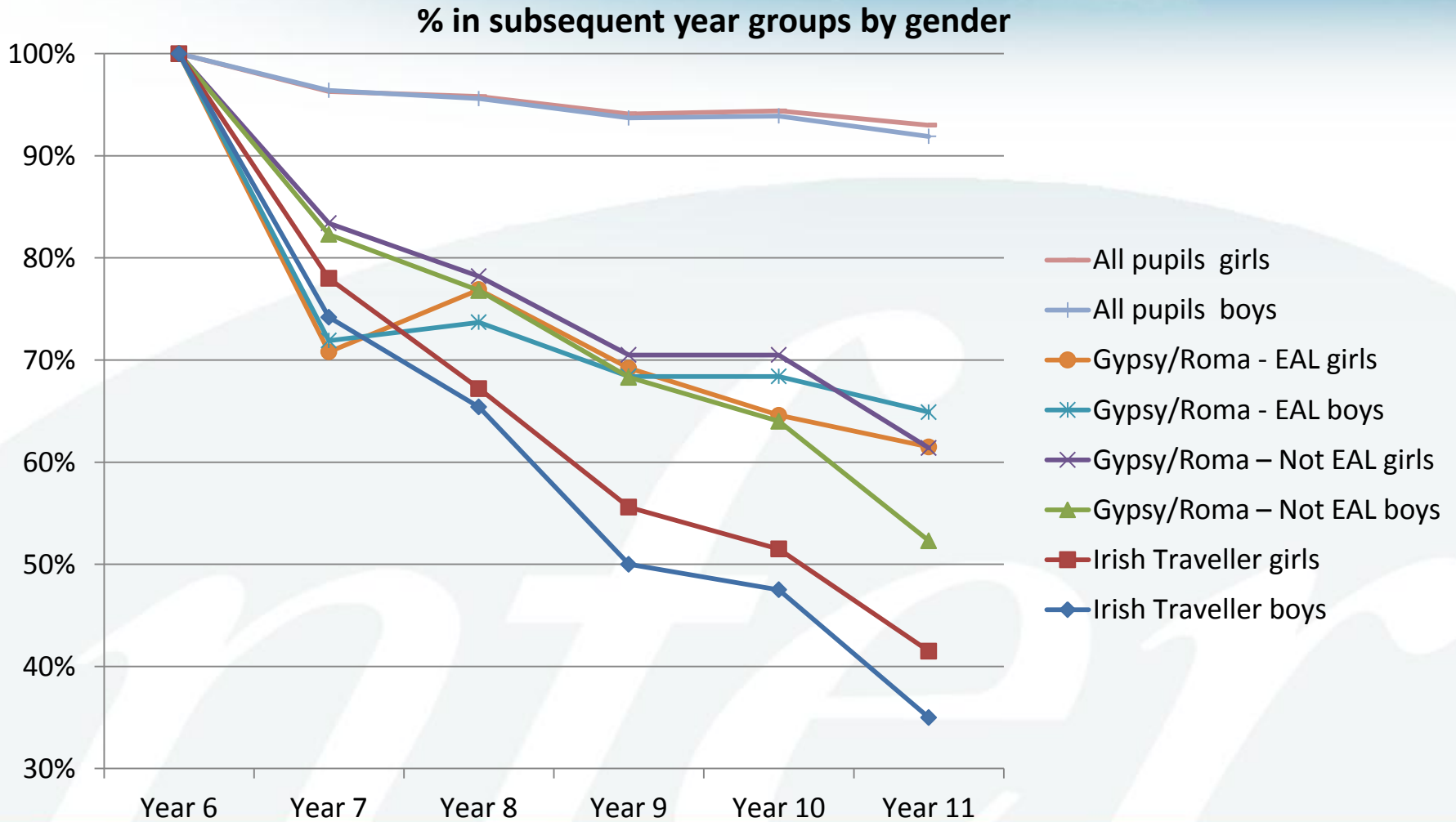
- The rate of permanent exclusion in 2007/08 was highest for Gypsy/Roma (0.56 per cent of the school population) and Travellers of Irish heritage (0.53 per cent of the school population)

# Retention

% of Y6 cohort appearing in subsequent year groups



# Retention



# Secondary transfer – case studies

- Almost 80 per cent of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils transferred from primary to secondary school.
- Patterns of resistance are found where parental anxieties and social pressures are manifested through transmissible scripts, for example: ‘Our children don’t go to secondary school’. Sometimes, scripts are accepted by school staff who feel unable or unwilling to challenge cultural values.

# Retention

- Just over half of the cohort of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils identified in Year 6 in 2003, were still attending school in Year 11 (in 2008).
- This finding represents a substantial improvement in comparison to the earlier and smaller scale study conducted between 2000-2005 by Derrington and Kendall (2007) in which less than 1/3 of the sample reached Year 11. HMI (1994) found only 15% completed secondary.
- The study shows that a small majority of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils are now completing statutory schooling rather than leaving early.

# Mobility – data analysis

- Almost 30 per cent of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils attended more than one secondary school (compared to 18 per cent of pupils not in these groups).
- Pupils with missing KS1 and/or KS2 test data had higher rates of Free School Meals eligibility, suggesting a connection between poverty and disrupted educational experience.

# Inclusion

- Staff perceptions about the social inclusion of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils were more positive than those of the pupils themselves.
- In focus group discussions, Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils often maintained that other pupils were unfriendly towards them. Coping responses included hiding their true identity and relying on social support from their cultural peer group.

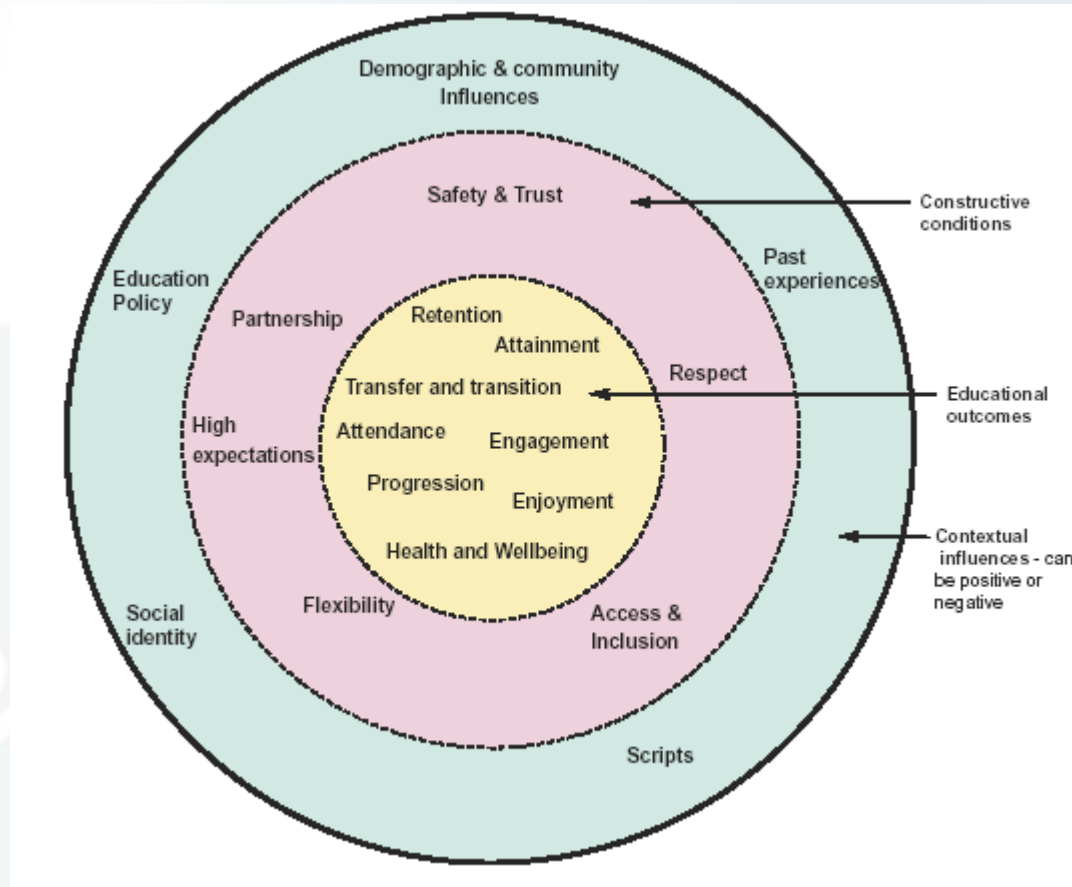
# Inclusion – focus groups

- Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils exhibit a strong need for social support from their community peers and make efforts to stay together in school.
- Outside of school, there is often little or no social contact between Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils and their peers.
- The responses suggest that this segregation is consciously or unconsciously endorsed by parents and this may be contributing to pupils' feelings of social exclusion in school.

# Outcomes

- Transfer between phases
- Retention
- Attendance
- Engagement
- Enjoyment
- Progression
- Attainment
- Health and well-being

# The TARGET model



# What works?

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- A number of common conditions or principles appear to be instrumental in raising pupil outcomes. Collectively, these conditions can impact positively on all the identified outcomes.
- The unique context of each school has also been shown to enhance or impede the improvement of educational outcomes for these groups of pupils and although generic guidance is helpful, one size does not fit all.

# Safety and trust

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School staff demonstrate understanding and awareness.

Collaboration between school and TESS to build trusting relationships with community members.

Firm but fair behaviour policies accepted by families.

Key individuals in schools act as accessible and approachable points of contact valued.

# Respect:

- Two-way process between the school families
- School leaders encourage culture of mutual respect in the school, whereby cultural diversity is accepted and celebrated in the school's systems and values.
- Locating responsibility with a senior member of school staff
- Knowledge of, and respect for, Gypsy, Traveller and Roma communities through training and development work including ITT and NQT.

# Access and inclusion:

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Schools are proactive in assisting parents with the admission process, including practical assistance, e.g. uniforms, transport, form filling.

Distance learning support and re-admission and reintegration of pupils on their return

The integration of culturally-specific resources and programmes into wider curriculum areas

The promotion of a 'school identity' encouraging all pupils to interact and integrate.

Provision of additional services, resources and facilities, e.g.family learning opportunities.

The employment of community members.

# Flexibility:

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Flexibility in the curriculum offering individual pathways, skills and opportunities that have direct relevance to their futures.

Work-related curriculum opportunities

Problem solving approach to behaviour, attendance and homework policies, based on dialogue with parents and understandings of cultures and lifestyles

# High Expectations:

- Generating and sustaining high expectations and aspirations
- Communication of such expectations to families and communities
- The use of role models from within the communities
- Data analysis and progress tracking to ensure that the most appropriate interventions are made.

# Demographic and community influences

## Supportive

The local Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities may value secondary education highly

Loyalty towards the school may be communicated to other community members

## Obstructive

Relatives/other community members may discourage Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils from attending or transferring to secondary school

Parents may be unwilling to consider their children taking part in extra-curricular activities or other enrichment activities such as school visits.

# Past experiences

## Supportive

- Former Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils may have achieved highly in school, providing a good role model
- Most/all Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils may have transferred to secondary school in the past and established a pattern

## Obstructive

- Several Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils may have been excluded from the school, reinforcing stereotyped expectations on all sides
- Parents may have had unhappy and negative experiences of school themselves

# Scripts

## Supportive

- ‘Travellers need exams these days –times have changed’
- ‘I want them to have the education that I didn’ t have’
- ‘This school wants all our children to reach their potential’

## Obstructive

- ‘Our girls don’ t go to high school’
- ‘Their parents won’ t allow them to go on trips’
- ‘There isn’ t much point; they drop out and work with their family’

# Education policies

## Supportive

- The school may be an all-girls' school and this may appeal to Traveller parents
- Fair and firm disciplinary policy may reassure parents

## Obstructive

- A selective schooling system in the local area may deter Traveller parents at point of transfer
- The secondary curriculum may be perceived as irrelevant to the needs of these pupils

# Social identity

## Supportive

- Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils may be less likely to feel like 'outsiders' in schools serving diverse populations
- The Traveller community may be well established in the local area –community cohesion impacts positively on relationships

## Obstructive

- The Traveller community may be marginalised by the local community, perhaps segregated geographically and there is inter-community tension.
- One Gypsy parent was not going to allow her daughter to transfer to a high school where there were no other Gypsy pupils

# What works?

- Inclusive schools that reach out to parents and families
- Staff with designated responsibilities for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils who build positive relationships with pupils and families
- Sensitive outreach work and proactive relationship building between secondary schools and communities
- A personalised, flexible and vocational approach to the curriculum as well as opening minds to professional career routes

# What works?

- Challenging scripts and assumptions.
- Clear communication of high expectations in relation to attainment, attendance and punctuality.
- The use of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller role models to promote aspiration and achievement
- Psycho-social factors – if Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils are unhappy in school, they are unlikely to feel included, attend or achieve.