

EIS EQUALITY

eis

The Educational
Institute of Scotland

GYPSY & TRAVELLERS

There is no one simple definition of Gypsy/Traveller. There are minority ethnic, professional, trade, craft and business communities which travel, each with a rich history, culture, religion, dialect or language.

GYPSY AND TRAVELLERS

Gypsy and Travellers – Who are they?

There is no one simple definition of Gypsy/Traveller. There are minority ethnic, professional, trade, craft and business communities which travel, each with a rich history, culture, religion, dialect or language. Some communities can be traced back some 500 years in UK history and have been spoken and written about extensively. Accounts can be found in the records of towns and cities and the annals of many parishes. In addition, there is a strong oral tradition among Travelling communities.

Broadly, today, there are three communities often referred to as Gypsy and Travellers. They are Gypsy/Travellers, 'New Age' Travellers and Occupational Travellers. While they follow the same travelling lifestyle, there are differences between each group in the method or duration of travel.

Gypsy/Travellers are a self-identifying group with a long history, language and cultural tradition of travelling within the UK and beyond. Within Scotland, there are Roma, Scottish and Irish Travellers who have travelled in and around Scotland for many centuries.

'New Age' Travellers are associated with people who elected to adopt a travelling life style for a number of reasons. The name 'New Age' was commonly used in the 1960s through to the 1980s and 90s although many communities now refer to themselves only as Travellers as they are now third and fourth generation.

Occupational Travellers such as show or fair ground communities have a long history and cultural tradition associated with markets and other events. Circus travellers follow festivals and fairs as well.

There remains a small travelling community along canals and waterways.

There are also Gypsy/Travellers from Europe and Ireland who arrive in the UK seasonally. Roma from the Accession States began to arrive as refugees and asylum seekers from 1980s onwards to escape persecution and enforced settlement.

The Scottish Context

In Scotland Gypsy/Travellers are recognised as a distinct ethnic group by the Scottish Government. It is recognised by the Scottish Government that they face prejudice and discrimination and so their needs are considered when developing policy, practice and legislation within Scotland.

It should be noted that not all travelling communities accept the term Gypsy/Traveller but it was adopted by the Scottish Parliament and Scottish Government after consultation with Gypsy/Travellers to reflect a wide community of different needs. Capital letters for Gypsy and Traveller are used to denote status and understanding of culture, history and traditions of a diverse group of people.

The mobility of Gypsy/Travellers means that they will visit sites throughout the country at certain times of the year for a particular duration. Many sites have disappeared as they are used for other purposes. Many traditional crafts and industries in which Gypsy/Travellers were involved have also disappeared. Within the Gypsy/Traveller communities there is concern about the cohesion of their community as younger people seek alternative lifestyles, sometimes in the 'settled community'. This can be more acute where 'sites' have disappeared and the community lives in houses for a large part of the year.

It is the responsibility of local authorities to liaise with the Gypsy/Traveller Community on their housing, health and education needs. Many have policies and plans in place to do this.

Education

Gypsy/Traveller parents are aware of the importance of education which has always featured prominently in the traditions and culture of Gypsy/Travellers and they respond to changes to support young people to have a good future. They are also aware of the pressures facing future generations to adjust either to secure the continuation of complex business and community interests or to leave the community altogether.

Many teachers have experience teaching children from Gypsy/Traveller communities and work positively to ensure they are given full access to the school and the curriculum. They also recognise and understand the issues relating to 'interrupted learning' through irregular attendance at schools. There is provision for distance and e-learning with developments in ICT.

There is a general perception that Gypsy/Traveller pupils are more likely to be subjected to bullying and harassment in class and in the playground. Some of this is racist abuse and behaviour. Gypsy/Traveller pupils have indicated that their reluctance to come to school is often associated with the fear or reality of racism and bullying and harassment.

There is policy and legislation which direct local authorities, teachers and schools to ensure that all children, regardless of their background, are given access to education and the curriculum in its fullest sense. The Standards in Scotland's Schools Act, 2000, provides that local authorities and schools must have regard for the child's right to an appropriate education.

The Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act, 2004 and Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2009 allow schools to take a wide view of additional support for learning which includes the needs of Gypsy/Traveller children.

The Curriculum

Some communities may be protected by the Equality Act 2010. In Scotland, Gypsy/Travellers are treated as a distinct ethnic minority group for the purposes of the Scotland Act, 1998 which has a broad definition of equality.

Within the context of inclusive education there are a number of resources to assist in understanding the history, lifestyles and cultures of a diverse community of people.

The Scottish Traveller Education Programme (STEP) has created a multitude of resources providing help for local authorities and schools to understand and support children from Gypsy/Traveller communities and gives examples of good practice. Resources include 'Inclusive Educational Approaches for Scotland's Travelling Communities within the context of interrupted learning'. It also gives advice on opportunities to use ICT, to support home learning, making the curriculum relevant, and progression.

Education Scotland also hosts a number of resources, including 'Sharing practice to support learners from travelling communities'.

The Curriculum for Excellence re-enforces recommendations contained in both documents. It should provide, if resourced properly, for greater flexibility and innovation within the curriculum which may accommodate the needs of Gypsy/Traveller children and young people.

Initial Teacher Education

The 'Standard for Initial Teacher Education in Scotland' contains references to inclusion. The Standard states that Initial Teacher Education courses will enable students to 'acquire a broad and critical understanding of the principal features of the education system, educational policy and practice'. It also states that students should 'demonstrate an understanding of the principles of equality of opportunity and social justice and of the need for anti-discriminatory practice' and that new teachers should be able to 'demonstrate the ability to respond appropriately to gender, social, cultural, linguistic and religious differences among pupils'.

It is essential that an adequate level of resourcing should be made available to deliver this expectation.

Standard for Full Registration

The 'Standard for Full Registration' develops the Standard for Initial Teacher Education. Part 3, Professional Values and Personal Commitment, refers to social justice, inclusion and equality.

The Professional Standard

3.1 Registered teachers show in their day to day practice a commitment to social justice, inclusion and caring for and protecting children.

Included in the Illustrations of Professional Practice for this standard is that registered teachers –

value and soundly promote fairness and justice and adopt anti-discriminatory practices in all regards including gender, sexual orientation, race, disability, age, religion, culture and socio-economic background;

Continuing Professional Development

Teachers and schools should identify opportunities to develop knowledge and understanding of the issues facing the Gypsy/Traveller communities in Scotland.

The issues include:

- Bullying and harassment
- Relevance of the curriculum
- Lack of progression
- Racism
- Cultural isolation
- Prejudice and Stereotyping
- Assumptions by teachers and pupils about ability and interests
- Attitudes towards learning and school education by Gypsy/ Traveller children.

Local authorities have a role to play in supporting teachers by providing appropriate advice and by facilitating access to these CPD opportunities.

Things to do to support children

- Find out if the local authority has support workers/teachers for Gypsy/Travellers and use this support
- Ask the child or family members about their experience of school education
- Use the school 'buddy' or 'friendship' system to help new arrivals
- Use existing bullying and harassment policies/resources to support all pupils
- Use appropriate local authority procedures to record racist incidents
- Use Scottish Traveller Education Programme (STEP) resources to assess and evaluate educational experience
- Refer to the Codes of Practice on the Additional Support for Learning Act 2004 and Additional Support for Learning Act 2009.

Resources

- www.scotland.gov.uk:
 - Gypsy/Travellers in Scotland: The Twice-yearly Count
- www.educationscotland.gov.uk
 - Inclusion and Equality
- www.education.ed.ac.uk/step/
 - Inclusive Educational Approaches for Gypsy and Travellers within the context of interrupted learning: Guidance for Local Authorities and Schools
 - Scotland's Traveller Education Network (TENET)
- www.childreninscotland.org.uk
- www.gtcs.org.uk

With thanks to STEP for assistance in compiling this advice



Printed and published by
The Educational Institute of Scotland
46 Moray Place
Edinburgh
EH3 6BH
www.eis.org.uk

August 2012