



**Oifig an Aire Oideachais agus Scileanna**  
Office of the Minister for Education and Skills

Ms. Tara Kelly,  
Clerk to the Committee,  
British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly,  
Leinster House,  
Kildare Street,  
Dublin 2.

**PLEASE QUOTE REF NUMBER ON ALL CORRESPONDENCE**

Our Ref: 1500262 RG

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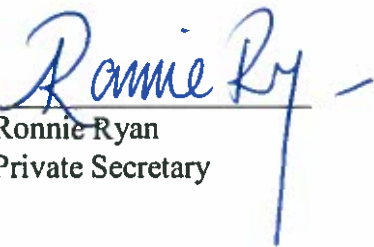
Dear Ms. Kelly,

Ms Jan O Sullivan TD, Minister for Education and Skills has asked me to refer to your recent correspondence regarding the next Plenary Session of the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly (BIPA) in February 2015 and the attached report 'Travellers and Roma' from Committee D (Environment and Social).

The Minister welcomes the work of the Committee and in particular its' findings relating to access to education services for Travellers and Roma.

The response of the Department of Education and Skills to the findings of the *Committee Report on Travellers, Gypsies and Roma: access to public services and community relations* is attached.

Yours sincerely,

  
Ronnie Ryan  
Private Secretary

## **British Irish Parliamentary Assembly – Committee D (Environment and Social)**

### **Report on Travellers, Gypsies and Roma: access to public services and community relations**

#### **Response of the Department of Education and Skills to Report Findings**

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The response of the Department of Education and Skills to the Report findings is as follows (using the paragraph numbers from the Committee's Report text) :

*17. We recognise the value of "one-stop-shop" models where schools also serve as community hubs for, potentially among other aims, building good relationships with Travellers and Gypsies. We recommend that model to areas with high concentrations of Travellers and Gypsies although we realise that current financial restraints are likely to delay implementation.*

- The example of Pembrokeshire County Council's model is noted, however, such a model is not easily transferable to the Irish situation given the different structure of the school system which is, for the most part, under private patronage. Some of the interventions mentioned such as supports for adult learning and afterschool projects to help with homework are available through the DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools) programme's Home School Community Liaison Service and School Completion Programme.

*18. Widening support for adult Travellers and Gypsies to help them develop literacy and numeracy skills so that they can support their children through school ought to be provided through lifelong learning projects.*

- Current policy and the approach to the provision of adult education is set out in the **Further Education and Training Strategy 2014-2019** which was prepared by SOLAS, the National Further Education and Training Authority, following a wide consultation process with stakeholders. A key element of the strategy is the facilitation of literacy provision for personal, family, social and community contexts with emphasis on specific priority target groups. Increased numeracy content in adult education courses is also prioritised. Targeted interventions by the Education and Training Board (ETB) sector and the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) are of particular value to Travellers. ETB English as an Additional language (ESOL) courses are available to all migrants to Ireland and these are particularly relevant to Roma parents in order to support their children in school, including engaging with school-related parental activities.

- Supporting parental engagement with education is a key element of the DEIS School Support Programme and the whole-school approach it promotes includes supports for families whose children may be particularly at risk of early school leaving. This is complemented by the remit of the Child and Family Agency (Tusla) Educational Welfare Service whose role is to support families and make sure that every child receives an education.

*19. The Irish and UK Governments and administrations should invest in building and maintaining appropriate mechanisms for transferring schools records, particularly to support Traveller and Gypsy children.*

- The introduction of the 'Education Passport' from September 2012 is an important move that was taken as part of the Literacy and Numeracy Strategy for Learning and Life. To assist students in the transition from primary to post primary, all primary schools are required to provide information on students moving to second level schools. This sharing of information is aimed at ensuring that a rounded picture of children's ability and achievement at primary school is available to their new school. This is an essential development for Travellers where making the transition from primary to post-primary school can be an issue.

*20. Ensuring that Traveller and Gypsy children can access education services with the support that they require to fulfil their potential is a basic human right. Governments should make funding available to adequately support these children.*

- Current policy in relation to Traveller education is underpinned by the **Report and Recommendations for a Traveller Education Strategy (2006)** which was developed in consultation with Traveller representative groups. The principle of inclusion is at the core of the Strategy and, accordingly, the focus of current provision is on the development of a more inclusive school environment through the whole school planning process, teaching practice, admissions policies, codes of behaviour and whole school evaluation. In keeping with this principle, additional resources provided in the education system are allocated on the basis of identified individual educational need rather than that of ethnic or cultural background.
- In addition, the main objectives of the **Intercultural Education Strategy (2010)** are (a) to ensure that all students experience an education that "respects the diversity of values, beliefs, languages and traditions in Irish society and is conducted in a spirit of partnership", and (b) to assist education providers at all levels to create a learning environment where inclusion and integration are the norm.
- **Anti-Bullying Procedures** for all primary and post primary schools were published by the Department of Education and Skills in September 2013. These procedures are designed to give direction and guidance to school authorities and school personnel in preventing and tackling school-based bullying behaviour amongst its pupils. They place a strong focus on education and prevention strategies to deal with bullying behaviour including, in particular, cyberbullying and identity based bullying such as homophobic and transphobic bullying.

- The **Action Plan on Bullying (2013)** encourages individual school authorities to identify, and participate in, anti-bullying programmes which best meet the needs of their particular school and the context in which it operates. There is a number of alternative programmes available to schools and the Department does not endorse any one particular programme, but leaves it to schools to use the programme which has the best potential to address the challenges faced by individual schools.

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The Action Plan favours an approach whereby a climate of respect for all, regardless of their identity or background. More generally, the Department supports a range of interventions to encourage an inclusive school environment – ranging from initial teacher education and continuing professional development to curriculum reform and supports such as the NCCA's Intercultural Guidelines for Schools. The Department is also committed to the reform of school admissions policies and encouraging increased pluralism in school patronage.

- The Department has provided funding for anti-bullying training and awareness programmes for pupils, teachers and parents, including Traveller and Roma parents. In relation to identity-based bullying, the Action Plan on Bullying outlines an approach which promotes respect and tolerance for all, regardless of their background, ethnic or other identity.
- The **Education (Admission to Schools) Bill 2014**, which is currently in preparation will provide an over-arching framework to ensure that how schools decide on who is enrolled and who is refused a place in schools is more structured, fair and transparent. The Bill includes provision for both the Child and Family Agency (TUSLA) and the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) to designate a school place.
- In 2013 **SOLAS – the Further Education and Training Authority** was established following the introduction of the Further Education and Training Act 2013 and they published a five year strategy in May 2014. The overall aim of the Strategy is to develop a world-class integrated system of further education and training in Ireland, which will promote economic development and meet the needs of all citizens including Travellers and Roma.
- The first national target to increase entry to higher education by Irish Travellers will be included as part of a new **National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education (2015 -2019)**, which is currently being developed by the Higher Education Authority (HEA). The need for such a target has been identified in consultation with Traveller representative groups and with Travellers who have succeeded in accessing further and higher education in Ireland

The Plan proposes to include a target increase for Traveller participation from 35 to 70 new entrants to higher education in five years' time. To help achieve this target, the HEA and higher education institutions plan to work with Traveller representative organisations and other education partners to consolidate and enhance existing access initiatives.

*21. We recommend that the other Governments in our jurisdictions seek or provide funding for research and development of support resources for teachers.*

- The Department's Support Services provide access to a comprehensive range of resources to teachers in the course of their CPD support programmes. Materials are developed in line with best practice and latest national and international research. Resources and support provided at individual school level have regard to the school setting and needs.

*22. Adequate language support in schools is vital if Roma children are to be able to access education services in the UK and Ireland. We recommend that the Governments and administrations assess the adequacy of current provisions and keep a watching brief on it.*

- The Department's Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) - English as an Additional Language Support Team offer a range of supports to teachers, at both primary and post-primary levels, including the provision of additional language support for students who do not speak English as their first language. The English as an Additional Language (EAL) resource is designed to allow individual students to participate in mainstream education on a par with their peers.
- The Department's Literacy and Numeracy Strategy for Learning and Life 2011-2020 includes an action to ensure that schools prioritise the tracking, assessment and analysis of the achievement of students for whom English is an additional language, as part of the school's self-evaluation and improvement process. This is complemented by provision for external inspections to report on literacy and numeracy standards in schools, including an evaluation of school self-evaluation and school improvement plans in these areas.
- Both Initial Teacher Education (ITE) and Continuing Professional Development (CPD) for teachers are tailored to meet the needs of teachers and schools so as to enable them deal with the teaching and learning needs of all students regardless of their cultural background and provides a general focus on inclusion and support for pedagogical practices which promote inclusion. All ITE programmes must address a number of specific elements and Inclusive Education (including Multiculturalism, Disadvantage & Special Education) and similar provision is available in CPD for all teachers.

*23. It would be most desirable to see greater media coverage of Travellers, Gypsies and Roma who do well in education so that they can be role models and inspire the next generation.*

- Traveller pupils who remain engaged with education progress beyond second level education to Further Education and Training and to Higher Education do not always identify themselves as members of the Travelling community. Positive media coverage of those who do is an important factor in encouraging others to do so.

*24. We recommend that the English, Northern Irish, Scottish and Welsh Governments and administrations explore better data-collection mechanisms covering achievement, retention and progression of Traveller, Gypsy and Roma children. Without comprehensive data it is difficult to measure the impact of any interventions.*

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- The Department of Education and Skills is improving its arrangements for the collection and collation of data on Traveller pupils through the current National School Annual Census of primary schools and through the Post-Primary Pupil Database for post-primary pupils. This will facilitate improved monitoring of progression and attainment of Travellers across the primary and post-primary school sectors.

The Primary Online Database (POD) will replace the current National School Annual Census, and will involve schools maintaining and returning data on pupils to the Department at individual pupil level on a live web-based system. The database will allow the Department to more closely monitor and evaluate progress and outcomes of pupils at primary level, to validate school enrolment returns for grant payment and teacher allocation purposes, and to follow up on pupils who do not make the transfer from primary to post primary level.

The main population of the Primary Online Database (POD) with existing pupil data will take place during the current academic year, and the database is scheduled to fully operational in the 2015/2016 academic year. At Post-Primary level the Department is currently consulting with the education partners and it is anticipated that this data will be collected in 2016/17 academic year as part of the data collection of student enrolments in post-primary schools.

Monitoring educational outcomes for minority groups, including Travellers and Roma, will facilitate not only the tracking of progress and educational outcomes but also allow for comparison of progress with other groups, thereby identifying any gaps in the system and assisting in the development and implementation of appropriate policies and interventions.

It is important to note that data collected throughout the education system is based on self-identification. Because of this it may be the case that Traveller numbers in education may be greater than stated.