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**Nick Gibb MP**  
Minister of State for Schools

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Lord Dubs  
Chair, Committee D (Environmental and Social)  
British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly  
House of Lords  
London  
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5 February 2016

*Dear Alf*

Thank you for your letter of 13 January, regarding the Department's response to Committee D's report on 'Travellers, Gypsies and Roma: access to public services and community relations'.

As you have noted, the Government supports local authorities and schools in examining how best to meet the educational needs of GRT pupils, and undertakes activity to promote best practice and help develop novel approaches where it is best placed to do so. The Government believes that the existing balance between central and local responsibilities is the right one.

The Government is committed to delivering educational excellence everywhere and enabling all pupils to fulfil their potential, regardless of background. We firmly believe the most effective and efficient route to achieving this is through a school-led, self-improving system that is characterised by a high level of autonomy for schools, coupled with strong accountability and high standards for all pupils. Many of the Government reforms will be of particular benefit to GRT pupils.

Improving all pupils' attendance at school remains a priority because of the impact that poor attendance has on attainment. We have empowered schools and local authorities with measures to support and promote good attendance and keep absences to a minimum.

Furthermore, we are determined to tackle all forms of bullying, including racist bullying targeted at vulnerable ethnic groups. All schools are required by law to have a behaviour policy with measures to tackle bullying among pupils, and are held to account for its effectiveness through Ofsted. We have funded several anti-bullying organisations to extend their work to support schools in

combatting bullying, and have produced guidance showing good practice in how schools deal with bullying.

We are committed to maintaining the pupil premium, protected at current rates, for the duration of this parliament. Levels of eligibility for this additional funding – £2.5 billion this year alone – are higher among GRT pupils than any other ethnic group. Schools continue to have flexibility over how they use the funding to benefit those pupils for whom it has been allocated, and are held to account through the focus in Ofsted inspections, and the school performance tables on the progress and attainment of disadvantaged pupils.

Our new 'Progress 8' and 'Attainment 8' accountability measures for secondary schools, introduced in 2015, will encourage schools to focus on the progress and attainment of all pupils across the full ability range, rather than concentrating on pupils just below the expected standard at the end of Key Stage 4. This will be particularly advantageous for GRT pupils, who are currently the lowest-attaining ethnic group in both primary and secondary.

The Ofsted inspection framework focuses on how well schools are meeting the needs of the range of their pupils, with a particular emphasis on disadvantaged groups, such as GRT pupils. Local authorities and Regional Schools Commissioners provide further oversight of school provision, and there are clear procedures to drive school improvement where expected standards are not being met.

As you have noted, from 2012 to 2014, the Department funded Cambridgeshire and Kent local authorities to appoint a Virtual Head Teacher to support schools in raising the attainment of GRT pupils, increase awareness of the common issues faced by GRT pupils, and to help schools overcome them. This was always intended to be a fixed term project, and the lessons learned were disseminated to the Department, and then to other local authorities to inform comparable arrangements that they may wish to put in place.

I have been assured that officials at the Department have discussed the matters set out in the report with the GRT Education Stakeholder Group. Officials are currently considering possible future arrangements for liaison with the stakeholder group, and can remind its members of the report in subsequent engagements.

With best wishes.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Your ministry Nick Gibb'. The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

**Nick Gibb MP**