**ADDRESSING REGIONAL DISPARITIES IN THE CZECH EDUCATION SYSTEM**

**Supporting the implementation of measures to promote more inclusive and equitable learning opportunities for all learners in Karlovarský and Ústecký regions**

**Peer Learning Activity 23rd June 2021**

**Development of specific support strategies for learners with a Roma/Traveller background in Ireland**

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Traveller, Roma and Migrant Education and Support

*The ministry in Ireland recently organised a shared learning day for all schools involved in our DEIS programme.  The theme of the day was transitions and as part of that, we asked two young people from the Roma and Traveller communities to talk about their experiences of education. While these are success stories, it’s important to note that many challenges remain for the majority of Roma and Traveller students in terms of progression to further and or higher education.*

*Their emphasis on the ‘one good person’ and the potential for that person to make a real and meaningful impact in difficult circumstances was one of the key messages that the approximately 700 teachers in attendance at the webinar heard.  Feedback provided by the teachers who attended described the two inputs as inspirational – we probably don’t highlight these success stories often enough.*

Background[[1]](#footnote-2) and introduction

Irish Travellers were recognised as a distinct ethnic group within the State on 1st March 2017, thus giving formal recognition to Travellers’ unique heritage, culture and identity. Comprising approximately 30,000[[2]](#footnote-3) people in total, Travellers have experienced significant social, economic and educational disadvantage over many years. The extent of the challenge facing Travellers in areas including health, housing and education is set out in a report compiled by the Economic Social Research Institute in 2017 – A Social Portrait of Travellers in Ireland <https://www.esri.ie/system/files/publications/RS56.pdf>

Travellers, traditionally had a nomadic lifestyle, though most Travellers today live in permanent accommodation, group housing schemes or on approved halting sites. The latest information from the Central Statistics Office relating to Travellers in Ireland is available [here](https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-cp8iter/p8iter/p8itd/).

For the school year 2020/2021, there were:

* 8165 Traveller pupils in primary schools (from a total of 561,410 pupils)
* 3,292 Traveller pupils in post-primary schools (from a total of 379,227 pupils)

There is significantly less information and data available on Roma people in Ireland. The national census, to date, has not provided specific information on the extent of the Roma population in Ireland. Some recent reports place the number at approximately 5,000. In 2020 the Department of Children and Youth Affairs[[3]](#footnote-4) compiled some information on the number of Roma children availing of early years’ services and that information is to be found in the appendix to the following report <https://assets.gov.ie/72732/824dc1d2acaf4e5a93d88e640ae1ef0f.pdf>

There are small numbers of Roma children enrolled in Irish primary and post-primary schools. For the 2020-2021 school year there were:

* 2,027 pupils of Roma background in primary schools (from a total of 561,411 pupils)
* 708 pupils of Roma background in post-primary schools (from a total of 379,227 pupils)

Traveller Education Policy

The education system in Ireland operates on an inclusive basis in keeping with our obligations under the Constitution, national and international law. Legislation relevant to the education sector such as the Education Act 1998, the Education (Welfare) Act, 2000 and the Education for Persons with Special Education Needs Act, 2004 clearly set out principles of equality. Additional supports, where required, are allocated on the basis of identified individual educational need.

A key objective of Traveller education policy has been the phasing out of segregated Traveller provision and the inclusion of Traveller children and young people in mainstream education. This policy is underpinned by the Report and Recommendations for a Traveller Education Strategy (2006) available at <https://www.education.ie/en/publications/policy-reports/traveller_ed_strat.pdf>.

Funding for segregated Traveller provision has been incorporated into overall school and other funding streams in order to provide supports for Traveller pupils in mainstream schools.

Traveller Ethnicity

The question of Traveller ethnicity had attracted sustained attention from UN and other human rights bodies. The UN Human Rights Committee in its concluding observations on Ireland’s report in connection with the implementation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights in July 2014 regretted the lack of progress in implementing its previous recommendations to recognise Travellers as an ethnic group.

An Economic Social Research Institute report published in January 2017 (A Social Portrait of Travellers in Ireland) showed, in very stark terms, the difference in life chances experienced by Travellers as compared with members of society generally and there were some 30,000 Travellers measured in the 2011 Census, which is the basis for the ESRI’s analysis. The Government’s decision in 2017 to recognise Travellers as an ethnic group within the Irish nation was warmly welcomed by Traveller groups, advocacy groups and by NGOs.

Traveller Enrolment in Schools

Identification of Travellers within the primary and post-primary education system is based on voluntary self-identification. Enrolment data in schools is collected on an online database (Primary Online Database (POD) and Post-Primary Online Database PPOD). The ethnic/cultural background of the pupil requires the express written consent of the parents/guardians before this data can be recorded for a student on the online systems accessed by the Department of Education. The data is used for planning of policy and supports for minority groups and monitoring and evaluation of policy /supports.

In the 2019/2020 academic year, there were 8,019 students in mainstream primary schools who identified as Travellers (1.5% of all mainstream primary pupils) and 3,087 students in post-primary schools. It should be noted that in line with data protection protocol, the use of ethnic identifier is voluntary on the basis of self-identification.

Traveller education issues

Perhaps the most significant issue relating to the education of Traveller students is retention within the school system. Education is compulsory for all young people aged between 6 and 16. Ireland has experienced considerable success in improving retention rates in our school system to the completion of the upper secondary phase where, typically most students are aged 18/19. Approximately 93% of students complete school to this level. In schools serving disadvantaged students, the average retention rate is somewhat lower, standing at approximately 84%. The retention of Traveller students in the formal education system is very low. The most recent available data suggests that retention rates for Traveller students averages in the low 20%s. This does not mean that all Traveller students who leave school also leave education. Many drop out of the formal school system and take up places in the Youthreach programme; a second chance alternative to school in which each Youthreach centre is significantly smaller and less formal than school. Attendees are also paid a training allowance.

Further information on the Youthreach programme is available [here](https://www.education.ie/en/Learners/Information/Youthreach/)

Ireland enjoys very high progression rates to higher and further education on completion of school. However, progression rates among Travellers to third level education remains very low. Cultural issues are frequently cited by schools in that regard. Similarly Traveller representative groups have cited issues relating to schools which impact on progression, including bullying. It is also reported by Traveller advocacy groups that Traveller students find it difficult to obtain work experience placements during their first year in upper secondary (the first year of upper secondary is named Transition Year during which students are facilitated to engage in community programmes, work placements and other, less formal, educational programmes.

Supports for schools enrolling Travellers

DEIS (pronounced desh) is the Irish language word for opportunity. Delivering Equality of Opportunity in our Schools (DEIS) is the Department of Education’s policy platform to tackle social and educational disadvantage. Schools are invited to participate in the programme on the basis of the students’ level of social disadvantage; this arising from a profiling process. Investment of circa €125 million is provided for the Department of Education’s DEIS Plan for educational inclusion. The DEIS programme provides for smaller class sizes and other supports including additional teaching posts, Home School Community Liaison Coordinators, DEIS grants, enhanced book grants, curriculum supports, priority access to Continuing Professional Development and the School Excellence Fund for DEIS.

It is recognised that not all Traveller or Roma pupils attend DEIS schools. In that regard, it is important to note that all schools have access to a range of supports including additional Special Educational Teachers , and access to the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) and Educational Welfare Officers employed by the TUSLA Education Support Service (TESS).

The model for allocating special education teaching resources to schools includes a baseline component provided to every mainstream school to support inclusion, prevention of learning difficulties and early intervention.

This model allocates special education teachers to schools based on the profiled needs of schools, as opposed to the assessed needs of individual children.   Where pupils who have multiple diagnoses of special educational needs have additional care needs, Special Needs Assistant (SNA) support may also be provided to schools to support such pupils. The National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) who work with both primary  
and post-primary schools and are concerned with learning, behaviour, social and  
emotional development.

In the past, additional resources were previously made available to certain schools because they had significant numbers of Traveller students enrolled. These additional resources included special classes for Travellers which were staffed by resource teachers, and a Visiting Teacher Service for Traveller. These Traveller-specific supports were phased out of the education system by 2012 in line with a recommendation in a 2006 *Report and Recommendations for a Traveller Education Strategy* that “*an integrated, collaborative and in-class learning support system should be adopted, where appropriate, in all primary schools for all children, including Travellers, who have identified educational needs*”.. Since the introduction of a revised model for the allocation of special education teachers in 2017, schools have been advised to ensure that additional resources are directed to those students with the greatest level of identified need.

National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy (NTRIS)

The Department of Justice and Equality published the National Traveller Roma Inclusion Strategy in June 2017[[4]](#footnote-5). The Department of Education participated in the development of the strategy and is a member of the Steering Group which was established to oversee the implementation of the new strategy. Membership of the Steering Group includes all relevant Government Departments, Agencies and NGOs.

The strategy takes a whole of Government approach to improving the lives of Travellers and Roma in Ireland in practical and tangible ways. Departments have worked together to identify actions that can be taken to bring about a real improvement in the quality of life for Travellers and Roma. It is also aims to improve public service engagement with Traveller and Roma communities in Ireland. There are 149 actions in the strategy covering the themes of Cultural Identity, Education, Employment and Traveller Economy, Children and Youth, Health, Gender Equality, Anti-discrimination and Equality, Public Services, Accommodation and Traveller and Roma Communities.

Key education-related actions proposed in the NTRIS include:

1. Traveller and Roma should be supported in key areas including education, employment and economic development
2. The development of education resources on Traveller and Roma culture and history for use in primary, post primary and adult education settings;
3. Improved access, participation and outcomes for Travellers and Roma in education to achieve outcomes that are equal to those for the majority population.
4. Further Education and Training providers to consider the needs of disadvantaged groups including Travellers and Roma in the planning of FET provision;
5. Strengthening of cooperation between formal education and non-formal learning sectors to address the high rate of early school-leaving in the Traveller and Roma communities.
6. A positive culture of respect and protection for the cultural identity of Travellers and Roma across the education system.

The Department is engaging in number of initiatives across the sector with a view to improving educational outcomes for Travellers and Roma. Some key NTRIS Education actions include:

* Bullying Research

The Department has commissioned this research on the experiences of Traveller and ROMA children in schools and the effectiveness of the Ministry’s Anti Bullying procedures. The project which has been developed in consultation with the Traveller Representative members of NTRIS, involves engagement with children and their parents in areas with high concentration of Travellers and ROMA. School data is being collated through a teacher survey. In line with international best practice, three field researchers were selected from Traveller and ROMA communities to assist in the research. The report is due to be published later this year, the outcome of which will inform future policy in this area, if necessary.

* NTRIS Pilot project

Responding to specific actions in the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy (NTRIS), a pilot project has been established to target attendance, participation and school completion in specific Traveller and Roma Communities regionally. The pilot project is underway in 4 areas across over 50 schools.

Each area has been provided with additional resources to form a pilot team in each area to work together with parents, children and young people, schools, communities and service providers. The pilot project is focused on developing and implementing innovative approaches to address issues impeding educational attainment and reducing the barriers impacting on children’s attendance, participation in schools. Expected outcomes of the pilot include improved attendance, participation and retention of Travellers and Roma in education and improved engagement with Traveller representative groups.

Five priority goals, with specific objectives, have been developed for the NTRIS Pilot. Each of the five goals is underpinned by the principle of maximising the attendance, participation and retention of Traveller and Roma students. The pilot team will set actions from the goals and objectives to ensure the pilot is following a consistent plan with a local focus. The goals and objectives are broad to allow the actions to reflect local needs.

1. Students – To improve the learning experience and outcomes for Traveller and Roma students in schools in the pilot areas
2. Parents and Guardians – To improve parental/guardian engagement with the school community and foster an appreciation of the value of education among Traveller and Roma communities
3. Schools – To improve attendance, participation and retention with the aim of improving the educational outcomes of Traveller and Roma students
4. Community/Services – To develop and promote community linkages and better connectivity between services
5. Data and Evaluation – To gather accurate data and evidence and learning on the pilots, to monitor progress and to inform policy

The pilot is overseen by the NTRIS Pilot Oversight Group which includes representation from all stakeholders. At local level, local pilot steering groupsprovide oversight and strategic direction to the implementation of the work in each area as detailed in a local plan.

Membership of Local NTRIS Pilot Steering Group include : Coordinator (Host Organisation), Three/Four Traveller/Roma Community/Parental Representatives, Regional Manager Educational Welfare Service, Integrated Services Manager Educational Welfare Service, Senior Educational Welfare Officer, Host Organisation Team Leader, Irish Primary Principals’ Network (IPPN) nominated Principal, National Association of Principals and Deputies (NAPD)[[5]](#footnote-6) nominated Principal, Principal of the NTRIS HSCL or other nominated Principal, Inspectorate Representative and NEPS Representative.

* National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) Audit of Traveller History and Culture

The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) advises the Department of Education on the curriculum for early childhood education, primary and post-primary schools. The NCCA was requested by the Minister to undertake a review of Traveller History and Culture in the curriculum. This review considered the place of traveller culture and history in the existing curriculum; the current intercultural education guidelines and other resources for schools in relation to travellers; and the opportunities for teaching about traveller history and culture and how it is incorporated into existing curricular subjects.

In addition to considering the content of the curriculum in relation to traveller history and culture, the NCCA was asked to consider how the curriculum is delivered in schools and to identify examples of good practice in schools, with a view to providing these as general exemplars, as well as considering what additional curricular supports may be required to ensure their effective implementation. The audit was also to consider the continuing professional development opportunities for teachers in this area.

The NCCA in performing its audit engaged with representatives from the Traveller community, particularly around detailed aspects of history, culture and language for potential inclusion in the curriculum as well as discussing the more general context of the school, classroom and learning environment for Traveller children and young people. Audit and desk research was also undertaken, along with some school visits.

*Traveller History and Culture in the Curriculum: A Curriculum Audit* was completed and published in 2019. The Department will be working with the NCCA and other relevant stakeholders to advance the findings of the [NCCA audit](https://ncca.ie/media/4324/ncca_draftaudit_travellerculturehistory_0919.pdf) (added link) with a view to developing opportunities for teaching about traveller history and culture in existing curricular subjects and development of resources for use in schools. The curriculum audit on Traveller history and culture has provided the basis from which further work in this area can be progressed. Some of the next steps involve:

* identifying existing initiatives and supports across the three education sectors (early childhood, primary and post-primary) and exploring how they can be further enhanced, supported and possibly replicated;
* identifying existing resources and materials and exploring the kinds of new support material and resources that need developing;
* working directly with early childhood settings and schools to identify good practice underpinned by principles of inclusion, intercultural education, and learning about Traveller history and culture.

The NCCA commenced this work with the appointment of a full-time NCCA Education Officer in September, 2020. Meanwhile other strands of work are being progressed through commissioning and liaison with relevant interests and bodies. Work across the Early Childhood, Primary and Post-Primary areas has been desk-based and the priority has been to gather material and information on Traveller history and culture. Since there is no single repository for Traveller history and culture, data/information gathering and research is a large part of this work at present. This work has involved establishing the range of material/information available and identifying areas where information/material needs to be improved which will be discussed with an expert advisory group which includes Traveller and ROMA representatives.

Separately, the NCCA intends to undertake a review of published Intercultural Education Guidelines in 2022 which will encompass updating Traveller Education Guidelines which were published in 2006 for the primary and for the post-primary sectors. This work was planned for 2021 but has been impacted upon by the Covid situation.

Migrant Education Policy

The education system in Ireland operates on an inclusive basis in keeping with our obligations under the Constitution, national and international law. Legislation relevant to the education sector such as the Education Act 1998, the Education Welfare Act, 2000 and the Education for Persons with Special Education Needs Act, 2004 clearly set out principles of equality. The Education Welfare Act 2000 requires all children between the ages of 6 and 16 (or who have received less than 3 years education at post primary education, whichever is the later) to attend school or otherwise receive an education.

All immigrant children, including children of asylum seekers, refugees, migrant workers and unaccompanied minors can access pre-school, first and second level education in a manner similar to Irish nationals, until they have reached the age of 18 years. Boys and girls can access the education system on the same basis.

English as an Additional Language (EAL) Supports

The model for allocating special education teachers to schools was introduced for all mainstream primary and post primary schools in 2017. The allocations for schools under this model were updated in February 2019.

The model for allocating special education teachers is designed to distribute teaching resources fairly to schools, taking into account the profiled needs of each school, as indicated by a set of key data indicators. The model provides all schools with a baseline teaching allocation to assist current and future pupils who have learning and literacy difficulties, including those arising from English Additional Language (EAL) needs. The special education teaching allocations which are being made for schools effective from September 2019 will remain in place for two years, following which, revised profiled allocations will be considered for schools from September 2021 onwards.

In primary schools, the standardised test scores on which part of the profile is based reflects where pupils have literacy problems. In post-primary schools, Junior Certificate examination result data in English and Mathematics represent the literacy and numeracy achievement scores and have been applied in a graduated manner to create a value for each school. The profiled allocation therefore takes account of the extent of literacy needs a schools has, including where these literacy needs arise due to language difficulties. The profiled allocation for schools therefore takes account of EAL needs in schools. Where schools can demonstrate that they have high concentrations of pupils requiring EAL they can continue to apply for additional allocations in accordance with the procedures set out in the school staffing schedules.

English as an Additional Language (EAL) resource are designed to allow individual students to participate in mainstream education on a par with their peers. The EAL Assessment Toolkit provides teachers with tests of English language proficiency for use with pupils for whom English is a second language. The EAL Support Team from the Department’s [Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST)](https://www.pdst.ie/EAL) (added link) offer a range of supports to teachers. The work of the PDST is complemented by the work of the English Language Support Teachers Association.

Migrant Integration Strategy

The Migrant Integration Strategy, published in 2017, is a whole-of-Government approach involving actions by all Departments and relevant Agencies and is targeted at all migrants, including refugees, who are legally residing in the State. The education actions outlined in the Migration Integration Strategy 2017-20,focus on enabling students to experience an education respectful of diversity while assisting education providers to ensure that integration becomes the norm within an intercultural learning environment. The Department of Education participates in the National Steering Group which oversees implementation of Ireland’s National Migrant Integration Strategy. Link to strategy https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/5a86da-the-migrant-integration-strategy-2017-2020/ (See appendix for list of education actions)

Covid Response

Since March 2020, the Department of Education has put in place a number of measures to support vulnerable learners and those at risk of educational disadvantage during possible partial or full school closures due to Covid-19. It is crucially important that the learning of all learners, especially vulnerable learners and those at risk of educational disadvantage are supported at this time.

The Department has provided a suite of guidance materials, agreed with the education partners, to enable schools to facilitate the continuity of learning for all pupils/students in a Covid-19 context. These are available at <https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Information/continuity-of-schooling/continuity-of-schooling.html>

The Department has also provided specific updated guidance to advise on how schools and teachers can support continuity in the learning of vulnerable learners and those at risk of educational disadvantage during school closures due to Covid-19. The guidance sets out approaches that schools can take to support the continued participation of students and schools are asked to ensure that there is a specific focus on ensuring that these students are supported.

Schools have been asked to be conscious of students who may not have access to online facilities or technology and to adapt approaches to ensure that these pupils’ ability to participate in learning is not compromised. Many schools introduced a range of strategies and measures to ensure that the needs of these pupils are catered for, including pupils who have limited access to technology or whose parents are not in a position to support their learning.

Additional grant funding issued to schools to address their ICT needs in the context of the current public health crisis. Schools were advised that this funding can be prioritised to assist schools in addressing ICT needs arising out of the Covid environment, including the purchase of digital devices to loan to students and teachers, software, essential learning platforms and other ICT solutions as determined by the needs of the individual school and their learner requirements.

Tusla Education Support Services are engaging with principals to promote connectedness to schools for children who are at risk of educational disadvantage and is liaising directly with Direct Provision accommodation centres, refuges for families experiencing domestic violence and homeless hubs to ensure students are linked with their schools.

In DEIS schools [Home School Community Liaison coordinators](https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Information/Home-School-Community-Liaison-HSCL-Scheme/HSCL.html) (added link) have worked with school principals to identify those families and pupils most in need of support, maintain a supportive link between the school and those families and will continue to support children and families through the return to in-classroom teaching.

The [School Completion Programme](https://www.tusla.ie/services/educational-welfare-services/scp/#:~:text=The%20School%20Completion%20Programme%20(SCP,alternative%20learning%20site%20(i.e.%20Youthreach%2C) (added link) is one of the key supports available in DEIS schools to support attendance, participation and retention of learners. On the 1st of March the Minister announced a range of supports under Budget 2021, aimed at tackling educational disadvantage, which included an extension of the programme to a further 28 DEIS schools and an overall increase of 5% in funding for programme. The Minister also announced a reduction in class sizes for Urban band 1 schools and reduced threshold for additional Deputy Principal posts in DEIS Post Primary schools.

In order to support the alleviation of learning loss and the transition of learners back to in-class education an enhanced programme of summer provision for children with additional needs and those who are experiencing educational disadvantage, similar to what was provided in summer 2020 has been developed for 2021.

Quality assurance

All schools are required to engage in a self-evaluation process which seeks to identify both the strengths of the school and the areas in which it faces challenge. Introduced formally in 2012, schools have been provided with comprehensive guidance and support to assist them in their work. More recently, in 2016, the Department published a quality framework for schools in which, for the first time, statements of effective and highly effective practice were provided for schools in two key dimensions of school life: management and leadership as well as teaching and learning. The quality framework ([Looking at Our School](https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Inspection-Reports-Publications/Evaluation-Reports-Guidelines/Looking-at-Our-School-2016-A-Quality-Framework-for-Post-Primary-schools.pdf)) is designed to ensure complementarity between schools’ self-evaluation work and external inspection conducted by the Department of Education’s Inspectorate.

The inspectorate has provided the following vignettes of good practice gathered arising from inspection-related engagement with schools.

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| **Primary School in Cork.**  This primary school, which recently changed from all-girls to co-ed, is situated only minutes’ walk from Cork city-centre. It is a DEIS school and hosts a diverse group of pupils including Roma children. One of the main strengths of this school is the dynamic, positive and energetic principal who provides great leadership and vision. The school celebrates itself as a School of Respect and Inclusivity and this is something that they are very proud of. This is evident in all aspects of school life and is celebrated on the website which highlights many aspects of school life. The website is clearly focused on communication with parents and celebrating the children’s learning and experiences.  The school’s SSE report for this year is published on their website and while it does not specifically mention Roma or Traveller pupils, one of the literacy priorities is increased communication with parents around specific expectations from homework at the different class levels. Maths language is also an area for improvement with account to be taken of the language and EAL needs and difficulties of 81% of the pupils.  The school’s SSE report shows that the school is monitoring standards and achievement closely and is clearly focused on ongoing improvements in literacy, numeracy and mental health and emotional wellbeing. A range of baseline data is gathered in order to elicit strengths and areas for improvement. Parental observations and feedback were also taken into account in the baseline data for numeracy and mental health and emotional wellbeing.  The school has always been very active in engaging with parents and continually utilises the HSCL teacher. Since the STAR[[6]](#footnote-7) workers commenced their involvement with the schools, the principal has reported at STAR meetings that contact with Roma parents has improved immensely. The Roma worker on the team acted as a link between the school and the Roma parents, and enabled the lines of communication to open up. There were numerous misunderstandings between the school and the Roma families that had meant that there was poor engagement from Roma families and they rarely turned up for scheduled meetings with either teachers or the principal. They also did not understand school routines such as homework. The links with the Roma worker meant that all of these issues were resolved and it means that any barriers to Roma children attending school or not being able to engage with their learning can be addressed immediately. The Roma worker has also provided English lessons for parents and runs sessions on how to help their children.  During the first Covid-19 school closure periods, it was noted that the engagement from Roma families was poor. The school linked with the Roma worker and she was very proactive in contacting the families to elicit their needs and the barriers to engagement. With the support of the school, she provided them with digital devices along with training in their use, as well as the platforms in use by the school. This meant that levels of engagement improved significantly and were not an issue during the second school closure period.  This school has also reviewed the books that were available in the school and classroom libraries. They included pupils in this review and it emerged that pupils wanted to be able to read books in their home languages and see children with similar ethnicities to themselves in the books. The school sought advice from the STAR workers, including the Roma worker, and they were able to source a diverse range of books reflecting the home languages and ethnic backgrounds of the children. The principal reported at a STAR meeting that this has sparked greater interest levels in reading amongst all children.  The ‘process’ works in this school because this school is living its moto of *Respect and Inclusivity* by finding ways to ensure that all pupils can access learning and be supported. They understand the need to reach out to parents and to support them too. They have used the resources available through the NTRIS programme to add to their repertoire.  The positivity, energy and ‘can do’ attitude of this principal should be shared with others. |

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| **Primary School in Galway**  This school is a recent amalgamation of three existing schools and the school population is diverse. The school participates in the Tuam STAR (Supporting Traveller and Roma) cluster as part of the Department of Education’s NTRIS (National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy) and the principal is a very positive participant on the local committee. Together with the other schools involved in the project, this school has access to enhanced support personnel such as a shared home-school community liaison teacher (HSCL), an educational welfare officer and two project workers from the local Traveller community. The school’s general School Self-Evaluation (SSE) focus centres on developing oral language and ensuring a structured approach to oral language across all class levels. As the school has a large cohort of Traveller pupils and in taking the school context into account, the SSE approach acknowledges that this group must be supported.  No firm baseline information on pupils’ language skills was collated in the amalgamated school although there was some baseline information available from the individual schools which came together in the amalgamation. The amalgamated school advocates scaffolded role modelling of oral language skills with opportunities to engage in role peer play. School leadership emphasises that sufficient time be given to oral language at all class levels.  For Traveller pupils, it was felt that poor attendance was the biggest barrier to the development of their language skills and that this must be improved. The school’s approach is to encourage Traveller children to attend and to ensure that there is consistently  good provision for oral language development when the children are present. Improvements in attendance are achieved through good co-operation and communication with the local STAR personnel to track attendance and to communicate positive messages about attendance.  Within the school, attendance is tracked rigorously. During 2020 and 2021, all schools were closed for two periods due to Covid restrictions. The school believes that the STAR project has been particularly helpful in getting Traveller children back to school after the closures. The project used the voice of Travellers to convey messages of safety and to contradict local rumours among the Traveller community about it being unsafe to send children back to school. The principal says that Traveller attendance has increased and that their participation in education and sense of belonging in the school has also improved. With less absences, there is greater continuity in their learning and this is having a positive impact on the classroom atmosphere. From the school point of view, the key success of approach is communication and the ability to speak to and listen to the Traveller community through members of that community on the STAR project team. These workers understand the issues raised by the home and the school and they have been trained specifically for this role. |

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| **Primary school in Dublin**  A primary school which is taking part in the National Traveller and Roma Integration Strategy (NTRIS) pilot project has benefitted in a number of ways from participation in the initiative. The school leader has a strong vision for the school which is underpinned by an inclusive ethos. A key principle of that vision is that every child will reach his/her potential regardless of background. Relationships with families and children are very positive. A sense of mutual respect predominates making school climate highly effective and conducive to learning for all.  As part of a whole-school approach, the school leader availed of bespoke Continuous Professional Development (CPD) which was led by Traveller workers attached to the NTRIS pilot project. The school leader ensured that all staff participated in the CPD which was aimed at raising awareness around Traveller culture and history. This CPD also involved highlighting to teachers the various barriers that can exist in a Traveller’s life that make accessing and participation in education a challenge. This awareness raising had a strong impact on staff in helping them understand the challenges around parental engagement, literacy issues and physical living conditions of some of their Traveller pupils. The CPD was particularly powerful as it was delivered by Travellers. A central pillar to the provision for traveller education in this school is that Travellers have a meaningful voice.  The school then decided to take part in a Traveller Storytelling Initiative provided by the Education Workers (EW) attached to the NTRIS pilot project. It was decided to run this with second class. The EWs are from the Travelling Community and they provided Storytelling to the same second-class group for three sessions.  The first session was an introductory meeting where the EW’s told the class about the NTRIS project and also a little about Travellers. One of the EWs read from “Why the Moon Travels”[[7]](#footnote-8) and there were questions and answers from the class.  In the second session another EW read from “The Dog in the Manger” and both EWs spoke about different types of homes that Travellers live in. Following this a broader discussion took place about “where we live”. In the course of that a Traveller pupil in the class put up her hand and said proudly “I live in a Trailer”. This moment was considered to be very powerful by the EWs in terms of how the session empowered and enabled the Traveller pupil to contribute to the lesson and to use her own identity to express her voice.  The third session involved a little quiz about famous Travellers and what they might be famous for. During interaction with the class it was evident that many pupils were interested in Traveller culture and history.  The impact as described by the observation of the teacher was increased confidence in the pupil in contributing to the class discussion and also increased learning and awareness among all pupils in the class about diversity. There was also a sense of acceptance that it is ok to come from different backgrounds. In terms of the Traveller pupil there was a definite sense of strong pupil voice and an increased opportunity to make a meaningful contribution to classroom discussion. |

Appendix

NTRIS Strategy Education Actions

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| **Action** | **NTRIS Education Actions** |
| **4** | The Department of Education and Skills has prepared intercultural guidelines for primary and post primary schools to support all member of the school community to develop an inclusive school community. These guidelines will support schools in collaboration with Traveller and Roma organisations to develop education resources on Traveller and Roma culture and history for use in primary, post primary and adult education settings. |
| **10** | The Department of Education and Skills, the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and TUSLA will develop proactive, early intervention education welfare supports to promote and support Traveller and Roma attendance, participation and engagement with the education system and retention to the Leaving Certificate or equivalent. |
| **11** | The Report and Recommendations for a Traveller Education Strategy will be reviewed by the Department of Education and Skills and the review will be published by early 2017. |
| **13** | The Department of Education and Skills, the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and TUSLA will implement good practice initiatives to support parental engagement in education and increase children’s school readiness. |
| **16** | The Department of Education and Skills will review policy on admissions to school in line with the Programme for Government commitment to publish new School Admissions legislation taking account of current draft proposals and addressing issues including publication of school enrolment policies, an end to waiting lists, introduction of annual enrolment structures, and transparency and fairness in admissions for pupils and their parents. |
| **18** | In consultation with representative groups, the Department of Education and Skills will commission research on the effectiveness of their anti-bullying procedures and guidelines on Traveller and Roma experiences in the school system. |
| **19** | The Department of Education and Skills has introduced programmes for initial Teacher Education and for Continuing Professional Development (CPD) based on the concept of inclusive education. The Department of Education and Skills will ensure that such programmes enable teachers to deal with teaching and learning needs of all students from all cultural backgrounds and provide support for pedagogical practices that promote inclusion |
| **20** | The Department of Education and Skills will request that the Teaching Council examine how the areas of intercultural, anti-racism and diversity are dealt with in Initial Teacher Education Programmes during the review of the “Criteria and Guidelines for Programme Providers of Initial Teacher Education”. |
| **21** | The Department of Education and Skills will continue to address the areas of anti-racism, identity-based bullying and cultural awareness through a suite of supports including the recently revised Stay Safe Programme and the Continuing Professional Development (CPD) provided by Department-funded support services to teachers at Primary and Post-Primary level. |
| **33** | All Departments will equality proof measures to ensure they are accessible for Travellers and Roma. |
| **41** | The Department of Education and Skills (and its agencies) will review current practices on student participation in the school inspection process. A review of questionnaires for students administered as part of Whole School Evaluations is planned for 2017. |

Migrant Integration Strategy Education Actions

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| **Action** | **Migrant Integration Strategy Education Actions** |
| 26 | The Education (Admission to Schools) Bill 2016 will be enacted. |
| 27 | Proactive efforts will be made to attract migrants into teaching positions, including raising awareness of the Irish language aptitude test and adaptation period for primary teaching. |
| 29 | The numbers of non-English speaking migrant children in schools will be monitored annually and details published. |
| 30 | Current school enrolment policies will be monitored over time to assess their effect on migrant students. |
| 31 | The effectiveness of training for teachers on managing diversity and tackling racism will be reviewed. |
| 33 | The adequacy of language supports in schools to cater for the language needs of children from ethnic minorities will be kept under review. |
| 34 | Schools will be encouraged to support migrant parents’ participation in the school life of their children |
| 36 | The fostering and development of positive attitudes towards diversity and celebrating difference will continue to form part of the school curriculum. |

1. The following infographic provides a good overview of the Irish education system – numbers of schools/teachers etc <https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/libraryResearch/2020/2020-04-03_l-rs-infographic-education-in-ireland-a-statistical-snapshot_en.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Data from 2016 Irish Census [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. now incorporated into the Department of Children Disability, Equality, Integration and Youth [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/National%20Traveller%20and%20Roma%20Inclusion%20Strategy,%202017-2021.pdf/Files/National%20Traveller%20and%20Roma%20Inclusion%20Strategy,%202017-2021.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. IPPN and NAPD are the national representative bodies for school leaders [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. STAR -Supporting Traveller And Roma. These workers are employed through the NTRIS programme [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. *Why the moon travels* is a collection of twenty stories rooted in the oral tradition of the Irish Traveller community. This book was published in 2020 [↑](#footnote-ref-8)