



Curriculum Review

The Traveller Movement Submission

20th November 2024

The Traveller Movement is a registered UK charity promoting inclusion and community engagement with Romani (Gypsies), Roma and Irish Travellers. The Traveller Movement seeks to empower and support Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller communities to advocate for the full implementation of their human rights.

Romani (Gypsy), Roma, and Irish Traveller communities in the UK remain among the most marginalised and underserved groups, particularly in the education system. Students from these communities face entrenched barriers to educational success, including persistently low levels of attainment, high rates of absenteeism, and disproportionately high exclusion rates compared to their peers. Furthermore, these communities are vastly underrepresented in the curriculum, with their cultures, histories, and contributions frequently overlooked or misrepresented. This absence not only perpetuates negative stereotypes but also reinforces feelings of alienation and exclusion among young people from these communities. The importance of an inclusive, diverse curriculum cannot be overstated. When educational content reflects the lived experiences and histories of all communities, it fosters a sense of belonging, pride, and respect, while also promoting cross-cultural understanding among all students. In light of the UK's growing commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion, the continued exclusion of Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller histories and cultures from the curriculum is both an educational and societal failing. This submission aims to highlight the urgent need for a more inclusive approach to education by providing evidence of the current gaps in representation and offering key recommendations to address these disparities. By integrating the traditions and histories of Romani (Gypsy), Roma, and Irish Traveller communities into the curriculum, we can begin to address the systemic challenges these



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students face, including poor attainment, high levels of absenteeism, and the disproportionate risk of exclusion.

Key Recommendations

Update Terminology to Ensure Specificity and Inclusivity: The Department for Education (DfE) should revise its terminology to more accurately reflect the distinct identities and experiences of the communities it serves. Currently, the term "GRT" (Gypsy, Roma, Traveller) is used as a catch-all label, merging three diverse groups with unique cultural histories and challenges. This broad categorisation not only fails to recognise the specific needs of each community but also undermines efforts to tackle disparities in educational outcomes.

To better align with its public sector equality duty, we recommend that the DfE replace the term "GRT" with the more precise and inclusive terms Romani (Gypsy), Roma, and Irish Travellers. These terms better reflect the specific groups for whom the DfE collects statistical data, and more accurately represent the distinct protected characteristics of each community under the Equality Act 2010.

Integrate Anti-Racism and Inclusive History into the National Curriculum: To ensure that anti-racism becomes a core part of the educational experience, the Department for Education (DfE) must mandate the inclusion of Romani (Gypsy), Roma, and Irish Traveller histories as a compulsory subject in the national curriculum. This should not only address historical injustices but also promote an understanding of contemporary issues facing these communities, ensuring that students from all backgrounds learn about the contributions and cultural heritage of Romani (Gypsy), Roma, and Irish Traveller people.

Support Schools in Celebrating GRT History Month: The DfE must provide targeted resources and guidance to schools to encourage and support the celebration of GRT History Month. This initiative should be supported with educational materials that highlight the unique cultures, histories, and contributions of these communities, fostering greater awareness and inclusion among students and staff. Schools should be equipped with resources that enable meaningful engagement with the rich cultural legacies of these communities, creating opportunities for dialogue and cultural exchange.

Enhance Engagement with Romani (Gypsy), Roma, and Irish Traveller Parents: Headteachers, teachers, and school staff must develop more comprehensive and culturally competent strategies for engaging with Romani (Gypsy), Roma, and Irish Traveller parents. These strategies should be tailored to account for cultural norms and values, recognising the diversity within these communities, as well as addressing the structural barriers that many parents face in accessing education systems. Building trust and fostering genuine partnerships with families is critical to improving educational

outcomes for their children. Schools should offer flexible communication channels and support services that are sensitive to the unique needs of these families.

Create Mentorship Opportunities within Schools for Romani (Gypsy), Roma, and Irish Traveller Students: Schools should establish dedicated roles for Romani (Gypsy), Roma, and Irish Traveller mentors within their institutions. These mentors would provide culturally relevant guidance, act as role models, and offer targeted support to students from these communities. By integrating mentors into the school environment, schools can provide more personalised support, reduce isolation, and improve engagement and achievement for Romani (Gypsy), Roma, and Irish Traveller students.

Promote Self-Employment as a Viable Career Pathway: The UK government should introduce and expand schemes that focus on developing self-employment skills for young people, particularly within Romani (Gypsy), Roma, and Irish Traveller communities. Self-employment training should be made an integral part of career education and should be placed on equal footing with traditional employment training. This would provide a valuable alternative career pathway for young people in these communities, who often face discrimination and barriers to entering the formal workforce. By offering self-employment education, young people can develop entrepreneurial skills and create sustainable livelihoods, promoting economic independence and community resilience.

Increase Funding for Vocational Education and 14-16 Provisions: To better support the diverse needs of students and improve post-16 outcomes, we recommend that the UK government increase funding for vocational education and 14-16 provision. Enhanced funding should focus on expanding access to high-quality vocational courses, apprenticeships, and work-based learning opportunities that equip young people with practical skills for the future. Increased funding would enable schools and colleges to better support Romani (Gypsy), Roma, and Irish Traveller students, particularly those at risk of disengaging from education, and help to ensure that all young people, regardless of background, have equal opportunities to succeed in their chosen career pathways.

By adopting these recommendations, the DfE will ensure that policy interventions and support are more tailored and effective, while also fostering greater understanding and respect for the cultural diversity within these communities. Additionally, this shift will help to ensure that educational strategies and resources are appropriately designed to address the unique barriers faced by each group, ultimately leading to more equitable outcomes for Romani (Gypsy), Roma, and Irish Traveller students.

What aspects of the current a) curriculum, b) assessment system and c) qualification pathways should be targeted for improvements to better support and recognise educational progress for children and young people?

Curriculum

Key changes are needed to make the current curriculum more inclusive and address the issues of low attainment, high exclusion rates, and the phenomenon that The Traveller Movement has identified as "institutionally coerced exclusions."¹ Embedding anti-racism education into the curriculum is a necessary and critical aspect in ensuring the curriculum is more inclusive. This anti-racist education should be inclusive of Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller histories, cultures, traditions and experiences. It should be integrated across the curriculum to challenge the discriminatory attitudes and behaviours towards Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller communities. This would ensure that Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller students are given recognition and protection contributing to a more inclusive school culture. Currently, the progress through post-16 pathways for Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller communities is the lowest of any ethnic group. Statistics from June 2022 show that only 49% of those classified under 'Gypsy/Roma' ethnic code and 59% of those classified as 'Irish Traveller' continue into education, employment or training post-16. For context, the national average is about 4 out of 5 pupils.² The Higher Education Policy Institute report from July 2022 shows that (Romani) Gypsy, Roma and Irish Traveller young people have the lowest rate of entry to higher education of any ethnic minority too. In the academic year of 2019/20, a mere 6.9% of young people classified under the 'Gypsy/Roma' ethnic code had entered higher education by the age of 19, and 'Irish Travellers' only entering higher education at a rate of 10.7% by the age of 19.³ Newer figures from the Department for Education highlight that these rates increased to 12.9% for 'Gypsy/Roma' pupils and decreased slightly for 'Irish Travellers' to 9% but the HEPI report notes that due to the small absolute numbers of entries to higher education, the number can fluctuate easily.⁴ The important figure is the comparison to the average of all ethnic groups which sits at 46.8%.⁵ This same report suggested that prejudice, discrimination and exclusion were some of the main causes of disrupted education pathways for Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller young people. Ethnicity-based bullying is a large factor in the lack of progress in education for Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller students. It becomes clear after looking at these figures that change in the curriculum is necessary in order to support educational progress for Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller students.

Another powerful factor which can make Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller children feel like educational institutions are not for them; the absence of themselves, their families and their history, culture and heritage from the curriculum. A sense of

¹ The Traveller Movement, [Fought not Taught](#), (2024).

² Department for Education, [Post-16 Educational Outcomes by Ethnicity in England](#), 2022

³ Dr Laura Brassington, [Gypsies, Roma and Travellers: The ethnic minorities most excluded from UK education – HEPI Report 151](#), 2022

⁴ House of Commons Library, [Gypsies and Travellers: Educational Outcomes](#), 2024

⁵ Gov.UK, [Widening participation in higher education](#), 2024

belonging plays an essential role in a child's engagement with and experience of education. Students who foster a sense of belonging are more likely to remain in education.⁶ However, Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Travellers are so rarely made to feel like they belong, and the lack of inclusion of their cultural histories within the curriculum is testament to this. Research conducted by the Traveller Movement⁷ indicates that Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller children want their history and culture included in the curriculum and to be represented in a positive way. In particular, history lessons on the Holocaust often exclude the Holocaust of Roma and Sinti people, despite the fact that historians estimate that up to 500,000 Roma and Sinti people were murdered by the Nazis and their collaborators. Whilst it is important for Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller children to have their history and cultures reflected in the curriculum, it is also important for the other children to learn about it. In order to break down barriers of understanding it is essential for British students of all ethnicities to 'better understand the dynamic world they inhabit'.⁸

Assessments

Alternative assessments and qualification pathways would be more suitable for many Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller pupils. Attainment levels and attendance are constant barriers due to cultural commitments and travelling therefore the introduction of more accommodating policies surrounding alternative educational pathways would allow for better support for these young people in reference to their educational progress. Currently, across all key stages these ethnic communities attain the lowest levels. At primary school, only 18% of children categorised under 'Gypsy/Roma' ethnicity code and 21% of those categorised as 'Irish Traveller' achieved the expected standard of development in comparison with 65% of all ethnic groups. This level worsens as you move up to GCSE. In 2023 only 16% of 'Gypsy/Roma' and 31% of 'Irish Travellers' attained a Grade 4 or above. Cultural practices align more with less academic qualifications and more vocational skills. The Traveller Movement highlighted the potential benefits of 14 to 16 and the 19 to 25 vocational qualifications, as well as increased funding for training and apprenticeships in terms of improving educational progress for children and young people from the Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller communities.⁹ The 14 to 16 provision focuses on reducing off-rolling and reducing the risk of young people becoming NEET. The majority Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller students do not remain in mainstream education until the age of 16 so

⁶ Allen, K.-A., Vella-Brodrick, D., & Waters, L. (2016). Fostering School Belonging in Secondary Schools Using a Socio-Ecological Framework. *The Educational and Developmental Psychologist*, 33(1), 97–121. doi:10.1017/edp.2016.5.

⁷ The Traveller Movement, [Fought not Taught](#), (2024).

⁸ Runnymede, *Teaching Migration, Belonging, and Empire in Secondary Schools*, (2019).

⁹ The Traveller Movement, [Gypsy, Roma and Traveller access to Further Education: 14-16 provision, vocational qualifications, apprenticeships and A levels](#), 2021

the current assessment system simply disregards them. These changes to assessment pathways/offering alternative qualifications could be crucial in improving educational outcomes for members of this community.

In the current curriculum, assessment system and qualification pathways are there any barriers to improving attainment, progress, access or participation which may disproportionately impact pupils based on other characteristics (e.g. disability, sexual orientation, gender, race, religion or belief etc.)

As highlighted by the Timpson Review of School Exclusions, certain characteristics leave children at a higher risk of facing barriers in education, especially when those characteristics overlap.¹⁰ These overlapping risk factors disproportionately affect Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller students with large numbers of this community struggling with SEND. Long standing data identifies members of this community as being the ethnic minority most likely to struggle with special educational needs.¹¹ Coupled with the harsh discriminatory attitudes that students from these communities face daily, there are considerable barriers to improving educational outcomes and participation.

A clear outcome of the combination of these factors that is stopping the Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller communities from improving and participating academically is the extreme disproportionate exclusion rate. The Traveller Movement has identified a number of mechanisms which fall under the term they coin 'coercive exclusions'. These mechanisms can occur through either action or inaction from teachers and decisions makers, some examples include discriminatory practices and biases such as 'institutional indifference' or low teacher expectations. Treating ethnicity as a factor consciously or unconsciously in any capacity regarding education or exclusions serves automatically as a barrier.¹² In the academic year of 2021/22, those classified under ethnic code of Irish Travellers and Gypsy/Roma had the same rate of exclusions sitting at 0.31 or 31 for every 10,000, which is the highest of all ethnic groups. For context, White British sits at 0.09 and the average rate for all exclusions sits at 0.08. In secondary schools however, this rate for Irish Travellers and Gypsy/Roma increases dramatically with Irish Travellers exclusion rate shooting up to 0.91 and then 0.84 for Gypsy/Roma¹³. This clearly evidences the claim that these pupils are not engaging in the curriculum and that change is necessary.

¹⁰ Edward Timpson, [Timpson Review of School Exclusions](#), 2019

¹¹ Department for Education, [Improving Outcomes for Gypsy Roma and Traveller Pupils](#), 2010

¹² The Traveller Movement, [Fought not Taught: Addressing Coercive Exclusions of Romani \(Gypsy\), Roma and Irish Traveller Children](#), 2024

¹³ Gov.UK, [Permanent Exclusions](#), 2024

A further effect of the lack of inclusion and discriminatory attitudes that acts as a barrier that disproportionately affects these communities is attendance rates. The absence rate of Irish Travellers in the 2021/22 academic year was a staggering 22.1% followed by Gypsy/Roma pupils at 17.8%. These are by far the two highest absence rates amongst any ethnic minority, with the overall absence rate sitting at 7.6%.¹⁴

Schools should actively work to build trust a foster better relationship with Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller families, whose engagement in education has often been hindered by historical discrimination and a lack of cultural understanding. Educational specialists agree that establishing a positive relationship with parents is key, alongside cultural awareness and that the lack of cultural understanding acts as a serious barrier to attainment and progress.¹⁵ Initiatives could include the establishment of regular school events that celebrate Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller cultures and invite parental involvement such as GRT history month. By strengthening ties with Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller families, schools can create a more supportive and inclusive environment that encourages higher attendance and participation rates amongst Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller students. The introduction of allowing members of this community to have contact with some kind of mature role model from the same background would dramatically improve academic progress. We have seen this approach work with other ethnic minorities too. Research has shown that black role models had a particular positive impact on young black men and as the positive role model was seen as somebody who they could emulate.¹⁶ A similar approach could be taken for Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller students, which may allow them to feel more comfortable in an environment that they feel segregated from already. These role models can provide academic guidance, career advice, and a personal support. This would help increase student engagement, reduce absenteeism, and boost academic outcomes by providing Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller students.

Are there particular changes that could be made to ensure the curriculum (including qualification content) is more diverse and representative of society?

A dedicated celebration of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller History Month would provide an opportunity for the entire school community to engage with and learn about Romani Gypsy, (Roma) and Irish Traveller cultures. This could involve cultural events, assemblies and lessons focused on Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller traditions, music, art

¹⁴ Gov.UK, [Absence from School](#), 2024

¹⁵ [The Traveller Movement, A Good Practice Guide for improving outcomes for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Children in education](#), 2019

¹⁶ Claire Stewart-Hall, [Preventing School Exclusions of Black Children in England – a critical review of prevention strategies and interventions](#), 2023

and history. Such practice would promote cultural awareness and help reduce the prejudice and stigma often faced by these communities. Our research shows the positive impacts on community members that celebrating GRT history month has. This is typically found in schools with higher populations of community members, but it must be more widespread for other young community members who are a minority in their schools. Dedicating a part of the curriculum to this seems an obvious change and would improve the diversity of the curriculum and make it more representative of society.

To ensure that these communities are reflected and respected within the curriculum, their histories contributions and cultural heritage should be woven into various subjects, including history, literature, social studies and the art.¹⁷ The inclusion of such content would not only validate the identities of these communities, but it would also help challenge stereotypes and educate other students on the rich diversity of British society.

Some examples include:

- Teaching Romani history, including their origins, migration patterns and the discrimination they have faced over centuries including persecution in the holocaust.
- Highlighting the contributions of Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller individuals to arts, sciences, politics, sports and other fields which are overlooked in mainstream education
- Addressing common misconceptions and promoting a more accurate understanding of Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller communities in lessons on social issues, diversity and human rights

Comprehensive training and professional development should be offered to educators to increase their awareness of Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller communities, their histories and the challenges they face in education. This training should focus on equipping teachers with the skills to foster inclusive classrooms and incorporate Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller perspectives into their teaching allowing them to address racism effectively. In addition to anti-racism training, sessions could include culturally responsive teaching methods and strategies for engaging Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller families in the educational process.¹⁸

¹⁷ Anne Wilkin et al. [Improving Educational Outcomes for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Pupils: What Works?](#), 2009

¹⁸ Anne Wilkin et al. [Improving Educational Outcomes for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Students](#), 2009

To what extent does the current curriculum (including qualification content) support students to positively engage with, be knowledgeable about and respect others? Are there elements that could be improved?

It is clear that the current curriculum is not working sufficiently when it comes to students positively engaging, being knowledgeable about and respecting members of the Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller communities. 40% of young Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller people in London have reported experiencing bullying. It is also important to note that 67% of these young people reported that they experienced bullying from their teachers as a result of their ethnicity¹⁹. So, there are numerous elements that can be improved that will help students to become more knowledgeable about and respect others:

Some of the previously mentioned include the inclusion of Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller historical contributions which are woven through different subjects, along with specific celebrations such as GRT history month. This would allow for others to have further education and understanding on the culture. It is clearly necessary for the introduction of improved anti-racism education which is deeply embedded into the curriculum with direct reference to the Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Traveller communities.

Positive engagement is also necessary and allowing for contributions and working professional insight to the curriculum from groups such as the DfE led stakeholder groups. Collaboration with different stakeholders would allow for students to further positively engage with the curriculum. Whether that be through listening to contributions put forward by the DfE stakeholder group, or by implementing mature role models from a Romani (Gypsy), Roma or Irish Traveller background, not only for community members to engage with, but to also act as educators for other students which will hopefully improve their knowledge and make them more respectful.

¹⁹ The Traveller Movement, Gypsy, Roma and Traveller experiences in Secondary Education: Issues, barriers and recommendations