



Fought not Taught

**Tackling Institutionally Coercive Exclusions for
Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller children**



October 2025

About the Traveller Movement

The Traveller Movement is a registered UK charity promoting inclusion and community engagement with to Romani (Gypsy), 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.

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Foreword



The Rt Revd Stephen Conway
Bishop of Lincoln

When I was lead bishop for education in the House of Lords and Chair of the National Society I was shocked to discover that the children most consistently affected by school exclusions are children from the Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller communities, and yet still there has been no action from central government. This report, along with its predecessor *Fought Not Taught*, makes one thing unmistakably clear: children from certain communities and with specific vulnerabilities are consistently left behind. The education system is failing Romani (Gypsy), Roma, and Irish Traveller children in ways that have life-long consequences, not only for the individuals affected but for their wider communities. This systemic failure has marginalised these communities for generations. It is time to take meaningful action to ensure that every child, regardless of background, has equal access to opportunities that can empower both themselves and their communities.

All children deserve a life full of opportunity. Yet Romani (Gypsy), Roma, and Irish Traveller children continue to face deep-rooted disadvantage, with their education repeatedly disrupted by poor treatment and systems that work against them. Addressing this injustice requires a fundamental shift in mindset, one that recognises and dismantles systemic barriers. Such a shift will not only support these communities but will also benefit all children, especially those who are care-experienced, have special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), or face significant disadvantage.

Throughout this report there are key practical policy interventions aimed at schools, local authorities, central government and inspection bodies. All of these recommendations have one clear aim, to put inclusion at the heart of all school practice. We must realise that an inclusive education is the basis of a high-quality education, and when inclusion is compromised, the overall quality of education is diminished for everyone.

I sit on a committee of the House of Lords looking at social mobility and access to opportunity to improve life chances. Access to pupil-appropriate and person-centred education is a key ingredient of life enhancement for all. There is no doubt that our education system is at a crisis point, particularly in providing education to our most vulnerable. Recently the Public Accounts Committee spoke of how the current SEND system will leave the country with a lost generation of children who will slip through the cracks of poor policy and poor provision. We must act now to ensure that no child experiences a life devoid of opportunity because of a lack of bold and creative thinking.

This report also highlights the important and powerful work that many teachers and schools are doing by stepping up to meet this crisis, showing innovation in their own classrooms. However, they are doing so in spite of, not because of, the current policy and practice landscape. We are grateful for these hero teachers; but their efforts often go unsupported, lacking the training and systemic backing needed to develop both their professional practice and, crucially, the educational outcomes of the next generation. This is not just about improvement in policy and resource. It is a matter of justice for those who are excluded in any way and who are left to feel disposable and without a voice which can be heard.

We must rise together to meet this crisis head-on and ensure all children who grow up in the UK have a chance to reach their full potential.

Introduction

This report acts as a follow-up report to our *Fought not Taught: Addressing Coercive Exclusions for Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller Children*. Building on its findings and shifting the focus from highlighting the issue of ‘institutionally coercive exclusions’ and how they manifest, to identifying actionable solutions which aim to tackle the persistently toxic educational environments faced by many Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller children. Whilst the first report explored how exclusionary practices and toxic educational environments disproportionately affect Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller pupils, this report shifts focus to explore meaningful policy solutions to ensure all children experience positive outcomes in education.

An institutionally coerced exclusion is a term used by the Traveller Movement to describe how schools, either through action or inaction, create a persistently toxic educational environment, forcing children and their families to withdraw from formal educational environments. This exclusion may not necessarily involve formal exclusion or suspension but rather the creation of conditions that make it untenable or unsafe for Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller children to remain enrolled in the school.¹ Some of the mechanisms of coercive exclusions highlighted in our first report include, off-rolling, pressure to home educate, repeated informal removals from the classroom, behavioural management systems and formal exclusion processes which are disproportionately used against Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller children.²

Poor experiences in schooling have a profound lifelong impact on individuals and on whole communities. This impact is deeply felt by children from Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller communities, as highlighted in our case studies, through their disrupted education, damaged wellbeing and often lifelong disconnection from learning. Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller people have the lowest educational attainment of all ethnic groups across all key stages. They also experience economic inactivity at a higher rate than the ‘White British’ ethnic group and are more likely than the general population to experience profound poverty. Ensuring we tackle the mechanisms driving Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller children out of education will ensure better outcomes for the communities across every indicator.

This ‘solution-focused’ report offers a series of practical policy interventions aimed at schools, local authorities and inspection bodies. These include reforms to disciplinary policy frameworks, improvements to the inclusivity and flexibility of the curriculum, and measures to strengthen accountability around bullying and discrimination through reforming or introducing different methods on data collection and monitoring.

1 The Traveller Movement, ‘*Fought not Taught*’, 2024.

2 Ibid.

Recommendations

1. The Department for Education should ensure all ethnic monitoring data and broader policy clearly distinguish between Romani (Gypsy), Roma, and Irish Traveller categories, not broad 'Traveller' or 'nomadic' groups. This enables accurate targeting of interventions and avoids masking the needs of specific groups within the so-called 'nomadic' community.
2. Local authorities must provide ring-fenced inclusion funding specifically for Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller pupils and support groups.

Reforming Zero Tolerance Policies

3. Ofsted must conduct a thematic review of behaviour policies across the country; this review should have a specific focus on their contribution to the disproportionate exclusion of ethnic minority children.
4. The Department for Education should conduct a review of its 'Behaviour in Schools: Advice for Head Teachers and school staff' Guidance and ensure the guidance recommends a broader shift towards early intervention, contextual understanding, and proportionate discipline.

Curriculum and Qualification Reform: Flexibility and Inclusivity

5. The Department for Education's curriculum review should formally acknowledge the importance of embedding Romani (Gypsy), Roma, and Irish Traveller histories, cultures, and contributions within the national curriculum. This is essential to promote visibility, foster a sense of belonging, and support inclusive education for all pupils.
6. The Department should mandate the celebration of GRT History Month, all schools, irrespective of the number of Romani (Gypsy), Roma, and Irish Traveller pupils on roll. Local authorities should play a proactive role in supporting this by developing and distributing high-quality resources to enable meaningful engagement across the education sector.
7. The Department for Education must issue Key Stage 4/5 guidance to encourage vocational routes aligned with cultural and economic contexts of Romani Gypsy, Roma and Irish Traveller communities.
8. The Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (Ofqual) must reform Attainment 8 to ensure a more balanced valuation of academic and vocational qualifications ensures all learning routes are respected. English and Maths remain essential but vocational and alternative subjects must also be properly recognised.
9. Local authorities and the Department for Education must work together to ensure that mobile or excluded Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller students have continued access to high quality online resources like Oak National Academy which is a government-backed online platform offering free OFSTED-accredited lessons and resources designed to support both in-school and remote learning. There must be consistent monitoring of these tools.

Whole School Responsibility for Inclusion

10. Schools must work to ensure inclusion is a shared responsibility across a whole school, not assigned to a single liaison officer. Appointing a Race and Social Justice Lead can provide strategic coordination while ensuring all staff are trained up and supported to promote cultural understanding and inclusion in their daily practice.
11. Local authorities should provide regular funding for schools to conduct cultural humility training such training must be a sustained commitment, constantly refreshed and not a simple one-off tick box exercise.
12. Schools need to actively recruit, celebrate and highlight positive role models from Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller communities both within teaching staff and through curriculum content. Funding from local authorities must be made available to support Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller attendance mentors and family mediators to address disengagement and school refusal.
13. The Department for Education must provide specific bursaries for members of Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller communities to complete teacher training.
14. Local authorities must increase outreach to Romani Gypsy, Roma and Irish Traveller families in early year's settings. Support school readiness via children's centres and health visitors.

Reforming (OFSTED) Inspection Framework Criteria

15. The current OFSTED inspection framework places too much emphasis on attainment and attendance which can often overlook inclusion. We propose that exclusion rates and elective home education (EHE) withdrawals be included in school inspections, with schools required to justify high figures. Mandatory recording of withdrawal reasons would provide accountability and highlight coercive practices.

This set of 15 policy recommendations outlines urgent and systemic changes needed to improve the educational experiences and life chances of **Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller pupils**.

Key principles include:

- **Ethnicity-specific targeting** using accurate terminology and categories
- **Culturally inclusive teaching** and visible representation
- **Sustained, ring-fenced investment** in engagement, mentoring, curriculum, and early intervention
- **A shift in inspection and accountability** to prioritise inclusion and equity

Reforming Zero Tolerance Policies to Support Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller Pupils

Our *Fought not Taught* report highlighted the emergence of zero tolerance behaviour policies as a significant contributing factor to the persistently toxic educational environments which Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller children face in schools. These rigid frameworks often fail to consider the complex social, cultural, and emotional contexts that influence student behaviour, leading to disproportionate disciplinary actions against Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller and other ethnic minority children.

The Traveller Movements Education Steering Group frequently emphasised the need for a more nuanced approach to school discipline. While maintaining classroom order is essential, the current punitive measures used in many schools often exacerbate the challenges faced by Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller pupils. 'Persistent disruptive behaviour' is consistently the leading reason for both fixed-term and permanent exclusions. In spring 2023/24, there were 176,200 suspensions which cited persistent disruptive behaviour as the primary reason, representing 51% of all reported suspensions. Additionally, there were 1,700 permanent exclusions citing persistent disruptive behaviour as the primary reason, representing 38% of all exclusions.³ Persistent disruptive behaviour is loosely defined, however, through data we know children with overlapping disadvantage are significantly more likely to experience exclusion. These overlapping inequalities include SEND needs, poverty, ethnic minority status and experiences of trauma which highlights the need for trauma informed approaches. The Traveller Movements Education Steering Group⁴ persistently disruptive behaviour' fails to acknowledge the underlying issues and unmet needs, or often the overlapping inequalities, which leads to a child to behave in a manner which can be characterised as bad behaviour. Reframing this terminology to 'persistent disruptive need' could shift the focus from punishment to support, recognising that behavioural issues often signal deeper concerns requiring attention.

A strong illustration of how schools can move beyond punitive approaches comes from Tameside Pupil Referral Service, where education leaders reframed their behaviour policy into a relationship-based policy which focused on trust, empathy and personalised support. It is guided by therapeutic practice, as it includes trauma responsive methods, and the policy emphasises proportionate and supportive responses to each pupil's needs on a case-by-case basis.⁵ There is priority placed on the context of pupil's actions.

The implementation of such sanction-free/contextual policies that prioritise early intervention over punishment has shown promise. Utilising behaviour points as indicators for additional support, rather than as grounds for disciplinary action, can help identify students in need of assistance before issues escalate.⁶ There are examples of both primary and secondary schools across the country that have successfully eliminated a sanctions-based approach and are entirely solution focused and positive.

3 explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk

4 Gov.UK, [Suspensions and Permanent Exclusions in England](#), 2024

5 Tameside Pupil Referral Service, [Relational Policy](#), 2024

6 Department for Education, [Case studies of behaviour management practices in schools rated Outstanding](#), 2017

It is essential to recognise that while zero tolerance policies are harmful in their current form, a complete removal of all sanctions may not be practical. Discussions with the Traveller Movements Education Steering Group recognised that schools will still require mechanisms to manage behaviour in real time, particularly in situations where a pupil's actions are presenting a potential risk to other pupils' safety. What matters most is how these interventions are structured. Sanctions should not result in lost learning,⁷ such as pre-planned isolation that removes a pupil from the classroom the following day, regardless of their progress or behaviour since the incident. Similarly, a child who has calmed down after an early disruption should not be excluded from valuable learning in other subjects for the rest of the day. When punitive responses extend beyond the moment and begin to affect core education, they risk reinforcing the cycle of disengagement. Effective discipline must be both proportionate and designed to support, not hinder, a child's right to education. This is a cycle that has long term effects into adulthood. The National Institute of Health conducted research finding that forced disengagement from learning and any form of formal exclusion from schooling is directly correlated to an increased risk of being NEET in late teens and continuing economic inactivity well into people's 20s⁸ which is clearly representative of Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller young people who are consistently recognised as being overrepresented as NEET. Lack of economic and educational opportunity can often leave people at risk of coming into contact with the criminal justice system, this phenomenon is explored further in the Traveller Movements School to Prison Pipeline report.⁹

These issues are further compounded in rural areas, where educational institutions are often sparsely distributed. In such settings, exclusion from a single school can effectively sever a child's access to education, given the lack of alternative options within reasonable proximity. This geographical isolation amplifies the detrimental impact of exclusions both formal and coercive on Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller pupils.

Revising zero tolerance policies to incorporate contextual understanding, early intervention, and a commitment to continuous learning is crucial. Such reforms would not only address the disproportionate exclusion of Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller pupils but also foster more inclusive and supportive educational environments for all students.

7 The Difference, *Who is losing learning?*, 2025

8 National Institute of Health, Long term labour market and economic consequences of school exclusions in England, 2022

9 Traveller Movement, *Disrupting the School to Prison Pipeline*, 2022

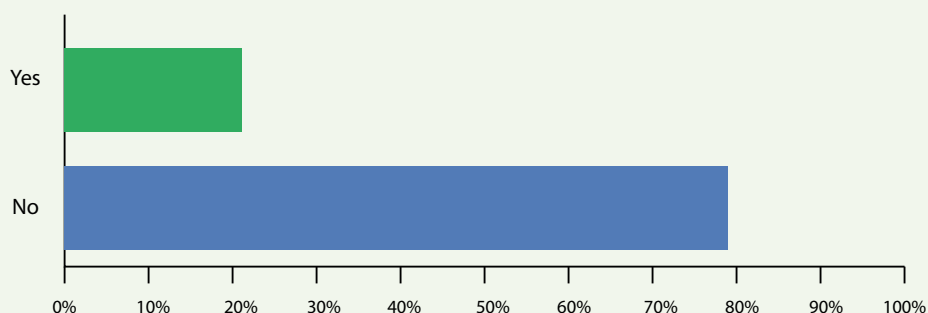
Curriculum Reform

Reforming the curriculum is essential to tackling the underlying drivers behind persistently toxic educational environments and would go a long way to ensuring that Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller pupils feel represented, supported, and included in their education. A rigid and culturally narrow curriculum alienates Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller pupils, so based on extensive community consultation and input from our Education Steering Group, we propose the following key areas for curriculum reform:

More Inclusive Curriculum

Representation matters. One thing that is clear in our previous report is how powerful a sense of belonging is in a child's education and how crucial it is that Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller histories, cultures, and contributions are embedded into the national curriculum as it would send a powerful signal of belonging and visibility. This includes recognising Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) History Month within school programming, and incorporating books and teaching materials created by Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller community members. As part of our research we conducted a survey aimed at educators, Head Teachers and decision-makers. This survey had 37 responses from all across the country. We also conducted interviews with decision makers, Heads of Academies, educators, academics, community members and leading thinkers. Over 75% of the teachers/decision makers who responded to our survey identified that their schools do not provide any programmes or materials about the Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller communities. To make matters worse, over 78% of those that responded to the same survey indicated said that their schools do not celebrate GRT History Month. None of the young people we interviewed or surveyed reported their schools having a dedicated or specific celebration for their communities such as GRT History Month. As highlighted in our previous report, the importance of an inclusive curriculum and the positive impact that an inclusive curriculum has on a young person's educational experience cannot be understated.¹⁰ A sense of 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.¹¹

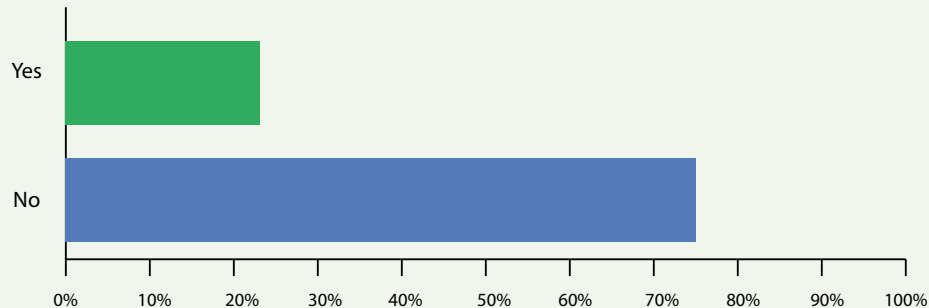
Q11 Does your school celebrate Gypsy, Roma and Traveller History month?



¹⁰ Traveller Movement, *Fought not Taught*, 2024

¹¹ Allen, K.-A., Vella-Brodick, 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.

Q9 Has your school provided any educational programs or materials about the Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Traveller communities?



Good Practice – Opportunity for Cultural Exchange

A strong example of inclusive practice emerged during one of our interviews, highlighting a school trip specifically designed to help develop cultural understanding and inclusion. The trip involved visiting a privately owned site, from which many of the Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller pupils who attended this school came from. The invitation to visit extended to both non-community member pupils in the class, and their parents or their carers. The site featured a number of facilities including a play park/area.

The visit served multiple purposes. Firstly, it enabled Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller pupils to feel valued and recognised, as the day was centered on their way of life. By welcoming their other students onto their site, they were able to share aspects of their culture in an environment where they felt safe and proud. This act of cultural sharing supported a sense of belonging and helped validate their identity

within the school community. Secondly, the visit provided a powerful learning opportunity for non- Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller pupils. Being able to ask questions, observe daily life, and engage with peers in a different cultural setting helped break down stereotypes and build empathy and understanding. For many, it was a rare and valuable insight into a community that is often marginalised and misunderstood.

This example illustrates how embedding cultural exchange into the curriculum through experiential learning and community-led involvement, can contribute to improving relationships and engagement, reducing exclusions and building a more inclusive school environment. It also highlights the importance of giving Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller communities a platform within educational settings to share their experiences and be seen as integral contributors to the school culture.

An inclusive curriculum is more than a box-ticking exercise. It plays a critical role in supporting young people's sense of identity and self-worth. For Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller pupils who often feel pressure to conceal their ethnicity due to fear of discrimination, inclusive content helps validate their experiences and build bridges of understanding across peer groups. This has social as well as academic benefits, fostering environments where diversity is respected rather than marginalised.

Greater Curriculum Flexibility and Qualification Weighting

A one-size-fits-all curriculum does not meet the needs of all learners. Providing more flexible options such as vocational courses, apprenticeships, and practical qualifications can open up pathways that align more closely with the cultural values and economic realities of many Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller families. We describe this as a form of ‘economic inclusion’ which ensures that education offers tangible value and opportunity for all communities. We see this value in alternative opportunities evidenced through certain words used by Roma. Whilst in English, we have the term ‘education’ which is almost always tied in with the idea of it being academic or schooling, Roma communities break down ‘education’ into different words as learning is not done merely at school. It is important that in bridging the gap for many communities we begin to value all types of educational attainment and ensure that no child is left NEET.

These alternative education options must be meaningful and not relegated to lower status. Importantly, when vocational routes include minimum requirements in English and mathematics, we may see higher levels of engagement from Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller pupils, who will be more motivated and incentivised to achieve these qualifications if they see a clear link to future employment. Whether pursued in mainstream school or through alternative or online provision, the goal is to offer genuine choices rather than stereotyped assumptions about what Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller young people ‘should’ do. There must be a careful approach to make sure we are not assuming that, for example, a young Irish Traveller boy would want to work on a building site. The key to this approach is that offering these pathways is about increasing opportunity, not limiting it.

A clear example of how a more flexible and inclusive curriculum can be achieved is through the Greater Manchester Baccalaureate. From age 14, offers seven technical education gateways that align with regional employment needs, providing young people with meaningful pathways beyond traditional academic routes.¹² This approach demonstrates that it is both possible and practical to create flexible and viable alternatives that continue to value core subjects whilst widening access to more vocational courses. If similar models were made available across the country, Romani (Gypsy) Roma and Irish Traveller pupils would see that education leads to real and relevant opportunities in their eyes, rather than feeling disconnected from the current education setup.

Qualification weighting ties in with the ideas of a more flexible curriculum. Echoing findings from the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR)’s and The Difference’s ‘Who is Losing Learning?’ report and building on their initial idea of ensuring a broad range of subjects are valued alongside the core subjects,¹³ we advocate for a more balanced approach to how qualifications are weighted and valued. While English and mathematics remain essential, we must ensure that vocational and alternative qualifications are given appropriate recognition. This is particularly important in the context of many Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller learners, for whom non-traditional learning routes may be more effective and culturally aligned. A curriculum that reflects multiple forms of success is more inclusive and responsive to the diverse needs of the student body.

¹² [Greater Manchester Baccalaureate](#)

¹³ IPPR and The Difference, [Who is Losing Learning](#), 2024

Accessible Online Education Resources

Access to quality education must be safeguarded, particularly for children who are mobile, electively home educated (EHE), or excluded from mainstream provision. Online resources such as Oak National Academy offer OFSTED-accredited, freely accessible educational content that can help bridge these gaps.¹⁴ Other examples of remote learning resources that are OFSTED accredited can be found on the [government website](#). This flexibility may allow for Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller communities to remain engaged in their education while travelling. Although permanent nomadism is declining amongst the communities many community members travel seasonally or for cultural events such as Appleby Horse Fair and allowing young people to engage in both their own cultural traditions whilst retaining educational opportunities.

We recommend that schools and local authorities proactively signpost these resources to families and ensure that Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller parents are aware of their availability. There is also a need for ongoing quality assurance: these online platforms must be regularly updated to remain effective and relevant. We further recommend the development of new, culturally inclusive online materials, including content tailored to the needs of Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller learners. In doing so, we can help ensure that an exclusion does not mean the end of a child's educational journey.



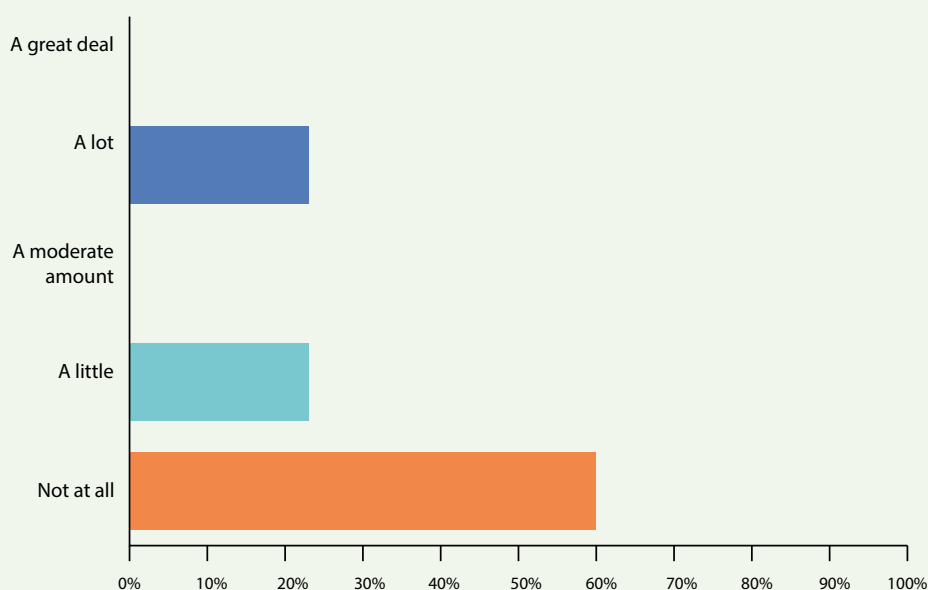
¹⁴ Gov.UK, [Oak National Academy](#)

Whole-School Responsibility for Inclusion

While the idea of appointing a designated liaison officer for Romani (Gypsy), Roma, and Irish Traveller pupils might seem like a straightforward solution, our Education Steering Group highlighted some serious drawbacks to this approach. Relying on a single individual to address the cultural needs of a specific ethnic group can lead to a culture of complacency among other staff, who may assume that these responsibilities fall outside their remit. This is a concern not limited to education as we see similar dynamics across public services, including policing and healthcare, where a ‘designated officer’ model can lead to the harmful outsourcing of responsibility.

In reality, all staff in a school must share the responsibility for fostering inclusion, cultural understanding, and safeguarding as our research shows there is clearly an issue involving cultural understanding. For instance, most of the young people who took our survey reported that they felt as though their teachers had no understanding of their community, and several reported that they felt their teacher had little understanding. Given this, we have encountered strong examples of good practice where this collective duty is embedded in school culture and what we have based our suggested approach upon. A helpful way of thinking about this was shared during our consultations: while a teacher may not always be **able** to solve an issue themselves, they must always **be willing to** try, and if they cannot help directly or are **‘unable’**, they should actively seek someone who can. The only unacceptable stance is to be **unwilling**. This emphasises the importance of recruitment, training, and school ethos, ensuring that staff are not only competent but also committed to inclusion.

Q15 How much understanding did you feel the teachers had of the Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Traveller communities?



That said, leadership in this area is still crucial. It would be an impossible task, particularly in diverse schools, to hire a dedicated officer for each ethnic minority in terms of practicality and resources. So, we are therefore recommending an adapted model. One that avoids the pitfalls of the traditional liaison officer role. Schools should appoint a Race and Social Justice Lead, not to act as the sole problem-solver, but to coordinate efforts, maintain strategic focus, and ensure sustained progress across the school. This individual could work closely with the curriculum lead/coordinator to ensure that equity and representation are embedded in both classroom content and broader school practices. Crucially, part of their role should involve training and empowering other staff, so that cultural awareness and inclusive practices become a shared responsibility, rather than a specialist task.

To further this, a Children's Committee on Inclusion should be created following on from the training and upscaling of other staff members understanding and skills in dealing with children from different cultural contexts. This would improve the inclusiveness of the entire school's environment and make it easier for accountability to be held for staff members. To ensure that a Children's Committee is not tokenistic and genuinely influences school culture, schools can adopt the Lundy Model of Youth Voice which is used across UK schools. It is designed around four dimensions: Space, Voice, Audience and Influence. This ensures children not only have opportunities to express their views but that those views are actively heard and acted upon.

This model also creates opportunities for community-led change. The Education Steering Group emphasised the value of bringing Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller community members into these roles, not only to increase representation but to build trust and improve cultural understanding within the school. This could be supported through apprenticeship pathways or targeted recruitment strategies, tying in with our broader recommendations around economic inclusion. A strong quote that stands out from an interview that was held with a senior member in an Academy Trust was to focus on 'withness, not aboutness'. Their idea was to work with community members when focusing on solutions and issues, as it is very easy when working with marginalised communities to fall into the trap of talking 'about' them rather than 'with' them which only excludes them further. We've also seen positive examples of outreach officers who work across school networks to build relationships with Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller families and advocate for systemic change. Elements of this outreach model could be adapted to support the Race and Social Justice Lead.

Ultimately, this approach avoids the dangers of tokenism and builds a stronger, more accountable culture of inclusion in which every member of staff plays a part in creating a safe and welcoming environment for all pupils.

Case Study: Key Worker Key Changes

"I'd known Eileen since I was about four years old. She worked in the GRT (Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller) department at Lancaster County Council for many years, and would continue to do so for at least another fifteen. Eileen visited us regularly to check in on how we were doing and often popped into our primary school to run workshops on our culture and history. At our school, GRT culture was celebrated. There were posters on the walls, and projects in lesson, like building miniature gypsy wagons, that made it feel special to be who we were. After primary school, there were around ten of us Romany Gypsy and Irish Traveller girls who found ourselves at a loose end, none of us went on to secondary school. Eileen worked with local youth centers and theatres to set up projects for us, alongside colleagues, one of whom was a Romany Gypsy herself. Over the years, we did all sorts, cooking lessons, driving theory classes, and other workshops. When I was 14, Eileen visited again, telling my family about a new project at the local theatre. All of us girls went along, and over the span of twelve months,

we designed outfits from upcycled clothes and put on a fashion show with a dance routine. It was a huge success. During that time, Eileen had also been building links with the local college. We all went on to do a 12-month entry-level hair and beauty course, which included mathematics and English too. Out of the ten girls, some chose to lead traditional lives, marrying young and starting families. Others found jobs, and four went on to complete further college courses. Two of us became qualified teachers (myself included), one earned a degree in social work, and another launched a successful business. I still see those girls now and then, and we always say the same thing: Where on earth would we have been without Eileen? We were a challenging bunch at times, caught between two worlds, trying to figure out how to fit in, running off, being late to lessons. But she never gave up on any of us. She stood by us and our families through so many trials. I tell people about Eileen all the time, what an incredible advocate and remarkable woman she is."

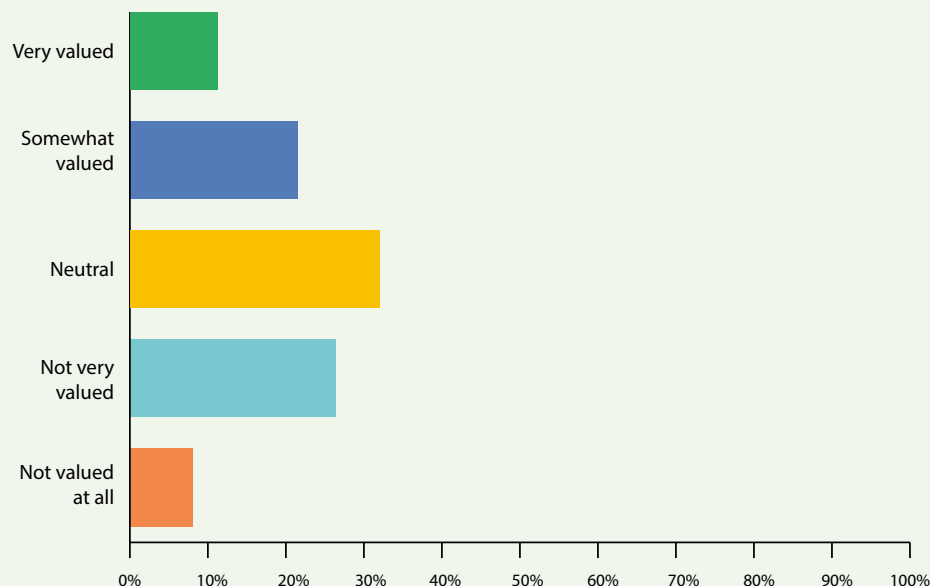
Cultural Humility Training

Too often, training on cultural awareness in schools is delivered by professionals without lived experience of the communities they discuss. This creates a risk of reinforcing unconscious biases rather than dismantling them. To address this, we are recommending a shift from 'cultural competency' training to cultural humility training. This is an approach that focuses on self-reflection, critical awareness of bias, and the importance of learning from, rather than just about communities.

To show how necessary this training is, we only have to look at our own survey results. Only 10.8% of decision makers/teachers believe that education is very valued and only 21% believe education is somewhat valued by Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller communities. This means over 67%, or over two-thirds, of decision makers either voted neutral, not very valued or not valued at all. This is not a made-up claim by young community members who are struggling in education, this is such a harmful narrative that directly plays into coercive exclusions mechanisms such as low teacher expectations and the self-fulfilling prophecy

Central to this model is community-led delivery. Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller community members should be supported and trained to design and deliver these sessions themselves. Their lived experience offers invaluable insight, and their involvement is essential in ensuring the training is authentic, relevant, and grounded in real-world understanding.

Q13 How much do you believe education is valued in Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Traveller communities?



Moreover, this training must not be treated as a one-off or a tick-box exercise. We recommend that it becomes part of a school's ongoing professional development programme, with regular refreshers and reflective components built in. Embedding cultural humility into staff development not only supports better relationships with Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller pupils but also cultivates a school culture where inclusion is an active, evolving commitment.

As highlighted in recent work on challenging professional discomfort in education, it is important for schools not to shy away from the unease that comes with confronting bias. One useful resource is the chapter 'Utilising Discomfort to Better Support Gypsy, Romany and Traveller Young People's Experiences of Education' which explores how leaning into discomfort can lead to genuine reflection and lasting change in school culture.¹⁵

The importance of representation, and cultural understanding cannot be understated, in particular for Roma, whose issues are compounded by potential immigration and language issues, who for some English can be up to their fifth language.¹⁶ Discussions with community members and support workers who have long standing relationships with Roma community members suggested the importance of cultural capital, and the positive effects this will have on academic attainment through enriching the culture. Examples of schools with high Roma populations that were successful in engaging with the community reported the importance of highlighting events and positive contributions to society from the Roma community. Promoting Roma Resistance Day as well as positive role models in combination this particular school noticed increased engagement, attendance (by up to 15%) and better relationship building with the families. It boiled down to making Roma community members feel like they belong, in a society where they feel neglected and outcast consistently.

¹⁵ Sally Carr and Ali Hanbury, *Utilizing Discomfort to Better Support Gypsy, Romany and Traveller Young People's Experiences of Education*, 2025

¹⁶ Traveller Movement, *Fought not Taught*, 2024

Power of Positive Role Models

Representation is a crucial lever for change, not only for improving the aspirations of young Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller pupils, but also for challenging the biases of educators and decision makers. When young people see role models from their own communities succeeding in education and reaching positions of leadership, it tackles the ‘self-fulfilling prophecy’ of low expectations and creates a sense of possibility. This goes further than just for Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller communities as seen in Feyisa Demie’s research. His work on Black Caribbean pupils in Lambeth schools demonstrates that the presence of black teachers and leaders has a measurable impact on improving engagement, confidence and attainment among black students.¹⁷ The same principles would apply to the Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller communities as seeing someone from their own, or similar background succeed in mainstream education would normalise achievement and increase motivation. Equally, for other teachers, leaders, policymakers and decision makers, encountering professionals from these communities at equal levels of authority would disrupt and tackle their own stereotypes and increase cultural respect. In order to ensure this approach is successful, it requires active recruitment of Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller community members into roles in this sector, and to celebrate the achievements of such role models.



17 Feyisa Demie, *Raising Achievement of Black Caribbean Pupils: Barriers and Good Practice in Schools*, 2023

Influencing OFSTED Criteria of Grading

The current OFSTED framework, whilst not having a dedicated section towards, still largely prioritises and has a ‘strong focus on’ academic attainment and attendance in their ‘leadership and management’ and ‘behaviour and attitudes’ section,¹⁸ with not enough meaningful or practical focus on inclusion outcomes. This inadvertently creates perverse incentives for schools to exclude, off-roll, or discourage enrolment of pupils from communities, such as Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller, whose performance on these metrics may be lower, often through no fault of their own. It is not uncommon to see exclusions rise before exam periods as a direct result.

We are proposing the inclusion of exclusion data and elective home education (EHE) withdrawals data as part of a school’s grading into the OFSTED inspection framework criteria. Schools with high rates of exclusions, managed moves, or unexplained home education withdrawals should be required to demonstrate clear and accountable justifications and failure to do so should impact their overall inspection outcome.

Additionally, we recommend that it become mandatory for schools to ask and record the reason for parental withdrawal from school-based education. Where negative or coercive school experiences are cited, this data can feed into OFSTED’s assessment and ensure schools are held accountable for the environments they create or facilitate.

These changes would signal that inclusion is a core element of educational quality and not a side issue and that a school cannot be considered ‘Outstanding’ if it is failing its most vulnerable pupils.

Early Years Engagement

The first three years of a child’s life are critical for their future development they are learning behaviourally, cognitively, physically, and socially at a faster rate than at any other time in their lives.¹⁹ It is clear that investment in early childhood can reap the greatest rewards in terms of the future health, wellbeing and happiness of children from all backgrounds. However, through the Traveller Movements research and work on the ground it is clear there is a need a significant increase in early years engagement from local authorities for Romani (Gypsy) Roma and Irish Traveller families. By intervening early, it is possible to address the root causes that later manifest as low attainment, poor school readiness and ultimately, the mechanisms of coercive exclusions.

Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller families, especially women and children, experience some of the most extreme forms of stress and adversity. These include higher mortality rates, poverty, poor housing conditions, poor educational outcomes and discrimination when accessing services. In the Health and Social Care Committee’s 2019 report²⁰ it was acknowledged that such experiences during the first 1000 days can result in a child’s development falling behind their peers.

¹⁸ Wise Academies, [How OFSTED inspects Behaviour and attitudes](#)

¹⁹ OECD, [Quality Early Childhood Education and Care for Children Under Age 3](#), 2020

²⁰ [House of Commons Health and Social Care Committee: First 1000 days of life](#), 2019

That report also acknowledged that individuals with four or more adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) are at a much greater risk of poor health outcomes compared to individuals with no ACEs, and that they are also thirty times more likely to attempt suicide. The report goes on to say that intervening more actively in the first 1000 days of a child's life can improve children's health, development and life chances and make society fairer and more prosperous.

While there appears to be very little research or data on the early years' experience of Romani (Gypsies), Roma and Irish Traveller women and children, there is abundant evidence within the adult population of poor educational and health outcomes, including high rates of suicide. It also includes high mortality rates for mothers and babies which are not monitored through the national review mechanism. This is just one example of a serious failing which can be attributed to the ethnic minority categories used by the NHS Data Model and Dictionary and is a clear example of how systemic neglect in the first 1000 days perpetuates long-term inequality.

We can learn from the success of past initiatives. One approach we recommend is the re-introduction of the Sure Start Children's Centres which were programmes that brought together early education, childcare, health and family under one roof and were proven to improve school readiness and reduce hospitalisation.²¹ The Sure Start programmes recognised the need to ensure that their services reached these marginalised families and guidance designed to support practitioners such as Save the Children's 2007 report, *Early years outreach practice: supporting early years practitioners working with Gypsy, Roma and Traveller families*.²² The government's current 'Best Start family hubs are an attempt to rebuild this infrastructure, aiming to expand access to similar integrated early years services by 2028'.²³ We are in full support of this re-introduction, however as of now, the coverage of these models looks patchy at best and seems to lack the targeted outreach needed to engage with marginalised communities. If properly funded and delivered in partnership with communities, we believe that such hubs can play a preventative role by addressing barriers before they manifest as behavioural issues or disengagement from schools.

21 Pedro Carneiro et al, *The short- and medium-term impacts of sure start on educational outcomes*, 2024

22 *Early years outreach practice: Supporting early years practitioners working with Gypsy, Roma and Traveller families*, 2007

23 www.gov.uk/government/news/government-revives-family-services-supporting-500000-more-kids

Recording and Reporting Racist Bullying

The persistent failure to address racist bullying in schools is a significant driver behind coercive exclusions, in particular, withdrawals from education among Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller families. Parents often feel that their concerns are ignored or dismissed, and in the absence of formal mechanisms for accountability, many see no option but to remove their children from what they perceive as unsafe environments. This is a consistent theme and appears to be constantly ignored so hearing some of the language thrown at the young people that partook in our survey may allow more insight into what they are going through. Quotes include, ‘Gypo’ ‘Do you wash?’ ‘Do you practice black magic?’, ‘Are you dead as most Gypsies died in the holocaust you big Gypo’, ‘do you carry different diseases?’, ‘are you a witch?’. These are just a handful of quotes from those who actually took our survey, so the larger picture is likely more dire.

Discussions with different educators and decision makers highlighted the different forms that racist bullying can take. One senior member of an Academy Trust identified the need for a child-on-child risk assessment, whilst other discussions highlighted the importance of getting recruitment of teachers’ right, as many young people report bullying or discrimination from teachers.

In our earlier Fought Not Taught report, we recommended that the Department for Education (DfE) introduce a statutory framework for the monitoring, recording, and reporting of all racist incidents in schools, including racist bullying. This data should be reported centrally to both the DfE and local authorities, ensuring national oversight and local accountability.²⁴ This recommendation aligns with one of the key proposals from the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry,²⁵ which called for robust systems to monitor racist incidents in education settings. While some schools adopted this practice following the inquiry, implementation remains inconsistent and non-mandatory. We suggest drawing on these examples of good practice to build a positive and reliable framework.

We further recommend that the DfE make a race equality and diversity policy a statutory requirement under the Public Sector Equality Duty. By making this policy a formal expectation of all schools, we ensure that anti-racist practice is no longer optional, and that schools are prepared to both prevent and respond to racism in a way that builds trust and safety for all pupils.

Effective monitoring of racist bullying will also support broader efforts to understand why families are withdrawing children into EHE. Where high rates of withdrawal coincide with unaddressed racism, further investigation and intervention must follow.

²⁴ Traveller Movement, *Fought not Taught*, 2024

²⁵ Insted Consultancy, *Recording and reporting racist incidents in school*, 2012

Case Study: The Devastating Reality of Racist Bullying

This case study highlights lived experiences of two sisters who are Romani (Gypsy) and Irish Traveller. They both faced significant discrimination and fell victim to some of the mechanisms of coercive exclusions. Their stories reveal both the systemic barriers they encountered and their personal resilience they continue to demonstrate.

The elder sister, now 16, reflects on a school experience marked by fear, silence and a forced denial of her cultural identity. She recalls entering education already apprehensive having witnessed the mistreatment of her older brother, who endured regular physical and emotional bullying. His visible Traveller identity made him a target, and this shaped her approach from a young age.

Because she looks slightly different from her siblings, the elder sister was able to conceal her ethnicity. She changed her accent, altered how she spoke and distanced herself from her own brother during the school day. She recalls feeling deep guilt for ignoring him, but describes feeling trapped or feeling like she had no other option as she believed hiding her ethnicity was the only way to avoid similar abuse.

She internalised the behaviour to the point where it was not until she was older that she realised she had normalised hiding her ethnicity at such a young age. Eventually, her identity was revealed, and she began experiencing direct prejudice. She shared that she was subject to name calling and cruel stereotyping even being compared to a witch, highlighting the depth of cultural misunderstanding and stigma she faced.

Her younger sister, now in her early teens, reports facing similar challenges. She describes a lack of engagement from the school, stating that staff appeared to give up on her education early on. Rather than being integrated into mainstream lessons, she was regularly assigned to supervise young pupils. This was based on the assumption that she would not complete school

anyway, which ties into one of the mechanisms of coercive exclusions in our earlier report (low teacher expectations/self-fulfilling prophecy). This reflects a deeply problematic approach to Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller pupils' potential.

One particularly distressing memory involved being pulled out of class by police officers as a young child and being asked invasive, stereotype-driven questions about her home life, including whether she was being abused. She noted other pupils were not subject to this questioning, further reinforcing her sense of isolation and being singled out because of her ethnicity.

Both sisters were withdrawn from education early. Not only did they feel this from other pupils, but the prejudice and racism was felt by the two girls from staff members too. The elder sister left after completing year 6, while the younger sister was removed before finishing the same year. Despite these negative experiences, both girls express a strong desire to bring about change in some capacity moving forward.

Both have shown remarkable resilience. The elder sister has aspirations to return to education in some form and pursue a career in politics, inspired by other successful women from marginalised communities as well as the charity that she has come into contact with. Their story reflects both the failings of the education system to support Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller pupils and the powerful potential that remains when young people are empowered to reclaim their voice.

This case study highlights the urgent need for culturally competent support for Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller pupils and policy-based changes such as the duty for schools to record and report racist and faith-based bullying centrally. It is essential we ensure that schools do not perpetuate discrimination or low expectations but instead create environments where all children can thrive.

Conclusion

Institutional coerced exclusions are not merely a policy issue. They are a human rights issue. As this report has shown, the exclusion of Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller children from education is not always overt or formalised. It is embedded in rigid disciplinary frameworks, cultural erasure within the curriculum, and a lack of systemic accountability and an absence of inclusive leadership across schools. The effects are devastating and long-lasting: disrupted learning, fractured identities, limited life chances and a deep, generational mistrust of educational institutions.

It is clear through the evidence and case studies provided that systemic change is necessary in order to address the disproportionate and coercive exclusions of Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller. This report has outlined a comprehensive set of recommendations. Across all our research, a glaringly obvious and consistent theme was to put in place preventative, rather than reactive measures. This ranges from dismantling the harmful zero tolerance behaviour policies and embedding cultural inclusion into the curriculum, to improving staff training and accountability. Schools must realise that inclusion is not an optional extra, but a core indicator of educational quality. Inclusion must be led with intent and commitment. The level of understanding by teachers and decision makers must be changed and developed. When asked in the survey we received responses such as 'their families' which shows a change in mind-set is necessary. Ultimately, dismantling coercive exclusions demands a systemic shift in mind-set; from 'managing behaviour' to understanding need. It is critical to act now to put an end to and ensure that no child is pushed out of a system that should exist to support them.



The Traveller Movement would like to say a heartfelt
THANK YOU to our funders for their support.

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