

Recommendations from the Taskforce on Traveller Education's report to the Department of Education

At the Taskforce meeting on 30 November 2010 it was agreed that the following fundamental principles should be embodied in this report and should underpin the recommendations and actions:

- Every child is an equal child
- The expectations for Traveller children should be the same as for all others, including access to the full range of educational experiences free from racial discrimination and prejudice.
- Outcomes for Traveller children should parallel the range of outcomes for all children
- Traveller parents have the same entitlements and responsibilities as all other parents
- All schools should be open to and welcoming of Traveller children
- Parents of Traveller children should have access to any school of their choice, on the same basis as any other parents, for the education of their children
- The Department has a key responsibility in ensuring the achievement of these outcomes

The Taskforce has an expectation that these principles will be met in ten years.

The following high level recommendations provide a framework to assist the Department of Education in developing an action plan which will address the barriers to Traveller children fully enjoying their right to education.

1. Recommendations

1.1 The draft action plan should be developed by the end of 2011. It must grasp the opportunity to deliver real progress for Traveller children. In developing the plan the Department should carefully consider the detailed recommendations of the six thematic sub-groups of the Taskforce and of the Education and Training Inspectorate.

- Early Years and Transitions
- Special Educational Needs
- Inter-Culturalism and Racism
- Primary Education
- Post-Primary and Youth
- Further Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills for Life and Work

1.2 The important role of teachers in the education of all children is key and building their capacity to develop an inclusive ethos and deliver change through Initial Teacher Education and Continuous Professional Development is crucial to the success of any action plan.

1.3 The action plan must be adequately monitored and resourced and should include target dates and responsibility for delivery for improvements in Traveller access,

attainment, attendance, enrolment and advancement. Actions to be taken should be based on firm evidence with collection and further analysis of data to enable monitoring of outcomes and evaluation of actions.

2. Voice of the Traveller community

2.1 There must be active engagement and participation with Traveller children, young people and their families on the draft action plan and as an ongoing process.

3. Partnership

3.1 Improving the educational attainment of Travellers is a significant element in reducing existing inequalities and encouraging their full inclusion in society. However, equality and social inclusion requires an integrated, collaborative approach across the statutory sector and with partners outside government.

3.2 A strategic group which includes representatives from health, education, employment, housing, the Traveller Support Movement and any other relevant organisations is necessary to facilitate a partnership approach and sharing of good practice in tackling barriers to Traveller equality and inclusion. This could be achieved by reconstituting the Traveller thematic group of the Racial Equality Forum.

3.3 A consistent, co-ordinated approach across all areas should be developed to promote the improved access, participation and attendance of Traveller children and young people in all formal and informal educational settings. This should include after school and youth activities, with actions identified for Department of Education, Education and Library Boards, Non-Government Organisations, Traveller Support Groups and Traveller families.

4. Access and Home/School/Community liaison

4.1 Schools, Education and Library Boards, Non-Government Organisations, Traveller Support Groups should improve engagement with Traveller parents to build trust, improve Travellers' sense of belonging and inclusion within the school community and encourage a positive attitude towards education and children's participation in all levels of education, including pre-school. Evidence indicates that 70% of a child's outcomes are dependent on parents/carers who need to be supported.

4.2 Information should be provided to Traveller families on educational provision, opportunities and services, their rights in relation to education and how to access appropriate funding to enable young people to go on to further education.

4.3 Best practice to support Traveller children and young people's transitions from pre-school to primary school, primary to post-primary school and post-primary to further education should be identified and disseminated.

5. Attendance

5.1 Reasons for school absence should be analysed, monitored and addressed. Education and Training Inspectorate has found that when Traveller children attend on a regular basis they achieve progress commensurate with their peers.

5.2 Para 3 (3) of Schedule 13 of the Education and Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order 1986 which relates to the school attendance requirement for a child who has no fixed abode and whose parent's trade or business requires him to travel from place to place should be reviewed.

6. Attainment

6.1 Careers advice, education and guidance to Traveller young people should take account of Travellers' 'world of work' but also encourage them to widen their horizons and ambitions.

6.2 The educational attainment of all Traveller children and young people, including those with special educational needs, should be developed, promoted and supported through flexible learning opportunities that meet their needs and abilities. Traveller young people should be made aware of the wide range of courses available under the Entitlement Framework from September 2013.

6.3 Schools must have an expectation that Traveller children and young people will achieve their potential and parents should be encouraged to have high expectations of their children's achievement and that their education should continue while they are travelling.

7. Inclusion

7.1 Consistent regional anti-racism training and high quality learning materials which reflect Traveller culture and heritage should be available to school Governors and school leaders and as part of Initial Teacher Education and the Continuing Professional Development of teaching and non-teaching staff.

7.2 Where it exists, the practice of providing Traveller specific school transport should be reviewed.

8. Structures and delivery

8.1 There should be a new structure to deliver the action plan and ensure meaningful Traveller involvement in the education sector. This would involve reconstitution of the Forum for the Education of Travellers' Children to include key Non-Government Organisation members.

8.2 This new structure should connect with evolving structures focussed on multiculturalism and appropriate education support for minority ethnic children so that in the longer term policy and practice should focus more on Traveller children as a specific constituency within all minority ethnic children.