

TRAVELLERS AND EDUCATION



Photo © Derek Spiers, Report Ltd.

“Education shall aim at developing the child’s personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to the fullest extent. Education shall prepare the child for an active adult life in a free society and foster respect for the child’s parents, his or her own cultural identity, language and values, and for the cultural background and values of others.”

Article 29 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

Traveller Voices

"My daughter's experience of school is drastically different to mine, she loves school she has loads of settled friends"

Traveller parent

"Why I didn't learn to read and write at school because the teachers put all the Traveller children into what they called a special class. There were children between the ages of six years old and fourteen, I don't know why they done that. We're put in one big room and told to play a board game or draw a picture. I feel very resentful and angry about how we were treated in school. We went to school for years and we left not being able to read and write"

Traveller parent

"My Teacher Ms. X, shes kinda nice, when she goes home she always waves at me. She always does fun stuff . . ."

Traveller Boy age 11

"Some people in my class know that I'm a Traveller and they're ok with it. There are other people who are afraid to tell anyone that they are Travellers because they are afraid that no one will like them . . . My favourite thing is English and English Tests. I like it very much because I always get 10/10. I'm an A student in English anyway!"

Traveller Girl age 9

"I left Secondary school because you know, up there you were treated, like kind of bad, not by the Teachers but by the young fellas in sixth year cos you're a Traveller, they'd slag you and if you slagged them back you'd get bet . . . by 17 and 18 year olds . . . that was a big reason for leaving school."

Traveller Boy age 16

"It would be a good idea to have settled people and Travellers together in books in schools . . . That might make them stop calling us names, reading about how Travellers lived in the old days . . ."

Traveller Girl age 11



Travellers in Education

Traveller's Educational status is considerably lower than that of their settled peers. The Census in 2002 revealed that for 54.8% of Travellers, primary school education was the highest level of education they obtained and that 63.2% of Traveller children under the age of 15 had left school.

Why have Travellers fared badly in Education? The reasons for this are many and complex with external and internal factors at play. In the past Education policy promoted a segregated model of provision. In practice this meant that in many schools Travellers were placed in special all-Traveller classes with one Teacher who catered for all Traveller children regardless of age in one classroom.

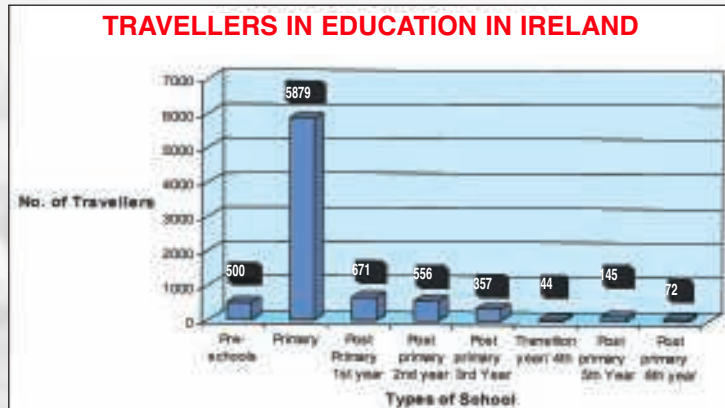
It can be argued that a contributing factor to the low levels of attainment of Travellers in Education is the lack of visibility of Traveller culture within the school system. This may contribute to feelings of isolation experienced by Traveller children. It is very important for all children to feel confident and positive in their own identity in school. Unfortunately many Traveller children are aware that their identity will pose a problem for them in school.

Furthermore it is difficult for Travellers to see the positive outcomes in staying on in mainstream Education as many Travellers experience discrimination in trying to obtain employment.

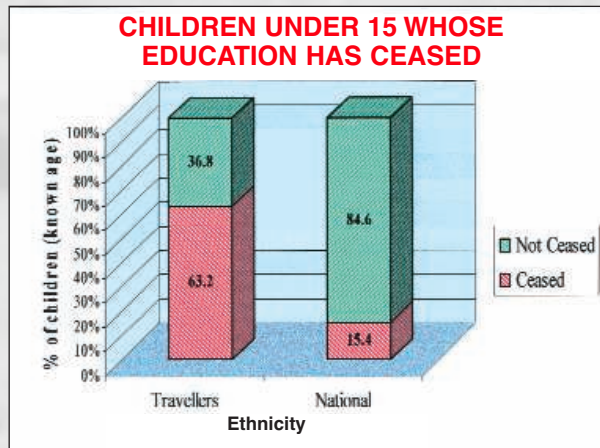
Underpinning all of the above is the situation that many Travellers find themselves in which includes poor accommodation and appalling living conditions, poor health and the experience of widespread prejudice and discrimination. All of these factors combine to create a particular set of circumstances that militate against many Travellers participating fully in education.



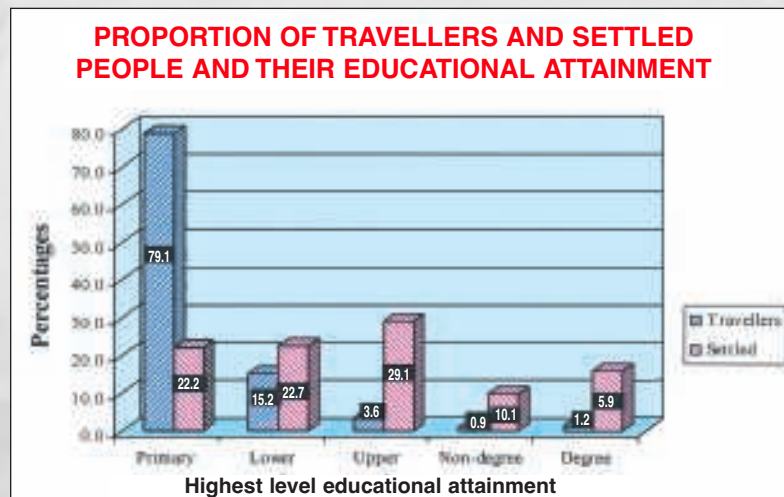
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Source: Department of Education and Science estimates for 2004/ 2005



Source: Census 2002



Source: Census 2002

Positive Developments

While literacy levels and the level of attainment is much lower than that of their settled peers, there are many positive developments in Traveller Education in recent years. Over the last decade segregated practice has for the most part been replaced in favour of age-appropriate integrated provision. There are now more Traveller children in post-primary and more Travellers accessing Third level education than ever before, however it must be acknowledged that numbers are still extremely low in comparison to the settled community. According to Department of Education and Science estimates in September 2002 there were 28 Travellers enrolled at third level.

Another welcome development is that the Department of Education now recognises the need to challenge practices within training modules and to equip educators to educate children from minority ethnic groups examples of this include the Intercultural Guidelines for Primary Schools launched by the National Council for Curriculum Assessment in 2005.

Traveller Education Strategy - A New Vision to the Future

A Traveller Education Strategy is being developed by members of the Advisory Committee on Traveller Education and the Education Disadvantage committee. This includes representation from Traveller Organisations (Pavee Point, Irish Traveller Movement and the National Traveller Women's Forum), Teachers Unions and School Management Authorities.



The main objective of the Traveller Education strategy will be to ensure that Travellers will be given the opportunity to benefit from an inclusive Education system and gain equality of access, participation and outcomes.

The Strategy maps out the way forward in relation to Traveller Education, taking into account the complexity of the issues involved, the history of provision and existing measures. It marks out the challenges for the future and clearly identifies ways to approach these challenges.

Pavee Point would hope that over the lifespan of the Strategy, significant developments in Traveller Education will take place such as:

- Traveller children will have access to an inclusive, well-resourced, well managed, high quality early childhood education provision.
- All children will be educated in mainstream provision in an integrated, inclusive, intercultural, anti-bias environment.
- Educators will be equipped to positively promote Traveller Culture in Educational Settings. And furthermore that interculturalism will be a core part of educator's training.
- That Traveller parents will not experience difficulties in enrolling their children in schools.
- That the Education system is accessible and meets the needs of Travellers who are nomadic
- That the transfer rate and retention of Travellers to post-primary will dramatically increase
- That more Travellers will access Third Level Education
- That increased support is given to improve the capacity of Traveller parents to support their children's (and their own) education.

Education should be about liberation and Pavee Point sees the Traveller Education Strategy as providing new hope for Travellers. It is also vital that throughout the implementation process, Travellers are at the centre of monitoring and evaluating the implementation of the strategy.

A Challenge to all

The development of the Traveller Education Strategy involves the commitment of all players. It involves all levels within the education system, parents, children and the community itself. It is vital that the Traveller Education Strategy brings a focus on equality/anti racism to the fore at all levels of the system, from the formal to non formal sectors. This will involve leadership as new challenges are met and new ways of thinking and behaving evolve.

"Traveller Education must be fully located within an intercultural educational framework, rather than included as an afterthought or separately, as present"

Irish Travellers Shadow Report, A Response to Ireland's First and Second Report on the International Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD) 2005 Pavee Point.

"The enhancement of access to education services for Travellers is a multi-faceted issue that takes into account living circumstances, parent/ pupil/ teacher expectations and the wider marginalisation/ social exclusion experienced by Travellers. This will require a multifaceted response, including review of existing education provision and supports at all levels within the education system."

The National Action Plan against Racism 2005-2008.

Education Projects in Pavee Point

Parents and Traveller Education Project

Enhancing Traveller parent's involvement in their children's education, building relationships and understanding with settled parents.

Pavee Point received Funding in 2004 from the Education Equality Initiative to fund a new and innovative project entitled Parents and Traveller Education.

This two and half year project has two distinct strategies:

Strategy 1: is essentially about increasing inclusion and proposes to work with Traveller parents and focus on their inclusion. It will address the deficit of information and understanding amongst Traveller parents of the education system and its structures. This project will also aim to increase Traveller parent involvement in school and parent organisations.

Strategy 2: is essentially about reducing exclusion and proposes to work with settled parents and school structures, acknowledging the impact they can have on Traveller access and participation in school and their potential for excluding Travellers.

The objectives of this project are:

- Production of Video/ DVD as a resource for training with Traveller parents on the education system and their role within it; followed by launch, dissemination and training workshops
- Disseminate the video amongst Traveller groups, visiting teachers and other relevant people to generate discussion.
- Establish and organise a Traveller Parent Representatives Forum and National Traveller Parents Education Day.



- Design a Training module on Traveller issues for the National Parents Council, Parents Associations, Boards of Management and other educational structures.
- Organise a programme of training seminars to deliver the module to settled parents and their organisations.
- Research, produce and disseminate a Good Practice Booklet aimed at Educators, staff members in Schools, parents associations etc giving pointers in relation to Traveller inclusion in their structure and work

Practice and policy aspect

One of the main aims of this project is to engage positively with the Education sector and to develop a partnership with key people in the Department of Education and Science.

The project will develop a good practice booklet on Traveller inclusion which will be aimed at boards of management and parents' bodies.

Policy development will be considered a key area of importance by the project. The Traveller Parents Representative Forums and National Traveller Parents' Education Days will explicitly stimulate policy related discussions amongst Traveller parents.

This project will contribute hugely to policy development by linking in with the Education sector and the Advisory Committee on Traveller Education and also monitoring the outcomes of the Traveller Education Strategy to ensure they complement the outcomes of this project.

This project is funded by the Education Equality Initiative through the Department of Education and Science, the National Development Plan and the European Structural Funds.

The Development of Appropriate Mechanisms to monitor Educational access, participation and outcomes by gender for Travellers

Project Summary

This project will propose to research how to ascertain the most appropriate method to monitor educational access, participation and outcomes for Traveller boys and girls, men and women. It will pilot an equality data mechanism inclusive of ethnicity in the administrative systems of a cross-section of education providers and co-relate it to data collected on gender.

Data generated will be analysed to make recommendations on data collection and education policy. The generation of data in this area is a sophisticated and sensitive process. The concepts are new to most people in education.

The intention is to build on the pioneering work on gender equality and the emerging work done on Traveller health inequalities by applying the concepts and tools to education.

This work will be carried out through the:

- identification of research on good practice in other fields in relation to data collection;
- consultation with Travellers and other minority ethnic groups;
- identification, negotiation with and buy-in of education providers;
- piloting of the mechanism and collection of available data on access, participation and outcomes; and,
- documentation and dissemination of the learning.

This project is funded by the Gender Equality Unit of the Department of Education and Science. The Unit is funded under the National Development Plan 2000-2006 and is co-funded by European Structural Funds.

Further information:

Pavee Point is a voluntary non-governmental organisation which is committed to the attainment of human rights for Irish Travellers. The group is a partnership of Travellers and the majority population working together to address the racism and exclusion that Travellers experience in society. It has been involved in direct work with Travellers since 1985.



PAVEE POINT
Travellers Centre



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