Meeting the Needs of Gypsies and Travellers

Advice to Schools

Introduction

It is the policy of East Lothian Council that all young people have an entitlement to be valued as individuals and to be given every opportunity to fulfil their potential within a democratic and multi-racial society. Pupils whose cultural, linguistic or educational experience differs from that of most pupils in the school may need special consideration to ensure that they are not disadvantaged in the key areas of literacy and numeracy, or by the curriculum in general.

Schools should plan to meet pupil needs through effective identification and assessment and flexible working arrangements (e.g. differentiated teaching and learning approaches; partnership with other agencies).

The advice contained within this document closely relates to the East Lothian policy on Equality and Fairness, and to the Outreach Teaching Services’ policy and procedures on English as an Additional Language.

A key document in auditing a school’s provision is ‘Taking a closer look at: Inclusion and Equality – meeting the needs of Gypsies and Travellers’, published as part of the self-evaluation series to supplement How Good Is Our School?.

Schools should also refer to the guidance to good practice ‘Keeping in Touch – Gypsy/Traveller Children’ issued by Children Missing from Education (Scotland), attached as Appendix 1.
Guidelines for schools

School Organisation

Interrupted learning
- Arrangements should be in place to allow for regular contact between staff and travelling pupils, and to promote continuity of learning over periods of absence.
- Where there are relatively predictable patterns of movement supported distance learning can be planned for.
- Flexible enrolment procedures and prompt transfer of information can also support continuity of learning where a pupil moves from one school to another. (Hand-held or computerised information can be useful.)

Enrolment/Induction
- Staff involved in enrolment should be welcoming and sensitive to individual circumstances and be able to offer help and advice where necessary.
- Information should be made available to parents and pupils in a variety of formats other than print-based (e.g. face-to-face or video).
- The Head Teacher (or his/her representative) should meet with the family to explain all policies and procedures, including health and safety, bullying and race equality, and to agree how the school and family will communicate.
- Enrolment practices should ensure that parental views on access to religion and sex education are recorded.
- All staff involved in the enrolment/induction process should be trained/kept informed of policies and practices relating to Gypsy and Traveller communities.
Ethos
- The school’s equality and inclusion policies and practices should be given a high profile, and all staff and pupils should be aware of them.

Monitoring of bullying and racist incidents
- School policies on recording and monitoring incidences of bullying and racism should be clearly stated and known to all.
- How such policies work in practice in individual schools should be drawn to the attention of Gypsy and Traveller parents and pupils, and information should be provided on local authority and national support networks.

Key member of staff
- A key member of staff who will be the first point of contact, and who will deal with any issues arising, should be designated and made known to the family/pupils/staff.

Social and pastoral support
- Systems should be in place which are flexible and responsive to individual pupil circumstances.

Placement of pupils
- Pupils should be placed in teaching groups which are age appropriate and can provide peer support.

Assessment and Intervention
- In-school systems should be used to identify and organise required interventions in relation to any additional support needs (learning, attendance, behaviour, social/emotional).
- Any assessments used or target-setting arrangements put in place should take individual circumstances into account.
- All staff should be kept fully informed of any such needs, and arrangements which are in place to address them.

Absence monitoring
Absence monitoring policies and practices should take account of individual circumstances. While expectations for school attendance are the same for all pupils, schools should encourage parents to give as much advance notice as possible where pupils will be absent for an extended period of time, and where parents make clear their intention to return. In accordance with SEED guidance, where a family informs the school of their intention to go travelling and return, this should be recorded as ‘authorised absence’. Information on the appropriate coding of absences is contained in Appendix 2 of the departmental policy and procedures on School Attendance. It is
important that the Children and Families Support Worker (Attendance) [C&FSW (A)] is kept informed of any extended absence.
In addition, if the school is aware of a family with school-aged children coming into the area, where the children have not been enrolled in a local school, this information should be passed to the C&FSW (A).

Planning for Teaching

Knowledge of culture
- The terminologies of ‘Gypsy’ and ‘Traveller’ are used to encompass a diverse range of travelling communities. The term ‘Traveller’ covers a number of different groups with different histories and cultures. These include:
  - English and Welsh gypsies
  - Irish and Scottish travellers
  - Show people (fairground travellers)
  - Circus travellers
  - Bargees (occupational boat dwellers)
  - New travellers.

The term ‘Traveller’ is acceptable to most members of these groups whereas the term ‘Gypsy’ is only acceptable to some. Families originating from Eastern and Central Europe prefer the term ‘Roma’.

For many, close family ties, traditional values and mobility are the features of their cultural background which may need special consideration within education settings.
- Resources which provide helpful information are available at Prestonpans Education centre.
- It is likely that the best way to know the priorities and expectations of individual communities and families is through dialogue.
- Direct involvement with families is acknowledged as a key factor in building trust, changing perceptions and supporting young people to access their rights to an appropriate education.
- Opportunities should be provided for all staff and pupils to learn about Gypsy and Traveller history, culture, languages and lifestyle through Equal Opportunities and Citizenship activities.

Realistic expectations
- It is important that teachers have realistic expectations of pupils’ abilities. Interrupted learning because of lifestyle may be the cause of low attainment in
literacy and numeracy. It should not automatically be assumed that any specific learning difficulties are present.

- Suitably challenging learning targets, which are informed by assessment other than literacy and numeracy levels and which take account of individual pupil circumstances, should be set.

**Flexible approaches**

- Teachers should consider how flexible approaches to teaching and learning could address the needs of Gypsy and Traveller pupils (e.g. homework club, helpline).
- Differentiated work which addresses gaps in pupils’ learning and allows them to show what they can achieve
- Multi-sensory classroom activities
- A prepared bank of distance learning materials which can be completed out of school
- Learning activities which take place outside the classroom environment.

**Relevant curricular materials and approaches**

- It is important that stereotypes and negative representations in curricular materials are avoided. Resources providing positive representations of Gypsy and Traveller people are available.
- A relevant and affirming culture is important for all pupils and it is particularly important for Gypsy and Traveller pupils to see their culture, language and values reflected in the whole school experience. Resources/topics of study can be selected to achieve this.

**Curriculum adaptation**

- Some families may not see the relevance of secondary education and perceive that it undermines their own values and aspirations for their children. Consequently, a secondary curriculum that takes into account cultural and vocational aspirations should be available.
- Schools should access appropriate off-site curricular opportunities where these are available.

**In-class support**

- Provide a ‘buddy’ who will give support with school routines
- A safe place to keep belongings and school work
- Being paired with others who will offer peer support for curriculum access if required
- Targeted use of support staff to ensure that the class teacher is able to provide a curriculum which is accessible and appropriate
- Study support, targeted teaching and mentoring support can be useful in allowing pupils to experience success and positive feedback
Notes

Useful background information:

- A Gypsy or Traveller child may have little experience of being in a large group of people in a large building with separate rooms.
- The normal routines of school (bells, registration, breaks/playtimes, behaviour rules etc.) should be clearly explained.
- All children should be given the opportunity to feel a sense of belonging in the school, even when attendance is temporary, and all pupils should be given the same resources/equipment (e.g. named trays or jotters, labelled coat peg etc).
- Some families may feel that ‘fun’ homework is not appropriate as most families tend to put a high priority on literacy and numeracy.
- Gypsy and Traveller culture can have strict rules about privacy and gender-related issues (e.g. separate changing areas for boys and girls; mixed gender teaching groups; girls being taught by male teachers; sex education outwith the family context).
- Education is sometimes seen as eroding cultural values or providing learning which is not relevant.
- Some families may feel that secondary school provides a negative influence (e.g. sex, drugs, different ways of living).
- Parents and pupils may not like to be asked questions about their culture in a public forum because they feel it is an invasion of their privacy.
- Lives of travelling people are not ruled by the clock or calendar – their culture may require them to be elsewhere at specific times.
- Parents should be encouraged to inform schools of their travelling plans, although some families may be reluctant to commit their intentions to anyone else.