

Case study: Small village primary school in the north-east of England with 12% Gypsy Travellers on roll

Focus: Building high aspirations, family learning, celebrating Gypsy Traveller culture

Background

This school is a small village community primary school. The majority of the children live in the village, although a few parents choose to bring their children to the school from the neighbouring area. The village is made up of a mix of housing and has a permanent privately-owned site for Traveller families. The village is in an ex-mining area which now has a significant level of unemployment.

The school is smaller than most primary schools and currently has 113 children on roll aged between 4 and 11 years. Twelve per cent of these children are Gypsy Travellers. There is an independent pre-school on the same site which many children attend prior to their enrolment at the school.

Foundation Stage profile data shows that on entry to school, attainment is below national expectations for many children. Attainment is very low in communication, language and literacy, with few children working at or above the expected levels for their age.

Overall, the number of children who join and leave the school during the school year is above average. The proportion of children eligible for free school meals is above average. The proportion of children with special educational needs, mainly for moderate learning difficulties, is below average. The majority of children are White British and the largest minority ethnic group is Gypsy/Roma. Currently all Traveller children attending the school ascribe themselves as Gypsy/Roma.

'Children from Traveller backgrounds achieve well owing to the very good relationships the school has established with the Traveller community, the systems that have been established to provide children with work when they are not in school, and the close relationship the school has with the local education authority Traveller Support Service. As a result, children's attendance has improved significantly over recent years and parents have come to recognise the value of education and learning as important for their children.

Children develop a high respect for the feelings and values of others and gain a very good insight into the traditions of other cultures, particularly that of the Traveller community.' (Ofsted 2005)



What is being done?

The headteacher and deputy headteacher share with staff a strong vision for the school and for the community it serves. The vision of the school is that every child should have the opportunity to achieve and that safety, security and happiness are essential conditions for learning to take place. It is recognised that children come from a variety of backgrounds and experiences. These differing backgrounds and experiences are celebrated and acknowledged in lessons and in the visual displays around the school. The school values the vibrant culture which Gypsy/Roma children bring and appreciates that sharing this culture enriches the ethos for all children.



The headteacher and deputy headteacher are committed to ensuring that the school provides an exciting environment where children will want to learn and will be keen to attend regularly. The school offers a visually stimulating environment with high quality interactive displays and varied learning opportunities. The school has high aspirations for children and the community. There is a strong belief that the outside community has much to offer the school and that the school can raise the aspirations of that community.

- **Developing trust between school and the community**

Staff meet parents individually in the playground and are keen to listen to concerns and celebrate successes as they occur. Developing trust is seen as key to any engagement with parents, carers and the community.



- **Welcome DVD**

Staff and children have worked together to produce an introductory DVD for prospective parents and children. The DVD gives a tour around the school premises and introduces key personnel and activities. Copies of the DVD are available from the warden at the Traveller site and newly arrived families are able to see what the school is like before actually stepping inside the door.

- **The use of data to identify underperforming groups and children**

The use of data is seen as key to informing teaching and learning opportunities. Pupil progress is tracked termly in order to gain a clear understanding of where children are in relation to their targets. The specific context for each child is noted and individualised programmes are put in place as necessary. The data is analysed to identify underperforming groups, and teaching and learning is appropriately contextualised to raise achievement for all children.

- **The *Fly with Me* programme**

A personalised ten-week intervention programme was developed to improve the speaking and listening skills of Key Stage 1 Gypsy Travellers as a basis for raising attainment in writing. Existing National Strategy Additional Literacy Support (ALS) and Further Literacy Support (FLS) intervention programmes were used as a starting point. This was complemented by a personalised programme using a story book with a central character of a hobby horse. The programme was entitled *Fly with Me*, 'Fly' having connotations of raising aspirations and 'with me'

inclusive of all. This captured the imagination of the targeted Key Stage 1 Gypsy Traveller children, their older siblings and parents alike. Real hobby horses were created and activities have taken place on the local Traveller site. The local authority's Traveller Education Service were partners in this work, providing resources and expertise to further enhance the programme of work with both children and parents.



● Family learning

The school has run family learning sessions for five years but it has been difficult to encourage some Gypsy Traveller parents to attend the sessions. Running alongside the children's *Fly with Me* programme, a family learning programme was developed, with the opportunity for children and parents to work together on the Traveller site. This has established trust, motivation and a sense of joint responsibility, and has increased understanding of ways in which parents can support their children's learning in writing and have a greater understanding of target setting and national expectations.



- **Building aspirations for all children**

A strong element of the school's philosophy is to build high, but achievable aspirations for every pupil. The school is working with Connexions and with the local community to provide practical opportunities, both on the school site and further afield, for Year 5 and Year 6 children to experience aspects of a range of jobs. Children have the opportunity to question visiting tradespeople and professionals about their jobs and the training and qualities needed to follow their career paths. They are encouraged to identify qualities and key skills needed to achieve aspirations.



- **Recognition and celebration of other cultures**

There is an affirmation of different cultures throughout the curriculum and in the visual learning environment. Curriculum audits are regularly carried out to ensure that equality and diversity issues are embedded in the daily curriculum and not seen as an 'add on' or separate entity. Much recent work has moved from the celebration of cultures to the analysis of negative stereotyping and the effects this has on groups and individuals.

- **Speak up! Speak out!**

There is a high commitment to addressing race equality issues throughout the school. Children are given the opportunity to challenge their own perceptions and to understand and reflect upon the impact of their actions on others. Through daily 'Speak up! Speak out!' speaking and listening activities, the school has moved beyond celebrating all cultures into challenging stereotypes and preconceived ideas.

- **Children as young leaders**

The development of the whole child is central to the vision of the school and its community. Developing skills of leadership and responsibility are essential for the children in terms of learning lifelong skills and raising future aspirations. Upper Key Stage 2 children have many responsibilities throughout the school, including running their own ICT club for other children and being involved in a Young Sports Leaders initiative whereby they collaborate to provide fitness and team-building activities for younger children.



Outcomes

- **The use of data to identify underperforming groups and individuals**

By rigorous analysis of performance data the school was able to identify that, despite a strong foundation of working with Gypsy Traveller families, the attainment of these children, although higher than the attainment of the group nationally, was still below that of other groups in the school. This information provided a basis for the identification of a target group of Gypsy Traveller children for the *Fly with Me* programme. A baseline assessment was carried out for each child to identify the gaps in learning and to inform personalised teaching and learning programmes.

- **Fly with Me programme**

All children involved in the programme exceeded their predicted levels of attainment in writing at the end of the academic year and their comparative rate of achievement was higher than that of many in their peer group. The programme was developed with the opportunity for children and parents to work together. This has established trust, motivation and a sense of joint responsibility, and has increased understanding of ways in which parents can support their children's learning in writing and have a greater understanding of target setting and national expectations.



- **Family learning with Gypsy Traveller families**

Since the *Fly with Me* work with parents, Traveller parents are now attending the family learning sessions in school with non-Traveller parents. This year the school is focusing on the family learning opportunities of the Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL) initiative.

- **Building aspirations for all children**

In the past many Gypsy Traveller children have not transferred to secondary school; parents preferring instead to opt for Elective Home Education (EHE) post primary school. The early introduction to future career opportunities allows Traveller children and their parents to look at a range of opportunities for future economic well-being and may challenge negative perceptions about the value of secondary school for their children's future.

- **Recognition and celebration of other cultures**

Through the opportunities that the school provides, children are tolerant and respectful towards one another and towards other cultures and traditions. The emphasis on celebration of culture means that children value differences and have the self-confidence and belief to aim high in their lives.

- **Speak up! Speak out!**

The daily sessions provide an open forum where children can discuss topical issues and know that their views and responses will be valued. Not only does this raise standards in speaking and listening, it also reflects the partnership in learning that the school strives towards. Children's views are heard and responded to as a starting point for any curriculum innovation.



Feedback

'All our families bring something special to our school. The Gypsy Traveller children bring a background of experiences and knowledge that we have learnt from.' (Headteacher)

'First of all listen... let the children talk about being Travellers. Our children who have been to other schools will tell us that very often the school doesn't mention the fact that they are a Traveller pupil. In our school we actively seek to engage children and their families in conversations about being a Traveller.' (Headteacher)

'I enjoy coming to this school because they do work about Travellers instead of ignoring us, they kind of appreciate us. Not like other schools, this is a much better school.' (Year 6 Gypsy Traveller pupil)

'The school welcomed us with open arms... we came on a Sunday... they were in school on a Monday. We got a really big welcome from everyone. There's absolutely no prejudice as a travelling family and we just feel very, very happy here. I would really recommend this school for any family, any colour, any creed. I think everyone's welcome here.' (Gypsy Traveller parent)



'What the school does well for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children is what it does well for all children. It has an inclusive approach to education. What impresses me is the creativity of their approaches and the enthusiasm they bring to the programme.' (LA head of learning support services)

