# RESEARCH REPORT SERIES

## Traveller Children's Experiences in Mainstream Post-Primary Schools in Northern Ireland: A Qualitative Study

by

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# Traveller Children's Experiences in Mainstream Post-Primary Schools in Northern Ireland: A Qualitative Study

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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## 1. Introduction

1.1 This report presents the findings of a research project commissioned by the Department of Education (DE) and undertaken by St. Mary's University College, Belfast.

1.2 Linking with recommendation 23 of the Final Report of the Promoting Social Inclusion (PSI) Working Group on Travellers, i.e. "Department of Education to commission research into the educational needs and experiences of Traveller parents and children", this study was carried out in order to provide evidence to the DE about Traveller children's experiences of integration and social inclusion in post-primary schools in Northern Ireland from an educational and social perspective.

1.3 In order to provide an all round perspective of the process of integration and social inclusion a wide range of individuals and organisations were included in the research. Data obtained from Traveller children are presented alongside that derived from consultation with a small number of parents of Traveller children enrolled in post-primary schools, post-primary school teachers and principals, representatives from the five education and library boards (ELBs), the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) and Traveller Support Groups. The majority of data were collected through semi-structured interviews; a small number of focus groups and a questionnaire survey of teachers were also carried out.

1.4 Fieldwork for the research was carried out between February 2002 and January 2003. Post-primary schools with Traveller children enrolled were identified from data obtained from DE relating to the academic year 2000/2001. Schools in Northern Ireland with more than four such pupils enrolled were approached and invited to participate in the research. All the Traveller children enrolled in these post-primary schools in Belfast and a one in three sample of Traveller children enrolled in these post-primary schools elsewhere in Northern Ireland were selected to take part in the interviews (n=58 pupils). In total, forty-four Traveller children participated. The views of seven Traveller parents were obtained via interviews. Interviews were also conducted with eighteen teachers and five principals/vice principals. Having determined the approximate number of teachers who had one or more Traveller children in their class, a total of one hundred and forty-one questionnaires were distributed to the schools for dissemination to those teachers. Fifty-six questionnaires were completed and returned, resulting in a 40 per cent response rate. Interviews were also carried out with representatives from each of the five education and library boards (ELBs) and the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS), as well as Traveller Movement (NI) and representatives from five of their member groups.

## 2. Main Findings

Traveller Pupils
2.1 The research indicates that Traveller pupils like being educated alongside their family and friends. They also like friendly teachers and being able to do their favourite subjects, for example physical education and art. Pupils found it more difficult to comment on what they disliked about post-primary school. Some pupils

disliked having to get up early for school, moving from classroom to classroom, doing homework, some individual teachers and certain subject areas, such as science and mathematics.

2.2 Non-attendance at school was often reported to be due to standard reasons, such as being ill or having to attend a medical appointment. However, there were many incidents reported by Traveller pupils of absence due to family events, such as weddings, funerals, christenings or simply visiting relatives. On some occasions this would last a few days or even a full week. Furthermore, pupils provided examples of absence from school due to helping out with domestic duties or with their father's work.

2.3 Many parents of the Traveller pupils had little or no contact with the school on matters associated with their children's education. Those parents who had contact with the school did so through Parents' Nights or an appointment with a teacher to discuss a child's report or incidents of misbehaving.

2.4 Traveller pupils thought that attending school was important, but it was evident that the skills of reading, writing and basic computation were valued most. Many pupils felt education was important for obtaining a job later in life but very few attached any importance to achieving qualifications. English and mathematics were deemed to be the most relevant subjects for Traveller pupils, mainly because these subjects enabled them to read, write, spell, count money and measure things. These skills were seen to be useful in successfully completing tasks associated with using tools, completing the driving theory test, reading letters or filling out forms and shopping. Some pupils felt technology and design was relevant, especially in situations where they have to use tools to make things. From the research it was evident that Traveller girls considered such occupations as hairdressing, beauty therapy and childcare appropriate career aspirations. However, other girls felt that they were destined to marry, have children and raise a family rather than pursue a career. Many Traveller boys aspired to enter vocational, trade-related jobs, such as plumbing, joinery or bricklaying and frequently this was linked to working alongside fathers or other family members. A number of Traveller pupils were attending further and higher education colleges (FHE) for training in vocational subjects. Approximately half of the 44 pupils interviewed felt they would be staying on at school up to Year 12, with some intending to go to FHE colleges after the age of sixteen. However, the remaining half were either undecided or planned to leave post-primary school before Year 12. A typical comment from this latter group was that it was not usual for Travellers to stay on at school.

2.5 Attendance at after-school clubs and taking part in extra-curricular activities were not apparent among the majority of the 44 Traveller pupils interviewed. This lack of involvement was explained by them as arising from lack of interest and practical reasons, such as having to leave straight after school because of transport arrangements. Most of the Traveller pupils had established friendships with their settled peers but did not necessarily spend time with them during lunch or break time because they opted to sit with their Traveller friends and family. Nor did they see their settled friends very often after school because they lived quite a distance away or because the Traveller pupils simply wanted to see their extended family, for example cousins, instead.

2.6 Half of those 44 pupils interviewed had experience of being bullied at school, either verbally or physically, and many felt it was because of their ethnicity. There was a reluctance on the part of the Traveller pupils to report incidents of bullying for fear of recrimination from the bully, or simply because they believed nothing could be done about it. There was mention of some incidents of bullying that ceased due to staff being informed and intervening.

2.7 Attending a mainstream post-primary school alongside settled pupils was what most Traveller pupils preferred. This was due to the opportunity this gave them to socialise in school with a wider circle of friends. Some Traveller pupils felt it would enable settled pupils to learn about and understand Traveller culture and lifestyle.

Traveller Parents
2.8 Parents cited proximity of schools to their home and the fact that there were other Travellers already attending as factors explaining their choice of post-primary schools. Two parents felt they had not been offered a genuine choice of schools and that Traveller children were destined to end up in particular schools. Getting an education and/or learning to read and write were the main reasons provided for sending their children to post-primary school. Three felt that, because of discrimination against Travellers in the workforce, attending post-primary school would not help their children to get a job.

2.9 Three of the parents interviewed indicated that to their knowledge their children had not experienced any problems with being bullied at school. While there were no current incidents of bullying reported by the parents, three discussed previous incidents and two parents said that they had a child who had left school early because of bullying. Two parents were resigned to the fact that bullying was part of Traveller children's lives.

2.10 Six parents were in favour of their children being offered a more vocational curriculum at Key Stage 4, for example EOTAS. While four parents had contact with their children's teachers via daytime visits to the school or attending Parents' Nights, two stressed that they found such occasions very intimidating. Five parents indicated that their children did not socialise with settled children outside of school hours. Three parents expressed concerns about their children falling into 'bad company' if they socialised with settled children.

2.11 In regard to aspirations for their children, the Traveller parents generally desired to see them get jobs and be able to support themselves. Two parents had more traditional aspirations for their daughters in terms of engagement and marriage. Two parents estimated that it would take Travellers at least another generation to be fully integrated into the education system.

Teachers
2.12 One in three teachers who completed the questionnaire considered their own awareness of Traveller culture and lifestyle was good or excellent, with just under half acknowledging it to be fair. A very small percentage of teachers reported receiving information or training at school on minority ethnic groups, e.g. Travellers. Information and training had been received by less than half of those teachers

interviewed. The majority of questionnaire respondents and interviewees felt that they required further training on minority ethnic groups, e.g. Travellers, in order to raise their awareness of Traveller culture, life and traditions; help them in their teaching of Traveller children; and update their knowledge of the Traveller pupils' circumstances.

2.13 Support received to help with the teaching of Traveller pupils came mainly from special education needs co-ordinators (SENCOs), Traveller support teachers and classroom assistants, according to those teachers who completed the questionnaire. Teachers interviewed referred to support being provided mainly by education welfare officers (EWOs) and ELB officers. There was a call by teachers for additional staff and resources to help with teaching Traveller pupils.

2.14 Teachers interviewed reported that Traveller children were bullied in school. However, they emphasised that it was not a regular occurrence and expressed some surprise that it was not in fact a major issue in schools. Questionnaire respondents noted two main issues associated with educating Traveller pupils: behaviour and attendance. With regard to behaviour it was reported that Traveller pupils had difficulty conforming to school requirements and were often unwilling to co-operate or follow instructions. Some reference was made to Traveller pupils' poor attitudes to teachers, dislike of correction and aggression. Many teachers noted as important the frequent absenteeism or non-attendance at school among Traveller pupils, with little or no explanation provided by the pupils. Reasons put forward to explain poor attendance among Traveller pupils included the Travellers' nomadic lifestyle; lack of amenities to aid preparation for school; importance attributed to family events; school not being a priority; and children staying at home to help with either domestic duties or working with their father.

2.15 Teachers who completed the questionnaire raised concerns about Traveller pupils' integration with their settled peers, poor literacy skills and lack of parental support for, or involvement in, post-primary education. Teachers also identified, as factors in the post-primary education of Travellers, issues such as low academic achievement; unwillingness to sit school examinations; timekeeping; having the proper uniform; non submission of homework; and leaving school at an early age. However, it must be noted that these factors could be attributed to settled pupils in post-primary schools in Northern Ireland, and not just Traveller pupils.

2.16 The majority of the 56 questionnaire respondents did not use resources relevant to Traveller culture and lifestyle in their teaching, due to their own lack of knowledge of Traveller culture and lifestyle and a lack of awareness of relevant educational resources that would be available to them. The teachers interviewed generally deemed the Northern Ireland Curriculum (NIC) irrelevant to the educational needs of Traveller children and stressed that a greater emphasis should be placed upon a more vocationally based curriculum. Teachers who completed the questionnaire were divided in their viewpoint on teachers' expectations of Traveller children's academic achievement. Half of them believed teachers had lower expectations and/or they justified low expectations of Traveller pupils' because of their poor attendance record, early school leaving age and non-participation in examinations. The remaining half of questionnaire respondents and most of the teacher interviewees emphasised that they or their school did not have low expectations of Traveller pupils' academic achievement. Nine out of ten teachers who completed a questionnaire felt that all

school children need to be offered more opportunities to learn about minority ethnic groups and this could help dissolve boundaries between ethnic groups, enabling settled pupils to become more understanding of Traveller culture.

2.17 Half of the 56 teachers who completed the questionnaire reported having similar relationships with the Traveller pupils as with settled pupils, with one-third describing their relationships as being very positive. Most of the teachers interviewed also reported that they had positive relationships with Traveller pupils. Teachers described Traveller pupils as having good relationships with one another and they were said to band together well. However teachers also reported incidents of disagreements and arguments. There were mixed responses from teachers regarding relationships between Traveller and settled pupils, with just over half referring to them as being friendly or good with occasional friction occurring. One-fifth noted a lack of socialising between settled and Traveller pupils and stressed that Travellers tended to stick together.

2.18 Over half of the 56 questionnaire respondents reported that they had not had any contact with Traveller parents. Those who have had contact often experienced difficulties organising meetings because appointments were often cancelled by parents.

Principals
2.19 Four principals and one vice-principal were asked whether settled parents had ever made an issue of the fact that Traveller children were attending the school. Two stated that this was not an issue that had ever been raised by parents and a further two explained that it had previously been an issue but had since been resolved. In one school settled parents refused to send their children to the school because Traveller pupils attended.

2.20 With regard to settled pupils, two of the principals interviewed felt that settled pupils did not have an issue with Travellers attending their school. However two principals indicated that there were current problems in their schools involving fighting and name-calling between settled and Traveller pupils.

Voluntary Groups
2.21 Services provided by the voluntary groups are varied and depend on success in obtaining funding and the number of Travellers in the area they serve. Some services pertaining to the education and training of young Travellers are offered by the groups. Examples include courses in personal development, IT, woodwork, plumbing and bricklaying for males who are 14+ years old. In addition training in office, organisational and computer skills, as well as courses on values, beliefs and self-identity are offered for 13-18 year old Travellers. One of the support groups has a purpose built Traveller Centre in Derry which provides a range of support facilities including a homework club. In addition, Traveller Support Groups offer other programmes and services, for example providing general support and information and lobbying for policy changes.

2.22 Several of the groups have staff who are qualified to deliver anti-discriminatory training which was developed by Traveller Movement (NI). A training programme about Traveller culture that explores the history, lifestyle, traditions and language of

Travellers and which addresses issues of prejudice and discrimination is also offered by a Traveller Support Group to schools and youth clubs. Contact with ELBs was described in a positive light by some of the groups. Other groups had minimal contact with ELBs. Groups also said they had minimal contact with post-primary schools.

2.23 Traveller Support Groups identified racism and bullying as two major issues which discouraged Traveller pupils from staying at school until the compulsory school leaving age. However an additional contributory factor cited by members of support groups was the cultural expectation regarding career aspirations of Traveller pupils. Girls were expected, in keeping with tradition, to become fully employed in childminding and domestic duties and boys were expected to work with their fathers. It was also felt that the benefits of education and qualifications for Travellers were diminished due to discrimination later in life when trying to gain employment. Poor or inadequate accommodation was also highlighted as a factor impacting on the education of Travellers. The NIC was referred to as having an adverse effect on Traveller pupils' participation in education at post-primary level: it was perceived as being irrelevant to the vocational and cultural aspirations of the Traveller community.

2.24 The promotion of multiculturalism and the fostering of positive attitudes to Travellers were two areas that Traveller Support Groups considered should be stressed in schools. They considered that awareness raising of Traveller culture and professional training in how to meet the needs of Traveller pupils would be essential for teachers. They also felt that we need a more relevant vocationally based curriculum in schools. In addition interviewees noted that a more collaborative approach and better communication among/between statutory and non-statutory sectors is required and this would go some way towards encouraging pupils to remain in school up to compulsory school leaving age.

Statutory Agencies
2.25 One ELB has its own written policy on Traveller education and the other four ELBs adhere to or are guided by either the DE's policy or the Forum for the Education of Traveller Children (NI). CCMS ensure that common policies, procedures and protocols are employed in Catholic maintained schools and they have produced an internal paper on primary education for Traveller children in Belfast.

2.26 Representatives from the statutory agencies highlighted the lack of real value attached to education by the parents of Traveller children as an issue in the full integration of Traveller pupils into post-primary education. However several indicated that Travellers have yet to see the benefits gained by having academic qualifications. Additional factors impacting on the education of Traveller pupils were reported as: cultural issues such as marrying at an early age; being moulded into following in parents' footsteps, for example, selling tools/scrap or raising a family; frequently attending family events; having poor literacy skills before entering post-primary school; and viewing the curriculum as irrelevant and not meeting the specific needs of Travellers.

2.27 Suggestions for enhancing the integration process included highlighting the importance of, and supporting Traveller parents in, sending children to school from an early age. This would reveal to parents the value of education and its links to child development. At the same time the problem of illiteracy among some Traveller

parents should be addressed to help them in supporting their children's school-work; this was thought by some to be possibly a slow and difficult process. In addition, educating teachers about the issues that can make it difficult for Travellers to be integrated fully into post-primary schools was recommended. It was also stated that a more diverse curriculum which would include the development of social skills and could facilitate EOTAS programmes was needed.

## 3. Recommendations from the Research Findings

3.1 (REC.1) The culture of the Traveller community embraces and celebrates major family events, for example engagements, weddings and funerals and it is usual for children to attend and participate on these occasions. This aspect of Traveller culture should be understood and accepted by schools and teachers and respected as a cultural reality that is inherent to the lifestyle of Travellers. Ways of integrating such absences into the school year of Traveller pupils should be sought so as to minimise the impact on their academic progress as much as possible. This could be most effectively done by looking at flexible approaches to the curriculum and with the support of Traveller parents.

3.2 (REC.2) The open-door policy that currently exists in post-primary schools should be further emphasised to Traveller parents to make them aware and encourage them to avail of this policy, with schools ensuring that their communication with Traveller parents and pupils is free of jargon and complex language.

3.3 (REC.3) Traveller pupils and parents need to become aware of the advantages of achieving academic qualifications. Traveller pupils and parents already acknowledge the importance of being literate and numerate. However they also need to be aware of the advantages of achieving qualifications in other areas. To help promote this awareness, pupils should be actively encouraged to remain at school to at least Year 12 and possibly beyond to realise the benefits of gaining qualifications.

3.4 (REC.4) Traveller pupils' plans and aspirations focus on vocational-related occupations and therefore it would be appropriate for post-primary schools to offer educational pathways through which the pupils could gain qualifications and experience in the vocational areas they aspire to, while still studying core GCSE subjects. Schools need to find ways of managing the curriculum that offer flexible curricular provision.

3.5 (REC.5) Extra-curricular activities and after-school clubs which target the specific interests of Traveller pupils should be offered in post-primary schools, thus encouraging social interaction between Traveller and settled pupils, with the need for Traveller parents to be encouraged to send their children. Clubs should also be provided to compensate for some Traveller parents' inability to help with homework.

3.6 (REC.6) There is a real need and desire for teachers in post-primary schools to receive informed training and to develop their knowledge about minority ethnic groups. Special care should be taken to ensure that teachers are familiar with Traveller culture and lifestyle. Training would raise awareness and promote understanding of the Traveller community and would help teachers to rethink the pedagogy associated

with their subject area to create innovative ways of involving Traveller pupils fully in the learning process.

3.7 (REC.7) Post-primary schools should be provided with more support. This should take the form of additional staff who have been trained to meet the needs of Travellers pupils and are specifically designated to working with Traveller pupils. Traveller-related educational resources are needed to enrich the learning experience of Traveller pupils and of all pupils in schools.

3.8 (REC.8) Rules and regulations are necessary in the post primary school to ensure a safe and healthy learning environment and to promote an atmosphere in which teachers can educate and pupils can learn to the best of their abilities. Schools should ensure that their rules and regulations take sufficient account of any additional needs or cultural differences that pertain among their pupils. All pupils, including Travellers, should be encouraged to comply with the structures and processes relating, for example, to attendance, discipline and behaviour. It should be the norm that parental support is encouraged and employed to promote adherence to these rules.

3.9 (REC.9) From the research it is evident that some teachers show agreement with the statement that teachers' expectations of Traveller children when in school tended to be unreasonably low. It is vital that these expectations do not impact on the provision of equality of opportunity for all pupils, including Traveller pupils.

3.10 (REC.10) Post-primary school pupils should be provided with the opportunity to learn about minority ethnic groups, e.g. Travellers, either as part of their academic subjects or as a separate part of the curriculum. This would include the promotion of multiculturalism and combating prejudice.

3.11 (REC.11) Post-primary schools and ELBs should consider availing more of the services of Traveller Support Groups who can offer training and information on Traveller culture, identity and lifestyle.

3.12 (REC.12) The benefits of education and achieving academic qualifications may be valued more by the Traveller community if employers actively promoted job applications from minority ethnic groups, such as Travellers. This could lead to the creation for Travellers of a working environment in the settled community that is free from discrimination and bigotry. In turn this would have an impact on the attitudes and aspirations of post-primary Traveller pupils and their parents.

3.13 (REC.13) Poor and inadequate accommodation for Travellers adversely affects Traveller children's education at every level, including post-primary school. New or much improved facilities need to be established on Traveller sites to enable children to get ready for school in the morning and complete their homework.

3.14 (REC.14) Further improved communication and collaboration between statutory and non-statutory sectors is required so that society can work towards the common goal of addressing the educational needs of Traveller children at post-primary level and establishing a position of trust with the Traveller community.

# INTRODUCTION

## 4. Introduction

4.1 Linking with recommendation 23 of the Final Report of the Promoting Social Inclusion (PSI) Working Group on Travellers, i.e. "Department of Education to commission research into the educational needs and experiences of Traveller parents and children", this research project was carried out in order to provide evidence to the Department of Education (DE) on Traveller children's experiences of integration and social inclusion in post-primary schools in Northern Ireland from an educational and social perspective. The report by the PSI Working Group highlighted a particular difficulty faced by Travellers in Northern Ireland, that of poor levels of educational attainment. It was noted in the report that most Travellers had few if any academic or formal qualifications, for example GCSEs; that illiteracy was rife among the community; that non-attendance at post-primary schools was a regular occurrence; and that there may be only a handful of Travellers in further or higher education.

4.2 Where provision for equality of opportunity in general is concerned, education has a crucial role in creating an inclusive society (Craft, 1996). In the United Kingdom the issue of social class and the need to ensure equal access to education for all dominated educational discourse about equality of opportunity in the 1960s and 70s, but towards the 1990s interest became focused on egalitarianism in general. Issues such as racial equality, gender equality and latterly equal opportunities for those with disabilities have been the focus for research and debate in relation to the fair division of goods in society.

4.3 As part of this agenda there have been attempts to promote equality of opportunity through educational provision. The Northern Ireland Curriculum (NIC), for example, was introduced in 1989 to ensure the spiritual, moral, cultural, intellectual and physical development of all pupils. Enshrined in the Education Reform Order of 1989, which introduced a common curriculum in Northern Ireland, was the notion of equality of opportunity. The use of an equal opportunities framework has not been without contention however. Questions about the meaning of equality and how equal opportunities can operate in the education system, which by its very nature could be seen as competitive, have confused the issue. In addition, the extent to which minority ethnic groups have specific needs has been largely ignored despite claims that ethnicity is a major factor in underachievement in schools. Craft (1996) states that education facilitates acculturation into the value system, economy and polity of society: it is part of the enabling process that promotes effective citizens. However, as the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination noted in 1996, there have been few attempts to bridge the cultural gaps between minority ethnic groups and mainstream society, a link necessary for effective education. Drudy and Lynch (1993) claim there have been few attempts in Irish schools to recognise the cultural traditions of minorities: ethnic groups therefore have traditionally been expected to adapt to the curriculum of school even though it largely excludes them.

4.4 This report addresses the issues of integration and social inclusion within the context of the mainstreaming of Traveller children in post-primary schools in Northern Ireland. Travellers are an indigenous ethnic minority who are committed to nomadism as a central element of their cultural identity. Traditionally Travellers have

experienced antipathy and rejection from the settled mainstream community and this is exacerbated by the general lack of appropriate provision of caravan sites and access to social services or health care.  It is estimated that there are 1,685 Irish Travellers living in Northern Ireland (Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency, 2001) and in 2000 an Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) report entitled *Education Other Than at School/Special Support Programme for Peace and Reconciliation (EOTAS/SSPPR)* documented that there were 162 post-primary pupils belonging to the Traveller community in Northern Ireland.

4.5 Belonging to a minority ethnic group means that Travellers have a common ancestry, share fundamental cultural values and traditions, have a language of their own and are seen by themselves and others as distinct and different.  It is also important to note that, as Save the Children (2001) reported, "the definition of Gypsies and Travellers does not exclude those who are settled or those who are presently living in houses.  An ethnicity or ethnic identity is not somehow 'lost' when a family settles: it continues and adapts to the new circumstances".  In relation to common ancestry, it is not possible to become a Traveller: one has to be born as such. This is reflected in the fact that traditionally Travellers would marry someone within their minority ethnic group.  For Travellers it is crucial to maintain cultural values and traditions. Family connections and forging partnerships with extended families are a central element to Traveller culture and lifestyle, as is the tradition of being self-employed and adapting to a Traveller economy.  Weddings and funerals are major events in the tradition of Travellers and are marked by large gatherings, and these ritual celebrations and other aspects of their tradition are passed down through the generations.  There is a specific language associated with Travellers known as Shelta, or Gammon, as the Travellers themselves refer to it.  How far this language is adopted by the new generation of Travellers is open to question.

4.6 Travellers share experience of social exclusion with other ethnic nomadic groups in Europe, for example the Roma/Gypsies, who also face wide-scale disadvantage and discrimination. Drudy and Lynch (1993) claimed that the minority status of Travellers has traditionally either been ignored or insufficiently addressed and this raises serious issues about the social inclusion of Travellers and their acceptance as a legitimate minority ethnic group in society. The social exclusion of Travellers in Northern Ireland has been documented by many of the voluntary sector Traveller Support Groups which have raised awareness of the disadvantages Travellers face regarding such issues as long-term unemployment, education, poor living conditions, health, mortality rate and the attitudes and behaviour of the settled community.  Long-term unemployment is high among Travellers with approximately only one in ten employed and the remainder heavily reliant on social security benefits. Regarding the education of Travellers, the vast majority do not have any formal qualifications and a large proportion are illiterate.  Non-attendance at school is a major problem among the Traveller community in Northern Ireland, and for those children attending post-primary school, the majority do not stay on after the age of sixteen.  Unsuitable living conditions and lack of sites and basic amenities such as running water, sanitation and electricity are a further significant problem experienced by Traveller families.  Due to the poor standard of accommodation and facilities there are high levels of ill health, with the mortality rate for Traveller children being devastatingly high. Added to these, is the apparent lack of acceptance from the settled community of Travellers.

4.7 The integration and social inclusion of Travellers has become a major issue for government in Northern Ireland in recent years and provision for Travellers has been consistently under review. A significant development in 1993 in Northern Ireland was the creation of the Forum for the Education of Traveller Children, a statutory body whose members include representatives from the five Education and Library Boards (ELBs), the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS), and the DE. This forum is active in the promotion and enhancement of Traveller education through, for example, the development of learning and teaching resources/materials for schools relevant to Traveller culture, the provision of in-service training and consultation with a network of Traveller Support Groups. With the introduction of the Race Relations Order (Northern Ireland) in 1997, the formation of the Equality Commission and the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission in 1998, and the introduction of Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, government has now an even bigger obligation to ensure equality of opportunity and the promotion of good relations among all communities and groups in Northern Ireland, one of which is the Traveller community. This, according to Save the Children (2001), gives "a more proactive edge to the avoidance of discrimination".

4.8 In July 1998, government in Northern Ireland launched a special initiative known as New Targeting Social Need (NTSN). This initiative had the task of ensuring that the needs of the most disadvantaged groups, including Travellers, would be addressed. *The Final Report of the PSI Working Group on Travellers* (2000) made ten recommendations in relation to education. Some of these included: providing specific advice to schools on dealing with racist bullying and intimidation, with schools having to develop strategies dealing with this issue; developing a more flexible post-14 curriculum for Travellers which would include a combination of academic and vocational subjects; monitoring Traveller children's progress and using data to set and measure achievement against targets; and as mentioned earlier, commissioning research into the educational needs and experiences of Traveller parents and children. This last recommendation is being addressed by the present study.

## 5. Research from Northern Ireland

5.1 A report by Gallagher and Leitch (1999) for the Commission for Racial Equality for Northern Ireland (now part of the Equality Commission) entitled *Education and Ethnic Minorities in Northern Ireland, a Survey of Teachers*, found that only four per cent of teachers surveyed received information and guidance on ethnic minorities during their initial teacher education, rising to only 15 per cent as part of in-service training. However, there was a strong indication by the majority of teachers that they would like to be offered the opportunity, through in-service training, to gain knowledge and guidelines on ethnic minority groups. Most teachers also favoured a series of pro-active measures towards offering special support and provision for children from ethnic minority communities in schools, especially Traveller children who regularly change schools.

5.2 Connolly and Keenan (2000) in their report investigating racial attitudes and prejudice in Northern Ireland found, from a survey carried out with approximately 1,300 people, that nearly half did not actually believe that the nomadic lifestyle of Travellers was a valid one and consequently felt that the government should not

adequately support and resource it. Approximately half of the respondents stated they would not be willing to accept Irish Travellers who come to live in Northern Ireland as citizens of Northern Ireland and they did not want them as residents in their local area. Two-thirds felt they would not like a Traveller as a work colleague; slightly more would not want Travellers as close friends; and nearly four out of five would not want Travellers as a relative by way of marrying a close member of their family.

5.3 Connolly and Keenan (2000) also produced a report on the experiences of education, training and employment in Northern Ireland of members of minority ethnic groups. Regarding Traveller children's experiences and perspectives on education, the authors found that most children from the Travelling community did not continue their education at post-primary school. This was due to fear of possible bullying and teasing by their settled peers and the feeling that teachers had low expectations regarding their educational attainment. These factors could have an effect on the standard of education Traveller children receive. It was also reported that non-attendance at school was due to the lack of value some Travellers attached to education. With the exception of learning to read and write the report indicated they did not feel that education was relevant for the uptake and development of a trade linked to the Traveller economy. This was linked to the view that it would be unlikely that they would be offered a job. In contrast to this lack of value regarding education, which was not apparent for all Travellers, there was indeed a desire expressed by most of the Travellers interviewed to learn more and gain qualifications.

5.4 At a Traveller Education Conference in 2000 entitled *Putting Traveller Education Centre Stage*, the then Minister for Education stated that it was in the best interests of both settled and Traveller children that they be educated together in an environment free from discrimination, where all children learn about understanding and respecting different cultures. This message was reiterated by the chairperson of the Forum for the Education of Traveller Children (NI) who stressed that Traveller children had an entitlement to the NIC, that they has the right to be treated on an equal basis with their settled peers and that they should have the opportunity to learn in a welcoming environment which was free of prejudice. A representative from the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) also spoke of a number of encouraging outcomes obvious in post-primary schools which had Traveller children enrolled. One outcome was the high attainment levels achieved by a small number of Traveller children. However, there were a few problems identified in some of the schools visited, including an uninviting and unchallenging learning environment for Traveller children in which learning needs were not properly met. It was proposed by the ETI representative that in order to improve the low attainment levels achieved by the majority of Traveller children at schools, it was necessary to introduce procedures to monitor and evaluate Traveller children's progress from an integrated perspective. Regular non-attendance at school by post-primary age Traveller children, particularly boys, was also highlighted as needing attention and this would crucially involve collaboration with parents. It was suggested that all schools should develop an understanding, acceptance and celebration of Traveller culture and lifestyle. Suggestions put forward during the conference by delegates who attended included the need for the post-primary curriculum at Key Stages 3 and 4 to focus more on skills, e.g. negotiation, decision-making and practical skills, as some young Travellers perceive the NIC as irrelevant to their specific needs. One final suggestion referred to the need for research into

education provision for Travellers which includes direct consultation with them. This current study goes some way to addressing that particular suggestion.

5.5 Noonan (2001) produced a case study of the PSI Working Group Initiative established as part of the new TSN policy. He acknowledged representation on the PSI Working Group by members of the Traveller community and Traveller Support Groups as being important and worthwhile. However, he had concerns regarding the extent to which the terms of reference had been met. Concerns were also expressed about the writing and consultation surrounding the final report of the PSI Working Group. Regardless of this, there was a realisation on the part of the Traveller Support Groups that recommendations from the final report could potentially bring real and worthwhile change for Travellers in Northern Ireland. The research findings and recommendations presented in the current study will hopefully raise awareness of the experiences of Traveller children in post-primary schools and potentially go some way towards encouraging change on the part of schools regarding the integration and social inclusion of Traveller pupils.

5.6 Conclusions from research on Travellers in Belfast, detailed in the 2002 report *Combating Exclusion Promoting Inclusion*, noted that relevant education was one way of sustaining change for Travellers. It was suggested that a greater emphasis was needed on devising a curriculum which lent itself to the culture and lifestyle of Travellers, thus ensuring school to be a place which reinforced a positive experience for Traveller children. One conclusion was that the small number of Traveller children attending post-primary school up to compulsory school leaving age was an important contribution to further exclusion later in life. One method suggested to combat this was the introduction of more innovative education programmes such as EOTAS.

5.7 As stated previously, one of the most important social processes in promoting inclusion is education. It is accepted that the NIC has at its heart the aspiration to provide a broad and balanced education for every child irrespective of social class, religious persuasion, ethnic status, origin or cultural preference. It is commonly held that through the process of education children should be equipped with a range of skills, accumulated knowledge and the personal outlook and confidence to enable them to fulfil their roles as workers, citizens and social beings. The aspiration of policy makers may be that education should support all children equally and discriminate against none yet, in a technologically advanced society, many children emerge from the educational system ill equipped academically, socially or vocationally (Northern Ireland Economic Research Centre, 2000).

## 6. Information from Scotland

6.1 The Advisory Committee on Scotland's Travelling People was established by the Scottish Office in 1971. The first committee's remit, although quite broad, was "to keep the whole situation relating to 'Scotland's Travelling People' under review over a three-year period, in particular to provide a bridge between the Travellers and the settled community with a view to achieving greater tolerance and understanding of each other's point of view, and in general to act as a focal point for the further consideration of the welfare of Travellers". Since its establishment the committee has never had executive power and has remained an advisory body. Its role has focused significantly on advising ministers on site and accommodation issues. However,

during its existence (1971-1999) the Advisory Committee has proposed recommendations in other areas of Traveller life, including education.

6.2 The remit of the Advisory Committee's third term was "to encourage the provision of adequate educational and other services to Travellers which are standard to other sections of the population". Their report (1982) proposed a number of recommendations, two of which included reference to the fact that traditions and culture caused significant problems which prevented Travellers from taking full advantage of the education system and that the education system encountered several difficulties in "delivering its blessings to Travellers". Recommendations included: there should be collaborative effort by all local education authorities; Travellers should be integrated into mainstream education at all stages; Teachers should have a knowledge of Travellers' culture and values; and schools should have access to reasonable support and appropriate materials. It was proposed that "at least one College of Education…should be a focus of expertise on education for Travellers".

6.3 One area included in the Advisory Committee's eight term remit was "to liaise with local authorities and other agencies on the social needs of Travellers; in particular to encourage the use and expansion of educational and health facilities for Travellers". Their report (1997) contained a large number of recommendations relating to education. These included: the Scottish Office should incorporate the particular needs of Travellers within its guidance on teacher training and curriculum initiatives; local authorities should support regular attendance at school of Traveller children; positive discrimination should be provided through, for example, provision of transport; and local authorities should seek to educate all staff as part of their ethnic minorities training.

6.4 Recommendations in the ninth and final report of the Advisory Committee (1999) included: local authorities and schools should be specific in their plans regarding how they intend to ensure inclusion; increased attendance and achievements of Travellers should be promoted; and local authorities and others in partnership with Traveller communities should set specific targets to ensure a shared commitment to improve the situation of Travellers in education.

6.5 In 1991 the Scottish Traveller Education Programme (STEP) was established by the Scottish Office as a national centre to undertake research into the integration of Travellers into the education system, and to maintain a specialist library. Research conducted by the programme between 1992-1998 found that Travellers in Scotland were often still mobile, particularly showground and circus communities. The drop-out rate in the secondary schools in their sample often coincided with the move from Year 3 to Year 4 and was frequently attributed to the difficulties Traveller pupils encountered building portfolios of achievement, which were part of the new system of continuous assessment.

6.6 With regard to meeting the needs of Traveller pupils, the research highlighted a number of issues raised by schools including: a general lack of support at local authority level; a lack of flexibility in classroom organisation; and an increasing reduction in Traveller pupils' self-esteem as they got older. Schools were concerned about the underachievement of Traveller pupils and some commented on the lack of relevance of the curriculum for Travellers' lives. The research concluded by calling

for a more "integrated but flexible approach" to meet the needs of Travellers and other interrupted learners.

6.7 Other research (Lloyd and Norris 1998, Lloyd, Stead and Jordan, 1999) found that racist bullying from peers which usually occurred outside of the classroom and a lack of support from school staff were key causes for the exclusion of Travellers from the education system. Research focusing on teachers and Travellers (Lloyd, Stead, Jordan and Norris 1999) found that most schools had defined the behaviour of some Traveller children as problematic. The kind of difficulties described included: a perceived lack of co-operation in class; difficulties with arriving late and absence; problems to do with missing parts of the curriculum and specific learning difficulties; problems with peer group relationships; difficulties relating to bullying of Traveller pupils; style of addressing adults; and difficulties associated with transition to secondary school.

6.8 Research conducted by Save the Children in Scotland (1996) indicated that formal schooling continued to be a low priority among the Traveller community. Only one-fifth of the secondary age children in their sample attended school with regularity and almost half were either absent or intermittent attenders. Children (of primary and secondary school age) cited learning, reading and school dinners as the most important reasons for attendance. Travelling, bullying and "I can't be bothered" were the main reasons given for non-attendance. Approximately 65 per cent of adults and the same proportion of children surveyed stated that no one had tried to enforce school attendance. Interaction with non-Traveller pupils was not good, and "bullying" was the most common response given by children when asked to specify the worst things about school.

6.9 A survey carried out in Edinburgh (*The Young Travellers' Project* (2000) supported by the Edinburgh Youth Social Inclusion Pilot Programme), revealed that many of the young people in the sample indicated that school was a bad experience and referred to fighting, being picked on by teachers and pupils and discrimination as the main issues. In *Scotland's Travelling People* (2000) the problem of interrupted learning and the level of bullying were identified as key issues in the education of Traveller children.

6.10 The Equal Opportunities Committee (EOC) of the Scottish Parliament carried out an inquiry into Travelling people and public sector policies. The report, published in 2001, cited a number of main areas of concern including: the need, particularly at secondary level, for more flexible alternatives to school; a lack of awareness of Traveller culture in school policies and teacher training; and the monitoring of strategies to prevent bullying.

6.11 *Achieving Inclusion in Scottish Schools*, produced in 2002 by HMI, presents seven key messages from the findings: schools should have high expectations for all of their pupils; all pupils should experience success; inclusion requires a flexible, dynamic response to the needs of individuals; inclusive education can be delivered through a variety of settings; inclusive education relies on schools working in partnership with others; schools should support and develop the whole child; and inclusion requires effective leadership.

6.12 A recent audit by the Scottish Executive of research on minority ethnic issues in Scotland from a 'race' perspective concluded that while most research focused on minority ethnic people in general, the studies that have focused on specific ethnic groups have largely concentrated on Chinese or Traveller families. The main themes identified in the audit include: teacher education courses failing to provide training to develop teacher competencies for working within a contemporary multi-cultural, multi-racial classroom; institutional and structural barriers being faced by minority ethnic groups in gaining access to all levels of education services; some minority ethnic parents, including Gypsy Travellers, being particularly vulnerable to exclusion; concerns about the possible under-use of early years educational provision by minority ethic communities; and very little being known about the attainment levels of minority ethnic young people. The audit acknowledged the extent to which STEP had considerably boosted research related to Gypsy Travellers in Scotland.

## 7. Information from the Republic of Ireland

7.1 The literature on Traveller education in the Republic of Ireland at post-primary level is not extensive. Although Travellers are an integral part of Irish history, they are relatively new to the education system. Kenny (1997) notes that during the 1980s adolescent Travellers would not attend mainstream schools and Junior Training Centres (JTCs), subsequently changed to Junior Education Centres (JECs), were created for their education. The *Report of the Task Force on the Travelling Community* (1995) found the number of Travellers attending post-primary schools to be very low. There are currently six JECs and twenty-seven Senior Training Centres (ages 15-25) for Travellers. Other education options for Travellers of post-primary age include Youthreach Centres and Community Training Workshops (Kelly, 2002). Kelly estimates that only one-third of Traveller children, in the relevant age group, enter mainstream post-primary school.

7.2 In 1992 a National Education Officer for Travellers post was established to promote the education of Traveller children and inform the Department of Education and Science (DES) on the educational needs of Travellers. The policy of the Irish government was outlined in the White Paper, *Charting Our Education Future* (1995) which stated: "the main aim for Traveller children over the age of twelve is to encourage them to continue in full-time education and to promote the continuation of their full inclusive participation in education, while retaining respect and value for their distinct culture".

7.3 The *Report of the Task Force on the Travelling Community* (1995) made a number of recommendations relating to education and training. These include: integrating Traveller pupils into mainstream provision; providing training for teachers on Traveller education; and commissioning inter-cultural/anti-racist programmes for use in schools. However, although some recommendations were followed through, the *First Progress Report of the Committee to Monitor and Co-ordinate the Implementation of the Recommendations of the Task Force on the Travelling Community* (2000) found, "a lack of real improvement on the ground". The Advisory Committee on Traveller Education (ACTE) was established in 1998, as recommended by the Task Force Report. Its remit was and continues to be to "advise the Minister for Education and Science on the provision of education services to members of the

Travelling Community". Membership of the committee includes representatives from DES, teacher unions and Traveller representative organisations.

7.4 The DES recently published guidelines on Traveller education in secondary-level schools. In the foreword, the Minister for Education and Science stated, "many challenges in Traveller education still need to be overcome. However, I am convinced that the production of these guidelines is an important milestone in the overall work of Traveller education".

7.5 MacAongusa (1993) carried out a study of Travellers' value orientations. She argued that, "all Traveller children contribute in some way to the economic well-being of the family. The little girls mind the babies thus freeing the mother to go off and collect. The boys help the father in the van. There is no activity called play". With regard to children's aspirations the author observed, "the boys' objective in life is to have a trailer and a van of his own and eventually to marry a good-looking woman. The girl is destined for marriage and rearing a family. She rarely aspires to anything else". MacAongusa stated that Travellers' culture and way of life make success in the settled mainstream school very difficult. She noted that the Irish system has tended to 'put down' Traveller culture and concluded, "through respectful inter-cultural exchange in our schools we could sow the first seeds of an understanding of tolerance and social justice which heretofore have been sadly missing from our treatment of the Travelling Community".

7.6 Research carried out by the Southside Partnership on Traveller participation in post-primary education and training revealed that 60 per cent of the Travellers they interviewed had experienced problems related to bullying. The report stated that the existence of JECs deterred some Traveller children from attending a mainstream post-primary school.

7.7 Kenny (1997) undertook an extensive ethnographic study of Travellers' resistance to post-primary schooling in Ireland. She highlighted that: "Travellers have been going to primary school in significant numbers since 1960, but educational provision for Travellers, particularly at secondary level, is still beset with problems". In an earlier study (Kenny, 1995) she also observed how Traveller children often got upset when encouraged to undertake high levels of work, and concluded that "pupils constructed the teacher-pupils relationship as one of teachers coercing incapable victims". According to Kenny, Traveller parents "cling to an internalised glass ceiling and it is very near the floor". She felt teachers should be aware that compassion could inhibit achievement, especially where success is feared. Kenny (1997) reported that in order to improve the participation of Travellers at post-primary level the following factors need to be addressed: right of access to school; a relevant inter-cultural curriculum; and educational provision which facilitates Traveller pupils' attainment. She also warned, "we need to bear in mind also that, if we push second-level schooling too fast, we may well force a rate of change onto Travellers that their culture cannot stand".

7.8 The Irish Traveller Movement (1997) produced a report entitled *Travellers and Post-Primary Education* based on workshops held in Galway, Limerick and Dublin with Traveller parents and young Travellers. The report stated that many young Travellers found the transition from primary to post-primary school difficult. Among

the key issues identified were: inability to keep up with all of the new subjects; difficulty with homework; peer pressure from other Travellers; and a lack of family history attending post-primary school. "Both parents and young Travellers felt strongly that where they had attended segregated classes within the primary school system, this had a negative impact on their overall attainment, which contributed to the difficulties they experienced in entering post-primary". Participants felt their culture and identity were not evident in the post-primary curriculum. Factors identified in relation to the school environment included teachers' low expectation of Traveller pupils and hostility experienced within school.

7.9 Based on their investigation into the relationship between society and schools in Ireland, Drudy and Lynch (1993) stated that, for Travellers, the problem is that their unique culture and nomadic lifestyle is not recognised and they are expected to "adapt to the curriculum of schooling, even though it excludes them". They found that typically children from minority ethnic groups in Ireland find themselves allocated to the lowest ability groupings in schools and Travellers were no exception. Drudy and Lynch claimed that there was much evidence to support the view that labelling of pupils as low achievers leads to a self-fulfilling prophecy. However, there was evidence (ETI, 2000) that a co-ordinated approach to Traveller education has had an impact in Northern Ireland on the academic achievement of Traveller pupils. The ETI claimed, "the traditional association of the Traveller child with least able classes … is no longer as tenable as it was". Furthermore they claimed that there was also evidence that some Traveller children were achieving their potential in public examinations.

7.10 One inclusion issue of central concern in Northern Ireland is that Traveller children should be integrated as far as possible into mainstream post-primary schools and that diversity in general and Traveller culture in particular should be celebrated. Integration of Traveller pupils in mainstream post-primary schools has generally been educational policy in Northern Ireland, especially since there is a large concentration of Traveller children in post-primary schools in Belfast, Coalisland, Newry, Ballymena, Omagh and Strabane. With this in mind, the report aims to examine the experiences of the integration and social inclusion of Traveller children in post-primary schools from both an educational and social perspective. This report will also include relevant information from Traveller parents, schools, statutory agencies and voluntary groups.

# PROJECT METHODOLOGY

## 8. Aim

8.1 The overall aim of this research was to provide DE with evidence on Traveller children's experiences of integration and social inclusion in post-primary schools in Northern Ireland from both an educational and social perspective. Data obtained from Traveller children are presented alongside information derived from consulting with parents of Traveller children enrolled in post-primary schools, post-primary school teachers and principals, representatives from the five ELBs, CCMS, and Traveller Support Groups.

## 9. Methodology

9.1 The majority of data were collected through semi-structured interviews; a small number of focus groups and a questionnaire survey of teachers were also carried out.

## 10. Traveller Children in Post-Primary Schools Throughout Northern Ireland

10.1 Post-primary schools with Traveller children enrolled were identified from data obtained from DE relating to the academic year 2000/2001. The data received from DE provided exact numbers for those schools having five or more Traveller pupils enrolled, and a range of one to four for all other schools attended by Traveller pupils. From the information obtained, it was decided that only those schools with more than four pupils enrolled would be approached and invited to participate in the research. Initial contact with schools was made via the principal or vice principal by a series of telephone calls informing them of the purpose, aims and objectives of the research and asking if the school would be willing to participate. All but one of the schools contacted agreed to take part in the project. One principal felt unable to take part in the research due to the fact that there was only one Traveller child enrolled at the time in the school. Written documentation on the background to the research, along with a permission letter for parents of the Traveller children, and the areas for discussion that would inform the semi-structured interviews, were then forwarded to the schools.

10.2 Following on from the initial telephone call, letters and accompanying documentation, contact was again made with the principals, vice principals, or designated teachers appointed to the research to arrange dates and times for visits to be made to the schools to conduct interviews with Traveller children. The interviews took place between February to May 2002, usually lasted 30-35 minutes and were recorded on audiocassette for later transcription. The areas for discussion which informed the interviews included: likes and dislikes about school; family involvement in school and homework; non-attendance; Traveller culture/lifestyle; friendships in school; and aspirations for post-sixteen education and job prospects.

10.3 All the Traveller children enrolled in post-primary schools in Belfast and a one in three sample of Traveller children enrolled in post-primary schools elsewhere in Northern Ireland were selected for interview by two members of the research team (n=58 pupils). In total, forty-four Traveller children were interviewed in the schools. The numbers fell short of the anticipated sample of 58 due to some pupils not being in schools on the dates arranged.

**11. Parents of Traveller Children in Post-Primary schools**

11.1 Contacts were made with seven Traveller parents who had children enrolled in post-primary schools throughout Northern Ireland. These were arranged through representatives from the ELBs, schools, and Traveller Support Groups. Dates and times were organised with the parents and interviews took place in a variety of locations, i.e. Traveller site, parents' house, post-primary school, or community centre. The interviews occurred between December 2002 and March 2003 and were recorded on audiocassette for later transcription. The areas for discussion included: child/children's experience of post-primary school; problems/issues children encounter at post-primary school; friendships their children have with settled children; contact with teachers; and future aspirations for their children.

**12. Post-Primary School Teachers and Principals**

12.1 Teachers and principals were approached and asked if they would take part in a series of semi-structured interviews for the purpose of the research. Eighteen teachers in total were willing to be interviewed and they included Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators (SENCOs), those with responsibility for Traveller children in the schools, and Traveller support teachers. The interviews were arranged directly with the individual teacher and took place at their convenience in the school between February and May 2002. Interviews were also held with four principals and one vice-principal, either in person or by telephone, during the months of May and June 2002. The areas for discussion which informed the interviews for teachers included: the teacher's role and responsibilities; relevant training, i.e. awareness of Traveller culture and lifestyle, and further training that would be beneficial; support received to help with the teaching of Traveller pupils; issues associated with Traveller children, e.g. attendance; curriculum and learning, e.g. relevance of the post-primary curriculum for Traveller children, resources used, and Traveller pupils' educational attainment; relationships with Traveller children and parents; and suggestions relating to additional help that could be provided for teachers of Traveller children and steps that could be taken to enhance their integration and retain them until the age of sixteen. The interviews with principals generally enquired of settled parents and pupils regarding the attendance at the school of Traveller children. Each teacher interview lasted approximately 30-45 minutes and the majority were recorded on audiocassette for later transcription (some teachers preferred not to have their interview recorded).

12.2 As well as conducting interviews with members of staff in the schools, a questionnaire was devised in consultation with members of the steering group set up by DE for this project and the Forum for the Education of Traveller Children (NI). Having determined the approximate number of teachers who had one or more Traveller children in their class, a total of one hundred and forty-one questionnaires were distributed to the schools in November 2002 for dissemination to those teachers. The first survey resulted in forty-seven questionnaires being completed and returned. This was repeated again a month later, resulting in a total final response of fifty-six questionnaires, i.e. a 40 per cent return rate.

12.3 The questionnaire included items on: teacher demographics, i.e. gender, age, number of years teaching; training and support regarding minority ethnic groups, e.g.

Travellers; issues associated with Traveller pupils in mainstream post-primary schools; curriculum and learning, i.e. relevance of the curriculum and pupils' attainment; relationships, i.e. with teachers, other Traveller pupils, settled pupils, and parents; and further suggestions.

## 13. Voluntary Groups and Statutory Agencies

13.1 In order to gather further information relevant to the project, a series of semi-structured interviews was conducted with representatives from each of the five ELBs and CCMS, who had responsibility for the education of Traveller children. A representative from Traveller Movement (NI) was also interviewed and contact details were obtained for a range of Traveller Support Groups throughout Northern Ireland. Representatives from these groups were contacted and agreed to take part in an interview.

13.2 Each of the statutory agencies and voluntary groups were contacted initially by post to inform them of the research. Letters were followed by a telephone call to arrange a date and time for an interview. These generally took place between October and December 2002 in their respective locations. Areas for discussion were sent out in advance of the interview to inform participants of the content. These included: roles and responsibilities involving Traveller education; policy regarding Travellers and post-primary education; contacts with other groups/organisations with an interest in Traveller education; services provided relating to the education of Traveller children at post-primary level; main issues associated with the integration and social inclusion of Traveller children in post-primary schools; and suggestions relating to enhancing the integration and social inclusion of Traveller children in post-primary schools and encouraging pupils to attend until compulsory school leaving age. Each interview lasted approximately 30-35 minutes and was recorded on audiocassette for later transcription.

## 14. Introduction

14.1 The following section is divided into four parts. Part one contains research findings from interviews with the Traveller children relating to: their likes and dislikes about school; school attendance; contact their parents have with the school; the importance and relevance they attach to education; their academic and career plans; and integration into school life and activities. Reference is also made to the findings from the interviews carried out with Traveller parents who have children enrolled in post-primary schools. These findings make reference to reasons for choosing a particular post-primary school; future aspirations relating to their child(ren); relevance of post-primary education; contact with teachers; relationships their child(ren) has/have with settled pupils; and early school leaving.

## PART ONE: TRAVELLER PUPILS AND PARENTS

## 15. Likes and Dislikes of Post-Primary School

15.1 Pupils were asked to talk about their likes and dislikes at school. One-quarter of the pupils mentioned teachers when discussing their likes.

*"I like the subjects and the teachers…cause if you're stuck on anything they explain it well, they help you with it."*

*"The teachers are really nice and they let you do lots of stuff."*

*"It's good to talk to the teachers. They don't be cheeky or nothing."*

15.2 Over ten per cent of pupils liked the fact that their friends and other members of their family circle were attending the same school as themselves.

*"If I stay at home I only get bored and when I come into school I can talk to my friends."*

*"I like it cause all my cousins is in it."*

15.3 Other likes cited included not being confined to one classroom for the entire school day, the school building and going on school trips.

15.4 The question regarding likes and dislikes was open ended and, while some pupils responded to it with ease, many required prompting and were subsequently asked to discuss their favourite subjects. Physical education and art were the two most popular subjects identified as being favoured by the Traveller pupils, followed by mathematics, home economics, English, technology and design, ICT and science.

15.5 Pupils found it more difficult to comment on what they disliked about post-primary school. However, a few referred to having to get up early to go to school, moving from classroom to classroom throughout the day and homework.

*"The same as any other school, you have to get up early and you get lots of homework."*

*"When you keep on moving, keep going to all the different classrooms."*

15.6 When prompted to discuss their least favourite subjects, mathematics and science featured highly, with a few pupils showing a dislike towards geography, technology and design, English, art and physical education.

15.7 When discussing what they disliked about school, two comments referred to teachers.

*"I don't like half the teachers.* (teacher's name omitted) *– he ran me out of the dinner hall, and* (teacher's name omitted) *– she likes to shout."*

*"Some of the teachers are too cheeky...they put you into detention for nothing."*

15.8 Pupils who did not specifically refer to their teachers during the interview were asked what they thought of them. Many pupils talked about their teachers in a positive light.

*"All the teachers are nice."*

*"The teachers is good, the teachers are the best."*

15.9 A few pupils indicated their dislike of some of the teachers and one pupil did not like any of his teachers.

*"Some of them, I don't like* (teacher's name omitted)*...cause if you don't bring your books in, they give you – what do you call it? – detention!"*

*"I like some of them, I don't like them all."*

## 16. Attendance at Post-Primary School

16.1 Pupils were asked to provide reasons why they might be absent from school. Illness was the reason most frequently referred to, with some pupils mentioning medical appointments with doctors or dentists.

*"No, I come to school, it was only once in a while I took school off because I was sick."*

*"Sick or just being sick or don't feel like going to school."*

*"I would just phone in sick, or if I had an appointment or something with the dentist or optician."*

16.2 Just under half of pupils stated they would be absent from school due to family events, for example, engagements and weddings.

*"When I go to weddings or funerals or something like that, I'd stay off for a few days."*

*"Christenings and stuff and my brother's Confirmation and Holy Communion, cause there's a lot of those coming up now."*

16.3 One-quarter of the pupils reported being absent from school due to having to visit family members, which often involved travelling some distance and staying overnight or longer.

*"I go down to Dublin…cause my brother's down there and he's got a girlfriend down there, also they're planning sort of like a wedding thing."*

*"I was in Kilkenny for the week…visiting my niece and nephew."*

*"I was off just before Christmas for a month or something because I was in Dublin…my sister lives there."*

*"Sometimes I would be off school cause I do go away sometimes, to Newcastle and that for the weekend…and I go to my cousins on the other side of Belfast and other places."*

16.4 A few pupils indicated that they were absent from school because they had to visit sick relatives.

*"I was off last week because my brother was in hospital…to go down and visit him, every day I had to. He had no company or nothing."*

16.5 A further quarter reported they were absent because they had to help their mother or father. Shopping for clothes for themselves and their siblings, babysitting or helping fathers in their line of work were frequently cited reasons for not attending school.

*"If my mother needs me off I'd take a day off. She just needs me to go to Belfast to go to the shops cause there's a few weddings on, get clothes."*

*"Just whenever my mummy or daddy needs me like, we have to help her minding the children and all."*

*"Babysitting for mummy when she is going shopping. She only goes once every month, only when she needs the things."*

*"Say there was a container full of tools coming, I'd stay off and help him* (father) *with that…Sometimes I've to mind the child, mostly after school when mummy's going to the shop or something, she might get me out about two o'clock or something like that."*

*"I was off a week down south working with my daddy, tarmacing and spraying. He told me if I wanted to go home I could go home, but I stayed longer to keep him company."*

*"Sometimes I've to look after my mummy cause she's very sick."*

16.6 Other reasons for not attending school included missing the bus/taxi or simply not wanting to go to school. For example, one pupil referred to a time when he went to work with his father because he missed the bus, while another referred to occasions when he stayed up late at night and did not rise until lunchtime, after which he would eat breakfast and play football rather than go to school. One female pupil explained that she would sometimes go to her sister's house instead of attending school. (REC.1 relates to the above section)

## 17. Parental Contact with School

17.1 Many pupils stated that their parents had never attended a Parents' Night, nor visited school, mainly because they were too busy.

*"No, not really. They don't really come up cause there's a lot of children in our house."*

*"No they are really busy because my daddy is going up the country to get the money like, and my mummy always has children…there is five children."*

*"On Parents' Night my mummy doesn't come. Because she has to go home, make the dinner and clean up."*

*"When we get a letter* (for Parents' Night) *we always lose them."*

17.2 The parents who had visited the school had done so during Open Nights and Parents' Nights.

*"She was here at Open Night, but she couldn't come at Parents' Night."*

*"First when they brought me to school…and Parents' Night."*

*"They went to maybe one or two of the Parents' Evenings, they wouldn't have been at all of them."*

*"Both of them attend Parents' Nights, but if daddy's in Scotland, daddy makes sure that mummy comes up. If the teacher says something about me, then they'd ask me."*

*"My mummy would come to every Parents' Night, I think. My mummy usually comes but sometimes my daddy would come as well."*

17.3 A few parents had been to the school to keep previously arranged appointments with teachers to discuss their child's work.

*"Two weeks ago to see my report because they missed the last one."*

*"Mummy was up a couple of weeks ago, about a week ago. There was a form teacher and me, and my mother had to go up to the form teacher to talk to her, everybody had to do it."*

17.4 A few pupils stated that their parents had visited the school because of their or their sibling's bad behaviour.

*"When you are getting suspended or something."*

*"Yeah, once, to get me back in...They had to, they had to come up cause I wouldn't be allowed back."*

*"My wee brother, he had a complaint. They* (teachers) *rang home cause he was fighting and mummy came in to talk to the teachers and all."* (REC.2 relates to the above section)

## 18. Importance and Relevance of School

<u>Importance of School</u>
18.1 The vast majority of pupils deemed school and gaining an education as important. Many comments concerned learning to read and write. When pupils were asked to elaborate, they pointed out that the ability to read and write was essential for obtaining a job and for being able to carry out tasks in everyday life, from reading a letter to passing the theory driving test.

*"Because to learn to read and write and when you grow up you can get a good job."*

*"So that when you go on to do a good job, you can't be tricked into a contract that's wrong."*

*"I meant when you grow up you'd need to learn how to read and all that stuff... Because in your driving test it's not only about driving it's about reading and filling in forms and if you don't know how to do that you'll never get your licence."*

*"To read books and what it says, the signs outside when you're driving, saying look right and stop."*

*"Because when you get older you have to know how to read and write...if you ever got a letter in the post you'd have to know how to read that."*

18.2 Learning mathematics at school was also considered to be important by a number of pupils.

*"Maths is important...so you can add things up in the shops."*

*"Because I have a granny who can't count."*

*"When you get older you'll know all that stuff, it'll be easy to add and all...in case you add money."*

18.3 Many pupils stated that it was important to get an education because this could enable them to obtain a job later in life.

*"Because, maybe when you're older and all, and you want a good job, you might not get one without education."*

*"You need a good work card. You can't go missing days if you want the job."*

*"You have to though, if you want to get a good job when you get older."*

*"Cause you can get an education and get a job after you do your GCSEs and go to college, you can get a good job and get your own home."*

18.4 Very few pupils stated that school was important in terms of obtaining academic qualifications.

*"So that you can get a job and go on to college."*

*"So you can learn and get somewhere. You know like, if you listen to the teacher you could be doing your GCSEs and all when you're bigger."*

18.5 Other comments regarding the importance of attending school included:

*"It's important to come to school. If you don't go they get social services on you, threatening you: "Why are you not going to school?" And then they bring your mummy to court."*

*"So whenever you grow up you can help your children to do their homework."*

*"Yeah, cause you get to mix in with other people."*

18.6 Only a small number of pupils were undecided or did not consider school to be important.

<u>Relevance of School</u>
18.7 Pupils were asked about the relevance of school for their everyday life. A minority of pupils felt school to be irrelevant or useless. English and mathematics were the subjects most frequently cited by pupils as being useful in everyday life. Pupils were asked to provide examples of how these subjects would be relevant. In relation to English the following comments were made.

*"Like reading and writing and spellings, if you ever need a job and you've to send off a letter."*

*"What make is on the tools and all, see what they spell."*

*"If there's ever instructions or something to put up something, if you couldn't read you wouldn't be able to do it. You'd be doing it the wrong way and are more likely to make a mess of it."*

*"Cause I like reading and I read magazines and books and stuff at home."*

18.8 A number of pupils commented on how their ability to read and write had enabled them to help out other family members.

*"Yeah, the reading in school helps me a lot, an awful lot. Cause my daddy, his brother comes up to collect him, you know like to go down to the shop or stuff...his brother can't read either, that's why I go with my daddy to read the signs."*

*"And if something comes up and you are sitting there and you're the only one there that can read and write, 'Will you read that for me, will you write that for me?'"*

*"I get tortured when I am at home because you know like Travelling people don't believe in going to school. And my cousin is 25 and she wants to do her driving test and she got the book for doing it. And every night I have to sit for about two or three hours going over it and going over it to learn her it."*

*"I would help my little brother or sister with their homework."*

18.9 The following comments were made by pupils about the relevance of learning mathematics. This subject was seen to be useful in relation to money and measurements.

*"Maths as well is useful, for when you've got money."*

*"If you're in a shop paying for something, you'd need to know like if you've been given the right change or if you're working in a shop or something."*

*"In case you go to the shop and somebody rips you off."*

*"If he says pack ten of them* (tools)*, just say if I packed about twelve. I'd have to put the right amount."*

*"Well maths you'd need...if you were measuring things for joinery and all that."*

*"Cause when my mum's adding up sums she doesn't really know how to add, I can add up."*

18.10 Apart from mathematics and English, the only other subjects considered by the Traveller children to be relevant in everyday life were technology and design and ICT.

*"In T&D you learn how to build stuff, it helps you if you're ever making up stuff."*

*"T&D for working with tools...because you have to get used to using them."*

*"Computers will help me be able to get on to stuff on the Internet."*

<u>Traveller Culture</u>
18.11 When asked if they had ever been given the opportunity to talk about their Traveller culture during lessons the majority of pupils replied no. Those pupils who were provided with the chance to carry out school work with a Traveller-related theme noted that it only occurred when they were withdrawn from the whole class situation, for example to receive extra support developing their literacy skills.

*"I do a reading class and I was on a laptop and there's this here Traveller CD and she* (the teacher) *put it in for me and I saw myself on it."*

*"Yeah, I'm doing it at the minute. What kind of house you live in, what religion, all sorts of things."*

*"I got to write a letter, a wee story about Travellers. I got to write about myself and my family."* (REC.3 relates to the above section)

## 19. Academic and Career Plans

<u>Career Aspirations</u>
19.1 Pupils were asked about their future plans once they left school. The most popular job referred to by girls was hairdressing. However, some stressed that they would not be willing to attend college to gain qualifications.

*"I wouldn't really like to go to college but I'd really like to get a job hairdressing. I dunno, my cousin went to college but I wouldn't."*

*"I just wouldn't go to college for hairdressing because I wouldn't really know anybody. There would be no other Travellers there, only me!"*

19.2 Other occupations chosen by the girls included beauty therapy and childminding.

*"A beauty therapist…you can do it in tech or at job skills."*

*"Yeah, beautician or something…I'll probably leave school and go to the tech and then when I'm finished there, like go looking for a job."*

*"Minding children and washing them and feeding them and then putting them to bed…in a hospital."*

*"I was talking to* (EWO's name omitted) *about doing childcare after my GCSEs."*

19.3 Some girls indicated that rather than pursuing a career they planned to marry at a young age and have children. This was deemed by them to be a traditional part of Traveller culture.

*"Do what all the Travellers do, they get married at 17, then they have children, they don't work. Their husbands work though."*

*"I don't want to get a job when I grow up…Traveller girls don't really get jobs…They stay at home, clean and look after the kids or something which I don't think is fair. That's what my mummy does…but she is allowed to go out when she wants."*

*"What I really would like to do but I wouldn't do it, is a hairdresser probably, because not many Traveller girls does things like that, none really… just get married early."*

19.4 Two girls indicated that rather than get jobs, they would end up helping out with the family, one by cleaning for her parents and uncles and the other by helping her sister mind her five children.

19.5 Some pupils talked about what they would really like to do when they leave school. 'Dream jobs' selected by girls included working in a veterinary practice, being an airhostess and becoming a teacher of mathematics. However realistically they felt that rather than pursuing these paths they would end up either helping the family, getting married or hairdressing.

19.6 The majority of Traveller boys' planned to enter into a trade-related occupation, for example bricklaying, plumbing, mechanics or joinery.

*"Working with cars as a mechanic…that's all what I wanted to learn, but they won't help me to learn that in this school. I want to know how to fix engines and things like that."*

*"Joiner…In fifth form you'd need to go down to the tech or something like that to make sure you get practice at it. I can never see me getting to do that there course here in fifth year."*

19.7 Over one-third of the boys felt they would end up working for their families, for example tarmacing, doing joinery or selling tools or furniture.

*"I wanna get a job along with my daddy tarmacing. If I don't stick at that I'll go to tools, sell tools over in Wales…Just cause, most Travellers always does that there you know."*

*"Yes, sell tools, that's what my daddy does…All my cousins does that."*

*"I'd rather work for my daddy doing joinery. You get paid good money, you see, and he'll pay me good if I help him out. So I've nothing to worry about there like, he'll be my boss."*

19.8 The father of one of the boys was keen for him to learn about working with computers in school in order to help with the family business.

*"Daddy says sometimes that he'd like me to use the computer…to order things from people in Japan and all."*

19.9 Working in a factory and washing cars are examples of other occupations cited by Traveller boys. When asked about 'dream jobs' replies included fireman, delivery

driver and teacher. However, these latter boys believed they would actually end up either travelling, working in a shop, working with their father, or working in a factory. When one boy was informed of the length of time he would need to study to become a teacher he responded:

*"Like what would you do for money for another six years?"*

19.10 Some Traveller pupils were already learning vocational skills in trade-related occupations while they were attending school. For example, one boy was attending a college of further and higher education one day per week, where he was learning about different trades such as joinery, as well as going on placement one day per week. One girl was also attending a college of further and higher education on a weekly basis where she received training in hairdressing.

19.11 A small number of pupils planned to enter into professions that would require taking a university degree. Teaching was selected by three pupils but two of these pupils were unaware of how they would pursue this career and one pupil was unsure whether she would stay in school to do GCSEs.

<u>School Leaving Age</u>
19.12 Approximately half of the pupils interviewed indicated their intention to stay on at post-primary school until Year 12, i.e. until the age of sixteen. A small number of these pupils were also considering attending a college of further and higher education after Year 12 with the intention of studying a vocational course in, for example, bricklaying or beauty therapy.

19.13 A few pupils did not know at what age they would leave school. The remaining pupils planned to leave before the age of sixteen. Many of these pupils indicated that remaining in post-primary school up to this age was not part of Traveller culture.

*"I'm leaving at 13. I have a big brother who left when he was 13 and I've a cousin…I don't think any Traveller has went to school til they're 16."*

*"I'd rather leave now…Probably in the third year because that's when all my brothers is leaving, and my cousins."*

*"Maybe 15 or 14…because I would have no one to talk to. All those ones will have left…All the Travelling girls."*

*"I am leaving at fourth year…All the Travellers leave at fourth year."*

19.14 Some pupils explained that preparation for marriage at a young age was one reason why Travellers would be unable to continue with their post-primary education.

*"Fourteen or something…because every one of the Traveller girls get married at 17. I am not allowed to get married at 17, I will get married at 20 or something."*

*"This year…No point, we get married at like 17 and a half and have to get a van and stuff."*

19.15 Pupils were asked questions relating to their intention to take GCSE examinations. Approximately two-thirds of the pupils who planned to stay in school until Year 12 thought they would sit GCSEs. The remainder were either undecided or knew they would not be sitting GCSEs. (REC.4 relates to the above section)

## 20. Integration and Social Inclusion

After-School Clubs
20.1 Only a small number of the pupils interviewed attended after-school clubs or took part in extra-curricular activities. The most frequently cited reasons for not taking part concerned their lack of interest in such things. Pupils were simply not interested in staying after school to take part in, for example, sports events, drama clubs, etc.

*"I wouldn't really want to stay."*

*"Because I think half-three is long enough to stay in school."*

*"I don't like any of that stuff."*

*"I've better things to do at home."*

20.2 Some pupils explained they were unable to attend after-school clubs because of transport arrangements, i.e. having to catch a bus, get a taxi or a lift home by car.

*"I don't go to any of them cause I have to go outside and get the bus, cause else it will go."*

*"Taxi problem, we've to go and get a taxi."*

Friendships
20.3 Traveller pupils were asked about their friendships to determine the extent to which they integrated socially with settled pupils both inside and outside of school. Most pupils acknowledged having some settled friends in their class/school.

*"Half my friends in this school is not Travellers."*

*"I play now with country boys as well...I hang about with them...I mix with everybody."*

*"My friends in class, they're not from a Traveller background."*

*"I do have settled friends but I don't speak to them much."*

*"I get on with some of them settled pupils but some of them are real bitchy."*

20.4 The majority of Traveller pupils, however, usually spent their mid-morning or lunch break with their Traveller friends and/or family.

*"All my cousins sit beside each other and my sister, we just all sit beside each other."*

*"All the Travelling boys, there's about four or five of us, six, seven."*

*"I sit beside my sisters."*

*"All my cousins, lots of my cousins go to this school."*

*"All the other Travellers, everyone I hang about with in this school is from a Travelling background."*

20.5 Less than one-third of the Traveller pupils interviewed met the settled pupils they were friendly with outside of school, in the evenings or at weekends. Distance was a reason frequently cited by pupils for not socialising with settled school friends outside of school hours.

*"There's none that lives near."*

*"Because they don't live nowhere near me."*

*"I don't know where they live."*

*"No cause they don't live beside me."*

20.6 Other comments made by Traveller pupils who did not meet up with settled school friends outside of school include:

*"I go into town and mess about with my cousin...They* (settled friends) *won't play football or anything like that."*

*"Sometimes I used to go up to their* (settled friends) *houses, but I don't now. I just go up to where all my cousins and all lives."*

*"Because I like the Traveller friends more."*

*"I'd be too embarrassed...I wouldn't like it."*

*"I could but I just don't go to the bother."*

*"I don't really want to see them."*

*"I don't, I go down to the portacabin and my cousins play down there with the computers."*

20.7 Below are comments made by those pupils who did socialise with their settled school friends outside of school hours.

*"Yeah, cinema every Friday."*

*"Yeah, a fella called* (pupil's name omitted). *We go down to his house or else he comes to my house to play games or a few CDs."*

*"They come down to our house or we go up to theirs."*

*"Yeah. I live at* (street name omitted) *and half of the friends from school lives up there."*

*"Yeah we meet down the town, sometimes after school."* (REC.5 relates to the above section)

Bullying
20.8 Half of the Traveller pupils interviewed had experienced some form of bullying at school. This ranged from other pupils making fun of their accents to name-calling and even physical violence.

20.9 Fifteen per cent of pupils were experiencing bullying at the time the interviews were conducted, with half of those being bullied attributing it to the fact that they were Travellers. In two cases the bully was another Traveller pupil. Incidents described by these pupils are outlined below.

*"In this school people in my class don't call me names* (relating to Traveller background) *but the older people does…To my cousins and to the wee girl in the next class too…At lunch and after whenever the bell rings for the next class."*

*"Sometimes called names. If I'm called names I call them back."*

*"They chuck you upside down and call us* (the Travellers) *names. And when we go down to the shop they put fags in your pocket and burn them…Just shout at you, "you f*****g gypsy b*****d" and all that…It happens almost all the time."*

*"They come into registration and come up and said…"them two are gypos"."*

*"They make fun of my talk and call me names and all…it's usually the same couple of boys. But see when their mates is there they tell their mates to call us, and they pass that to their mates and all… About six or seven of them. There's a bunch of them, like big ones."*

*"Yeah there is one girl, she is a Traveller and she calls us names…country girls."*

20.10 Some of these pupils were reluctant to inform teachers of the ongoing bullying while others had, with little success.

*(I = Interviewer   P = Pupil)*

*"I: Have you told anybody about them?*
*P: No*
*I: Why not?*
*P: Because they come back and hit us again.*
*I: Do you think if you mention it, maybe the teachers would do something to stop it?*
*P: They'll come back and dig into us, cause then the teachers will shout at them, then they'll come back and hit us again."*

*"I: Did you ever talk to any of the teachers about this?*
*P: I tell* (teacher's name omitted)*, he had a talk with them but that's no good, like he only talks to them, shouts at them and all, like but sure after that there it started again.*
*I: Do you think* (teacher's name omitted) *is doing what he can to help?*
*P: Yeah*
*I: Do you think he could do more?*
*P: He's doing his best like he is."*

*"P: I do tell the teachers but they still just call me names, so I just leave it.*
*I: And you told the teachers, and what did the teachers do?*
*P: They tell them to stop and give them detention.*
*I: And does it stop?*
*P: No*
*I: No. And would you go back and tell the teachers?*
*P: I just ignore them."*

20.11 Comments made by pupils about previous incidents of bullying are illustrated below.

*"Only one girl, she tried to bully me before…She's from a Travelling background… She said something about my sister bullying her sister. But her sister's about the same size as me but she's kinda chubby, but she said she'll kick the face of me."*

*"They called me names and all, punched me. Like "fatso" and that and other stuff."*

*"Aye there's someone who tried to before, he's left now though. He would get down to try and hit everybody over the head, on all the first years."*

20.12 Over half of the pupils who had been bullied in the past thought it had happened because they were Travellers.

*"There was about a year ago. This fifth-year girl, she was giving us* (Travellers) *trouble a couple of times a week, she would call us names."*

*"Sometimes when I'm walking on the corridors boys would shout out things to me. Like talking in my accent and saying, 'kiss my…' bad words."*

*"Yeah, called names and got sick of it and just hit them…after a while I got to know them and they wouldn't call me names…I talk to them now."*

*"Well sometimes they try and make fun of my voice…Some people try and get me going for a good fight…they don't do it now, before they used to do it. After I hit two, three people it stopped then."*

20.13 In many of these cases the bullying stopped as a result of intervention by a member of staff.

*(I = Interviewer   P = Pupil)*

*"I:  Who put a stop to it or why did it stop?*
*P:  (teacher's name omitted) told them to stop it."*

*"I:  Why do you think it stopped?*
*P: I think the principal told them to stop it and he kept on tolding them.*
*P:  So I went to (vice-principal's name omitted).  And then I wrote it down on paper and give it to my form teacher and then she sorted it out.*
*I:  So the teachers sorted it out right away, is that right?*
*P:  Yes."*

*"I:  Were the teachers very helpful when that was going on or do you think they could have done more?*
*P:  No, they were helpful, they were very helpful."*

20.14 One pupil who had never experienced bullying commented:

*"I am from the Travellers, they won't touch the Travellers."*

Preferred Type of School
20.15 When asked if they would prefer to go to a post-primary school for pupils from a Travelling background rather than a school that catered for both Traveller and settled pupils, approximately one-quarter of pupils selected the former.  This was mainly because of familiarity with other Traveller pupils and the fact that it would provide a friendlier environment.

*"Just cause I know them better than I know the other lot."*

*"Just your cousins and just like a bit of craic."*

*"I'd have millions of friends, millions, everybody would be my friend."*

*"Like it's your own…you'd be able to talk about things, anything."*

20.16 Two pupils who would prefer a Traveller only school did so because of their experiences of being bullied in post-primary school.

*"Cause here, sometimes they beat me up, Travellers don't."*

*"In this school people in my class don't call me names but the older people does."*

20.17 Comments made by the majority of pupils who preferred to attend a post-primary school for both Traveller and settled children centred on social issues, namely having a wider circle of friends.

*"Cause then that way you find that you know more people, then you get more friends that way.  The other way you just see ones that you already know."*

*"Just, because like when you know all the Travellers you'd like to know all different people."*

*"Because you learn more, not just about your own background which you already know about."*

*"I like to get on with everybody. I think everybody's the same."*

20.18 A few pupils also felt that having both Travellers and settled pupils educated together in the same school provided the settled pupils with an opportunity to learn about Travellers and their culture.

*"You get to mix with other people and all and they get to mix with you."*

*"Well they get to know about how normal Travellers are."*

20.19 Some pupils stated that they had a better relationship with their settled peers than with other Travellers, or they disliked their Traveller peers.

*"I'd rather have settled girls cause they're more friends than Travellers are."*

*"Because sometimes you can talk better to people that is not Travelling."*

*"Because nearly all the Travellers are snobby and bossy like."*

*"There's not very many Travellers I do like so I'd just rather have my own friends."*

## 21. Parents of Traveller Children in Post-Primary School

Choosing a Post-Primary School
21.1 When asked to explain their choice of post-primary school parents cited the proximity of the schools to the home and the fact that there were other Travellers already attending.

*"It could have been any school, it was just the nearest one."*

*"The other ones* (Travellers) *were at it and we just followed them up."*

21.2 One parent indicated that the ELB officer influenced his decision, which he was subsequently unhappy about and another felt that she had not been given a choice.

*"It was* (ELB officer's name omitted). *I think any school would have done rather than that school you know."*

*"They give you all these different leaflets but at the end of the day we were not given a choice… I automatically knew from day one what line they were walking. I used to say, "I can see everyone of them Traveller children ending up in* (school name omitted)". *Fill in the forms for here, fill in the forms for there. I decided at that stage of the game Travelling women will not get a bit of a choice."*

Reasons for Sending Children to Post-Primary School

21.3 The main reasons provided by parents for sending their children to post-primary school were essentially to get an education and/or to learn to read and write.

*"I want them to learn how to read and write. Basically read and write and try and get a little bit of education."*

*"If they've got every degree in the world they won't get a job so it's only to learn to read and write. And if they ever want anything they don't have to ask people like I do myself."*

21.4 Only one parent mentioned gaining qualifications.

*"They all need an education. If you can read and write and if you've passed a few exams you can be whoever you want or whatever you want."* (REC.3 relates to the above section)

Usefulness of School in Gaining Employment

21.5 Four parents thought attending post-primary school would help their children to get a job.

*"It will certainly. Our children are getting married when they're older now and they're going on holidays. I would like to see them getting a good job and making something out of life."*

*"They're learning a lot of stuff that the older people wouldn't have got a chance."*

21.6 The other three disagreed citing discrimination in the workforce.

*"I know for a fact they won't get a job, a settled proper job, no. They'll get a job sweeping the road maybe, something like that."*

*"This is why a lot of Travellers only learn how to read and write. The likes of them going into a big job, an office job, or being in airlines or anything like that there, they're not going to get it."*

Bullying

21.7 While there were no current incidents of bullying reported by the parents, previous incidents had been discussed. Two parents explained that they each had a child who had left school early because of bullying.

"(Child's name omitted) *is fifteen and she's not going to school, she was going to* (name of school omitted) *about two years ago. She used to get bullied and called names no matter how clean she was and it really upset me…They wouldn't say anything to the teachers cause they'd get twice what they got, tout, gypsy."*

*"You send your children in their very best to school to try and make life easier on them. You bend over backwards for your children not to have to face these bad situations. They go into their school and they'll be getting called gypsies, they'll be getting attacked."*

21.8 One of the mothers had informed the school of the bullying her child was subjected to while the other did not consult the school.

*"No I didn't.* (child's name omitted) *just came out of it and then I went away again to Scotland for a while and then I never thought of sending her back."*

21.9 Two parents were resigned to the fact that bullying was part of Traveller children's lives, although they did not think their children were currently being bullied at school.

*"They had a bit here and there but I think it's all a part of life. They'll have to learn."*

*"You'll always get a bit of bullying. In the Traveller community it will happen won't it? I don't think that's serious."*

21.10 Three of the parents indicated that to their knowledge their children never experienced any problems with being bullied at school.

*"No. I think if there was I would hear about it…they would tell you you know."*

*"You cannot talk for other places. They're not treated any different from any other child in the school."*

Vocational Curriculum
21.11 Parents were asked what they thought of pupils being offered a more vocational curriculum at Key Stage 4, for example, EOTAS. Six were in favour of it.

*"It breaks up the last couple of years in school for children as well as training them to be something."*

*"Yeah it is a very good idea. Learn how to deal with wood and electricians, that kind of stuff."*

*"It would give them a sense of security and a bit of independence for the future. He'll know I can do this. I'd like to see my boys going learning something like that."*

21.12 One parent stated that Traveller boys in her area would not go to the college of further and higher education. However, she felt they would need to learn skills in order to carry on in the Traveller tradition. (REC.4 relates to the above section)

Contact with Teachers
21.13 Four parents had contact with their children's teachers via daytime visits to the school or attending Parents' Nights. However, two stressed that occasions such as Parents' Nights were intimidating for them.

*"We wouldn't go. They could be talking to you and I wouldn't know what they'd be saying. If they say it in big high language I wouldn't understand. Not that I wouldn't have an interest. If there's a load of people I don't like that…If there's something that*

*you can't answer there in front of all the other parents it wouldn't be nice, would let my child down. So rather than do that I wouldn't go."*

*"You go to some of the meetings and they ask you questions and you might have to read something and it's very embarrassing, to tell everybody there I can't read, I'm a thick blah blah blah. It's something you don't like to do."* (REC.2 relates to the above section)

Socialising with Settled Children
21.14 While two parents indicated that their children socialised with settled children outside of school hours, five stated this was not the case. Two parents explained that their home was on a dangerous road, which they did not allow their children to cross, and they were some distance from where settled school friends lived. One of these parents explained however, that she occasionally transported her daughter to meet settled friends.

*"Well I dropped her off at a couple of birthday parties. Like I knew the house was safe so I dropped her off at a certain time and I came back and collected her at a certain time. I made sure like that she was safe before I dropped here off and I came back and collected her in an hour."*

21.15 Three parents expressed concerns over their children falling into 'bad company'.

*"When it comes to 14 or 15 or 16 we wouldn't want them to mix. Not the age group that stands around street corners drinking in* (street name omitted)*."*

*"You wouldn't like to see them hanging around the streets or into car thieving or whatever, going on the wrong road."*

*"I've seen a lot of it, good children going wrong mixing up with one bad fella."*
(REC.5 relates to the above section)

Aspirations for Children
21.16 With regards aspirations for their children, the general consensus among parents was a desire to see them get jobs and be able to support themselves.

*"Education, get some sort of a job...I would rather have had more education, I would be further up the ladder...with a lack of education it's hard...stay on as long as possible and get the right qualifications."*

*"I'd like them to get a job when they leave school. If they could get a job there in joinery or something like that...The way it is now they need jobs when they leave school."*

*"I'd like to have my boys in a good job, support themselves, and if they did ever get married to have something there for the woman. Children come along very quick."*

*"If they got a good education and ended up getting a really good job and forgot about marriage til they're away late on in life."*

*"I'd love my girls to do something before they settle down."*

21.17 Although the above comments are positive, it should be noted that some of the parents who made them already had children who had left school in the last few years before compulsory school leaving age and others had daughters who had married early and had children rather than entering the world of work.

21.18 Two parents still stressed more traditional aspirations for their daughters in terms of engagement and marriage.

*"If they were getting married you wouldn't stop them...You wouldn't expect a Travelling girl to stay on any longer because a lot of them are getting engaged and probably married the following year."*

*"You are allowed to go in your car and go wherever you want to go to bring you to your job, even if you're only single, you're allowed to do that. Mine wouldn't be allowed to do that full stop. There's no point in telling you lies, they wouldn't be allowed to do that."*

Other Comments

21.19 Two parents commented that it would take Travellers another generation at least to be fully integrated into the education system.

*"It'll take 20 year at least, more, for Travellers to fully adapt. But the first thing that's going to have to be done for them is accommodation. That's the cornerstone of any community, no matter where you go, is accommodation. If you have no accommodation you've nothing."*

*"There is a good few changes from 20 year ago but maybe in another 20 year."*

# PART TWO: TEACHERS AND PRINCIPALS

## 22. Introduction

22.1 Part two presents findings derived from the questionnaire and interviews with teachers in the schools. It provides demographic details on gender, age, teaching experience, subjects taught, etc; the responses of teachers to the training and support opportunities provided for teaching Travellers; the issues they raised regarding Traveller children in post-primary schools; the relevance of the NIC and their expectations of Traveller pupils; the relationships Traveller pupils have with teachers, settled pupils and other Traveller pupils; and their suggestions regarding the process of integration and social inclusion for Traveller pupils. Findings from interviews with principals, which generally enquired of settled parents and pupils regarding the attendance at the school of Traveller children, are also reported on.

## 23. Demographics of Teachers

23.1 Fifty-five per cent of the questionnaire respondents were female and eighty per cent were over the age of thirty.

Table 1: Age range of teachers

| Age Range (Years) | Frequency | % |
|---|---|---|
| 20-25 | 2 | 4 |
| 26-30 | 9 | 16 |
| 31-40 | 20 | 36 |
| 41-50 | 17 | 30 |
| 51-60 | 8 | 14 |
| **Total** | **56** | **100** |

23.2 As shown in Figure 1, English was the main subject taught by 16 per cent of questionnaire respondents, followed by science (13 per cent) and mathematics (11 per cent).

Figure 1: Main subjects taught by teachers
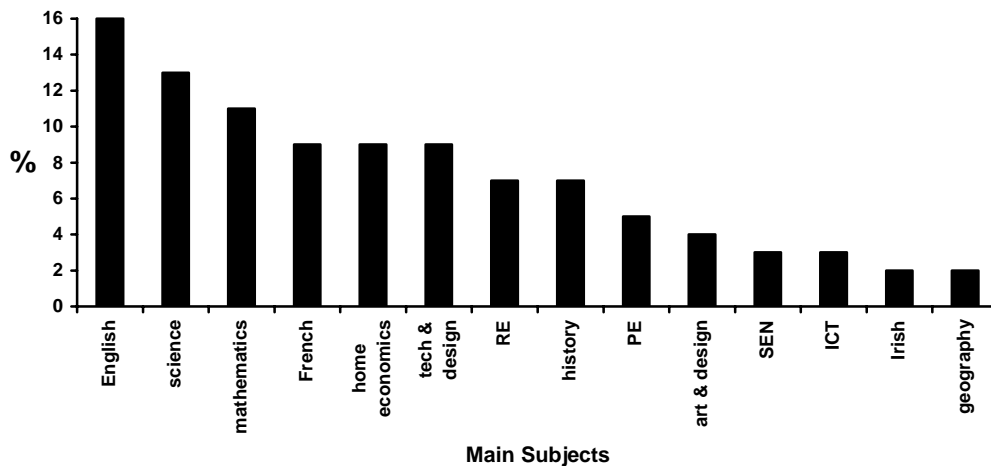
23.3 Half of the teachers interviewed were Traveller support teachers (based in one school or peripatetic teachers employed by the ELBs) or SENCOs. Other roles included form teacher, head of year and head of pastoral care. A few teachers described their role as a link teacher with specific responsibility for Traveller pupils.

23.4 Table 2 shows the vast majority of respondents to the questionnaire had been teaching for over five years and one-third had been teaching for over twenty years.

Table 2: Number of years' teaching experience

| Teaching Experience (Years) | Frequency | % |
|---|---|---|
| 1-5 | 8 | 14 |
| 6-10 | 16 | 29 |
| 11-15 | 9 | 16 |
| 16-20 | 4 | 7 |
| 21+ | 19 | 34 |
| **Total** | **56** | **100** |

23.5 Approximately 60 per cent had five years or more experience of teaching Traveller pupils and 13 per cent had less than three years experience.

Table 3: Number of years' experience teaching Traveller pupils

| Teaching Experience of Traveller Pupils (Years) | Frequency | % |
|---|---|---|
| Less than 1 | 1 | 2 |
| 1 | 1 | 2 |
| 2 | 5 | 9 |
| 3 | 9 | 16 |
| 4 | 6 | 10 |
| 5 | 6 | 11 |
| 6-10 | 12 | 21 |
| 11-15 | 6 | 11 |
| 16+ | 10 | 18 |
| **Total** | **56** | **100** |

23.6 The number of Traveller pupils taught by each teacher at the time of the survey ranged from one to 22, with the mean number for girls being four, and for boys two.

23.7 Teachers who were interviewed were asked about Traveller pupils' living accommodation. This varied from area to area. However, in half of the schools visited pupils were from a mixture of both Traveller sites and settled housing. In two schools the majority of Traveller pupils lived in settled housing and in only one school most of their Traveller pupils were living on a Traveller site.

23.8 Teachers noted a trend in recent years for their Traveller pupils to move into settled housing.

*"I think when I came here they were all on site and over a period of five or six years that has changed."*

*"Some have gone from camps into settled."*

*"Ours would be a mix too, but more and more we find they're becoming settled."*

## 24. Training and Support

<u>Knowledge and Awareness of Traveller Culture/Lifestyle</u>
24.1 Just over one-third of respondents to the questionnaire considered their own knowledge and awareness of Traveller culture/lifestyle to be good or excellent, with 14 per cent acknowledging it to be poor.

Figure 2: Knowledge and awareness of Traveller culture/lifestyle
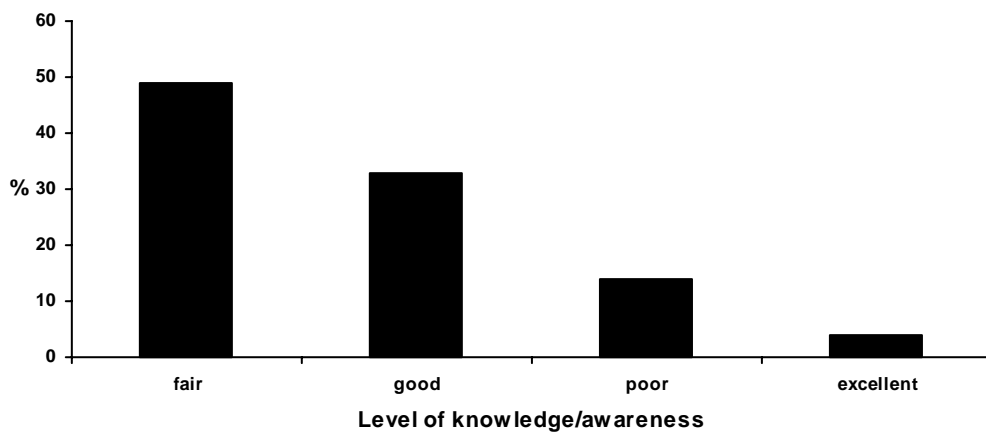


24.2 The teachers interviewed were generally more satisfied with their own knowledge and awareness of Traveller culture/lifestyle than those who completed the questionnaire. A number made reference to their years of experience working with Travellers.

*"I just feel I know the Traveller culture well and it's something you learn over years. You learn it by going down to the parents' homes, speaking to parents. It's just a different way of living and it's something you just grow to understand as opposed to learn about. You understand the more you're working with them."*

*"We have been involved with Travellers for years and I would be familiar with the culture. They would have very strict codes and we'd be aware of it here."*

24.3 Two teachers also attributed some of their knowledge to their own experience of growing up with the Traveller community.

*"I actually was coming through my childhood and watching them moving from our roadside into a settled camp and I can see the change in the children quite remarkable. I can see the whole culture change."*

24.4 As demonstrated by the above comments, some teachers were extremely confident about their understanding of Traveller culture. Others were happy with or felt their awareness to be satisfactory.

*"Generally, I think it would be sufficient at the minute but there could be room for improvement."*

Information/Training on Issues Relating to Minority Ethnic Groups i.e. Travellers
24.5 Only 16 per cent of respondents to the questionnaire had received any information or training on issues relating to minority ethnic groups i.e. Travellers. This ranged from in-service courses to information or training received via Traveller literature, CDs, videos or by word of mouth. The majority of these teachers felt that it had benefited their teaching. Each commented on how it had made them more aware of Traveller pupils' culture and lifestyle.

*"Awareness is always of value! For example, knowing that a wedding is a big event in the Traveller community, resulting in several days off school, means we could celebrate the event and talk and write about it, rather than focusing on the absence!"*

*"Training illuminated in me their lifestyles, their ethos, and their culture."*

24.6 The two teachers who did not feel the information or training they had previously received had any benefit towards their teaching stated:

*"Information was background only."*

*"Everything was related to primary schools."*

24.7 The teachers interviewed were asked if they had received information or training specifically related to Traveller children, and less than half responded yes. In many cases it occurred several years ago rather than more recently.

*"Yes, lots of courses. Not so much now, but in the past."*

*"We did have a lot of courses when the Travellers started coming here…In the last number of years I suppose it hasn't been seen as a priority because we are so well used to Travellers within our system that it isn't that big a problem."*

24.8 It was evident during the interviews that the training received varied. Most of the teachers had attended courses or information days organised by their ELB. Others described in-service days where outside agencies provided background information on Travellers or a video was shown on Traveller lifestyle.

*"I have attended various Traveller courses run by both the SELB and the WELB and benefited from them very much."*

*"Travellers coming talking to us about their culture, that's very useful…Excellent courses."*

*"I was at a few courses then which were very good. Well there was one particular one that went on for three days...they had different speakers in and they actually even did a session on Traveller music. They did give resources, special reading resources for Travellers where we had the trailer and the family and the wedding."*

*"We did a couple of in-service courses, which was mainly just looking at a video and looking at some of the lifestyle that Travellers followed."*

*"(Teacher's name omitted) liaised with other agencies and bodies which were responsible for Travellers and they gave us a lot of background information."*

24.9 As already demonstrated in some of the above comments, most of the teachers interviewed found the information or training they had received beneficial.

*"I came away feeling I really understood Travellers."*

*"I know initially I would have thought our job was to make them like us. Of course that's totally wrong, we're not trying to make them like us, we really have to respect their culture. Even if I personally don't like aspects of it I have to step back and just allow it to be because who's to say I'm right."*

24.10 One teacher who had received no training commented:

*"No, it was just in school on the first day it was pointed out that there may be pupils from the Travelling community in the class, and just if you're having any difficulty you were told to get in contact with (teacher's name omitted). But aside from that, there's no direct training and I don't even think there was any offered. It was just if you're stuck on a problem consult (teacher's name omitted) who would help you."*

Further Information/Training

24.11 All teachers were asked if they felt there was a need for them to receive further information or training on issues relating to minority ethnic groups i.e. Travellers. Three-quarters of the questionnaire respondents answered yes, as did most of the teachers interviewed. The comments made by the questionnaire respondents centred around three main issues.

24.12 The most frequently made comment was that it would be useful for teachers to become more aware of Traveller pupils' way of life, culture and traditions.

*"In order to cater for the aspirations of ethnic groups we need to understand their values and philosophy."*

*"Inclusive education is very important but quite often Travellers are at a disadvantage regarding resources, accommodation and home or family circumstances etc, and there is a need of awareness for teachers and pupils in class."*

*"It would be useful...I am conscious of not offending them therefore I rarely make direct reference to their background in case I make a mistake because of my ignorance."*

24.13 Many teachers felt that further information or training would enable them to help Traveller pupils more.

*"Sometimes I think it can be difficult for these children to fit into mainstream education. It would be good to know how to help them more – any problems they have etc."*

*"I understand that teamwork is one of their strengths in the south, I have no idea if the same applies here. Also I noticed that some are excellent at memory games and I am not sure if oral learning is a more efficient way for them."*

24.14 In addition teachers saw a need to be kept up-to-date because Traveller pupils' circumstances had changed over the years, for example it was highlighted that greater numbers are now in settled housing.

*"My training occurred ten years ago. Yes, because pupils' circumstances have changed and Travellers are more integrated into the settled community than previously."*

*"We need to be kept up-to-date. There are aspects of this culture that are very diverse from our own. We need more training."*

24.15 Those teachers interviewed who favoured further information or training provided a variety of reasons, for instance: the increasing number of Traveller pupils attending their school; the need to keep up with Travellers' changing circumstances; and the fact that there is always room for improvement.

*"I think we should always be kept in touch with the Travellers' views because they're changing, as Travellers lives are changing."*

*"I think training would be big time beneficial. I think they're totally ignored, the difference isn't even mentioned in school which I think it should be."*

*"I would like to meet with other secondary Traveller teachers to share ideas and work practices."*

24.16 One-quarter of questionnaire respondents did not think there was a need for them to receive further information or training. Some reasons put forward included: Traveller pupils should not get or do not require special treatment; and that relevant information is already gained from the children and staff in the school.

*"These pupils wish to be educated in mainstream education like all other pupils. The rules and methods that apply to other pupils should also apply to them."*

*"All pupils should be treated equally. At present I feel Travellers are given more opportunities, help and assistance than settled pupils."*

*"In the context of the school issues relating to Travellers have not as yet arisen. I feel that interaction with children and staff is much more relevant than training."*

*"You learn all you need from the children."* (REC.6 relates to the above section)

Support Received

24.17 When asked about the type of support, in school and/or out of school, received to help with the teaching of Traveller pupils, 15 per cent of respondents to the questionnaire felt there was no support. Of those teachers who did feel support was offered, some listed more than one type. As illustrated in Figure 3, the SENCO was the most frequently cited support, followed by Traveller support teachers and classroom assistants. Other types of support came from the education welfare officer (EWO) and the statutory bodies/ ELBs. (Please note that as some teachers cited more than one type of support the percentages in the chart below do not add up to one hundred).

Figure 3: Support received to help with the teaching of Traveller pupils
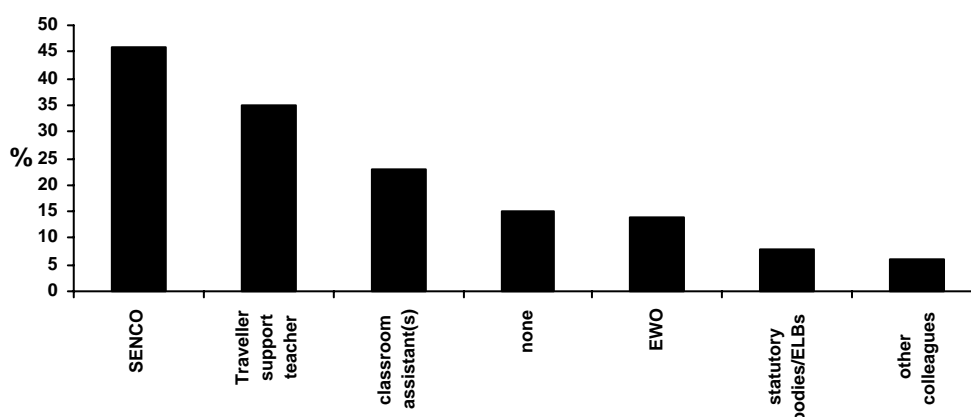


24.18 The EWO and the ELB officer with responsibility for Travellers were the sources of support most frequently cited by those teachers interviewed.

*"We're fortunate here in that we have an EWO who is specific to the Traveller community and that's useful because (s)he's working with the Traveller community on an ongoing basis and has developed a rapport with them. So if I have issues I would ring* (EWO's name omitted). *The EWO would be supportive."*

*"We also have the EWO who would be very good, so if you were concerned about attendance or anything, we would phone* (EWO's name omitted) *and (s)he's very amenable and very quick to answer back."*

*"Well I suppose really* (Traveller liaison officer's name omitted) *would keep us up-to-date with all the legislation. We get threatened with it often enough!"*

24.19 Classroom assistants, Traveller support teachers and the school principal were other types of support mentioned during interviews.

24.20 Three-quarters of the teachers who completed the questionnaire believed either their school or ELB should provide special support for Traveller pupils. Some teachers failed to comment further on their answer while others simply stated their

school already provided special support for Traveller pupils. Several teachers who did comment would appreciate extra help in the form of additional staff, for instance, Traveller support teachers and classroom assistants.

*"Yes, definitely we need more classroom assistants and outside school agencies working to keep the children in school more frequently and help them with literacy problems."*

*"Extra help to improve numeracy and literacy. Elements of curriculum dropped."*

*"More extended and comprehensive support – supporting the holistic needs of the child."*

24.21 Other comments were varied and included that additional resources, a parent support group and a homework club would be beneficial.

24.22 The remaining 25 per cent of teachers who did not think their school or ELB should provide special support for Traveller pupils noted that they already received help and felt that Traveller children should be treated the same as settled pupils.

*"They are already being provided for within the school."*

*"I don't think they should have any special privileges – but should get the same respect and attention as other children."*

*"Other pupils need help as well – all pupils should be treated equally."* (REC.7 relates to the above section)

## 25. Bullying

25.1 The teachers interviewed were asked whether bullying was an issue for Traveller children in their school. Bullying was not specifically referred to in the teacher questionnaire. The general response was that bullying was intermittent rather than consistent. The following are examples of responses to this question.

*"There is an occasional head-to-head between Travellers and settled children but in general the relationship is good."*

*"It can do. If there's any sort of aggro you might find that they refer to, that they're called names with particular reference to their background, their ethnic background. It can cause problems. But I have found that they are more than well able to hold their own."*

25.2 Some teachers expressed surprise that bullying was not more of an issue in their school.

*"From time to time, but not as often as I would have thought, I'm really surprised at how little. It's not as if they don't say so because they do say so. But our Travellers are very much a force of their own. And they would be regarded highly cause they're great craic and they're not under confident."*

*"Off and on. But nothing major at least that I've heard of...A couple of them would call them 'gypsy'. I was actually surprised there wasn't more, that's the God's truth, really. Over the years I was surprised there wasn't more. They fight anyway, first year's coming in, especially as kids do. It's definitely no more with them than it is with anybody else."*

*"It surprises me that it isn't a big issue...there isn't exclusion. The boys' peers would be out there with them...they wouldn't be sort of excluded or name-called or labelled."*

25.3 One Traveller support teacher noted that the level of bullying varied in the schools visited. A small number of teachers stated that bullying of Traveller children was not an issue in their school, or was not one that had been brought to their attention.

*"It hasn't no, it hasn't been a problem. But it certainly hasn't come over that they've been victimised or they're not coming in because they're being called "gypsies", it hasn't been an issue. In fact last year one of the Travellers came and said that he was being pulled by another Traveller. It isn't an issue really."*

*"But no, they haven't complained to me that others were calling them names."*

## 26. Issues Raised by Teachers

26.1 Based on their experience of teaching Traveller pupils, respondents to the questionnaire were asked to identify four main current issues which they associated with Traveller pupils in mainstream post-primary schools. The question was completely open-ended. The two most frequent issues referred to by the teachers centred on Traveller pupils' behaviour and attendance in school. (REC.8 relates to the above section)

Pupils' Behaviour in School
26.2 Some teachers simply referred to the Traveller pupils' generally disruptive behaviour while others provided more detailed comments. Teachers found that Traveller pupils had difficulty conforming, often for example displaying an unwillingness to co-operate or follow instructions. Traveller pupils' attitudes towards teachers and dislike of correction were also noted and teachers said that Traveller pupils could be physically aggressive. Examples of issues raised by the teachers are outlined below.

*"At times they misbehave badly, possibly in an attempt to 'prove' themselves in front of other boys."*

*"They can also be quite restless and disruptive in class. This can also depend on the number of Travellers in the same class."*

*"Lack of willingness to follow set programme. Traveller children tend to want to do their own thing their way..."*

*"At times they believe that the normal school rules do not apply to them because of their 'Traveller status.' They want all of the benefits of this status but none of the constraints."*

*"Lack of willingness to accept the teacher's authority. Traveller children in my experience, in the majority of cases though not all, tend to question and challenge my authority as a teacher."*

*"Many have a poor attitude to teachers."*

*"Women teachers often find it a problem getting the respect of the male Traveller pupils because of the position of women within the Travelling community."*

*"They don't like to be reprimanded."*

*"Over-sensitivity to correction, e.g. if one child is corrected in class others 'gang-up' on the teacher."*

*"Physical aggression. Ongoing physical aggression is used in school as the norm when challenged by either teachers or pupils. They do not understand or know of any other means of defence."*

*"I feel personally, having observed them and noticed them with their peers, that they genuinely don't have the social capacity to deal with someone who hits back at them. If someone relates to them in a way they don't like, all they seem to know is aggression or fighting."*

*"Traveller pupils experience violence at home and think this is a fair way to deal with issues in school."*

*"Traveller boys tend to be more violent and settle disagreements in a physical manner."*

Attendance in School

26.3 Some teachers highlighted Traveller pupils' frequent absenteeism in general. Others commented that little or no explanation is ever given for absences; pupils are often absent for long periods of time due to family events, such as weddings and funerals; and missing so much school further hindered Traveller pupils' progress or adversely affected their behaviour.

*"Absenteeism – Traveller pupils disappear for weeks at a time with little or no explanation."*

*"Attendance is erratic or poor. Attendance is rarely due to illness. Attendance is often due to social issues, e.g. family weddings, funerals etc. which seem to last for weeks."*

*"Poor attendance especially after Year 10. Although welcome in some cases, it contributes to poor progress and lack of motivation."*

*"Attendance – this has to be the most important issue. It is vital to get a good attendance to ensure continuity in class as pupils become 'switched off' when they don't attend often."*

26.4 Problems with integration of Traveller pupils into mainstream schools and poor literacy skills were the next most frequent issues identified by teachers.

Integration in School

26.5 Many teachers commented that Traveller pupils tended to socialise among themselves during their time at school.

*"They do not integrate with the other children. Traveller children tend to keep to themselves. On one occasion only one Traveller was in the class and the other children made a great effort to keep her involved and be part of their friendship groups, but at break and lunchtime the child spent time with other Traveller children."*

*"They are always sticking together and don't like to be separated."*

*"There is a problem with them mixing and integrating with their fellow pupils. They tend to stay together in class, at break, in the canteen. As they get older they become more segregated."*

26.6 A few teachers noted that some settled pupils were less than accepting of their Traveller peers.

*"Isolation. These pupils tend to remain aloof and have no wish to mix with peers. This is also the case within the peer group where there is a 'shunning' of the Traveller pupil. This is not to suggest any sinister or racial issue, simply these Traveller pupils have very little in common with the 'settled' pupils."*

*"Also there is still antipathy from some students towards some Travellers which can be very hurtful at times."*

Poor Literacy Skills

26.7 In addition to highlighting problems with Traveller pupils' literacy skills, a small number of teachers also commented on the poor literacy levels of Traveller parents.

*"Much weaker reading and writing skills than other pupils."*

*"Poor literacy skills – pupils and parents."*

26.8 Some teachers commented on Traveller pupils' generally low academic achievement and unwillingness to take school examinations.

*"They tend to be quite weak academically."*

*"Unfortunately most Traveller pupils have low attainment and need special help."*

*"By the time pupils reach Key Stage 4, few are willing to enter examinations or to reach their maximum potential."*

*"Despite the excellent efforts of all staff Travellers do not participate in Key Stage 4 examinations. Perhaps this could be addressed!"*

Parental Support

26.9 The next most frequently cited issue that teachers associated with Traveller pupils in mainstream post-primary schools was a perceived lack of parental support. Many teachers gave as evidence of this the fact that Traveller parents rarely attended school events.

*"Lack of parental involvement – parents never attends parent teacher meetings. No excuse or reason is ever given for absenteeism i.e. no note."*

*"Getting parental support – parents place less value on education – often promise improvement – little progress made. Feel that we are the opposition."*

*"Lack of parental support – parents are either not interested or feel out of their depth. If the parents have reading difficulties they cannot support the child."*

*"Home support for homework is poor."*

26.10 Other issues raised by teachers of Traveller pupils included: practical issues with timekeeping; having the correct uniform, books, pens and homework; personal hygiene; and leaving school at an early age.

26.11 Replies from the teachers who were interviewed agreed with those from the questionnaire that the two main issues associated with Traveller pupils in mainstream post-primary schools were behaviour and attendance in school. Encouraging Traveller pupils to stay on at school was the next most frequently raised issue.

Reasons for the Issues Identified

26.12 During the interviews teachers were asked to explain why they felt such issues were apparent in the education of Traveller pupils. With regards to poor attendance, various reasons were provided. These included: Travellers' nomadic lifestyle; lack of amenities to aid preparation for school, for example washing uniform; the importance placed on family events, weddings, funerals, etc; school not being a priority; parents keeping girls at home to help out with domestic duties; and boys working with their father to earn money.

26.13 Some teachers felt the feuding and fighting among Traveller families and their belief that violence was more acceptable in the Traveller culture partly contributed towards explaining Traveller pupils' poor behaviour.

*"I think because the Traveller culture itself has allowed violence to be, I wouldn't say an intrinsic part, but we're all aware of, it's more acceptable. You know of feuds that take place in Traveller families and if young people see violence as being used to resolve problems then it's small wonder that they're going to use the same things when they're in school."*

*"There's also a lot of feuding and fighting among Travellers and all that affects the child and creates problems for the child coming to school."*

26.14 When asked about possible reasons why Traveller pupils did not stay on at school, some teachers made the following comments.

*"They tell you in first year, I'm only staying until I'm in third year. Then third year they're engaged and the next year they're married."*

*"Their sense of values are completely different and they maybe feel the world's a better educator for them and that they should be out learning to get a trade or whatever in their own setting."*

*"She said* (Traveller mother) *that the older one actually burnt the uniform because all the other girls in the camp of that age were not going to school."*

26.15 One teacher referred to a phone call he had taken from the parent of a Year 8 pupil who was adamant that his son was not going to school because he was old enough to work.

*"And he just never came to school. As far as he was concerned he'd done his stint at school, that was the primary school and now it was time to go out and work."*

Equality of Treatment

26.16 Questionnaire respondents were asked if they used the same general approach for both Traveller and settled pupils when addressing the issues previously identified by them. Fifty-seven per cent employed exactly the same methods, forty-one per cent employed similar methods and two per cent employed totally different methods.

26.17 Almost one-quarter of respondents who employed the same approach for both Traveller and settled pupils did not elaborate further on their answer. The most frequent comment made was that all pupils should be treated the same.

*"We have to treat all pupils in a fair manner and adhere to guidelines. We have one set of rules, one code of conduct – we cannot make exceptions – it just would not be fair. Many of our settled pupils have worse backgrounds! No exceptions are made in their case."*

*"I believe that if these children wish to be treated the same as their peers then the same rules and regulations apply to them as to all children in the classroom situation. The same help for children with learning difficulties is there for them."*

26.18 The two main comments made by teachers who used slightly different approaches were that Travellers were given extra help or attention in class and they sometimes made allowances or concessions for Traveller pupils.

*"For attendance and reading and maths age more time needs to be spent with individual pupils."*

*"Make allowances – greater motivation and reinforcement needed."*

*"Try to understand how they deal with certain issues and cut them a bit of slack when required."*

26.19 A few teachers noted that the normal disciplinary procedure of detaining pupils after school could not be used with Traveller pupils due to their special transport arrangements.

*"When they are disruptive in class I cannot keep them for detention after school as they get a special bus and must leave directly after school. This can seem unfair to the other children in the class."*

26.20 The one teacher who employed a totally different approach for Traveller and settled pupils commented:

*"Sanctions are not applied when books and pens are not brought to class or homework not completed. Extra help is given."*

26.21 The majority of teachers interviewed stated that both Traveller and settled pupils were treated in a similar way. However, more concessions and rewards were provided for Traveller pupils, or additional support/information was available for them, for example, from the EWO.

*"If the Traveller child is doing well you just lavish praise and gifts and presents…They're far far more rewarded than the settled child…"*

*"Generally in the school the same strategies are used to deal with the problems of both Traveller and settled children. Personally, I allow some concessions for the Traveller children, e.g. in their culture no harm is seen in arriving late."*

## 27. Curriculum and Learning

Relevant Resources
27.1 Twenty-two per cent of respondents to the questionnaire used resources in their teaching that were relevant to Traveller culture and lifestyle. These ranged from resources supplied by specialists and material on topics in which Traveller pupils were interested, for example horses, to material covered in various subjects in the curriculum, for example religious studies and geography.

*"Whatever materials and resources are given to me by specialists."*

*"Geography – we look at ethnic minority groups and we have photographs of them and their way of life."*

27.2 Comments made by those who did not use relevant resources focused on the fact that they were not aware of the resources available, they did not want to offend or single out Traveller pupils and they were not fully aware of Traveller culture to incorporate it into their teaching.

*"What resources are specific to the Traveller culture?"*

*"When doing English I need to be careful that the material being used does not offend the pupil. I have found that they do not like being identified as a 'Traveller' in a classroom situation."*

*"I have received no training on issues relating to Traveller culture which could be incorporated into my teaching. The children do sometimes talk about their experiences, which I and other pupils find interesting."*

Relevance of the Curriculum

27.3 The vast majority of teachers who completed the questionnaire felt their main subject was relevant in addressing the educational needs of the Traveller pupils in their classes.

*"Maths is very important in everyday life – shopping, managing a household etc."*

*"English and literacy are essential for all pupils to fully access all curriculum areas."*

*"Topics covered in religion are often related to problems of social justice – this is an area where they can be discussed honestly and calmly."*

*"I use 'therapeutic approaches' for pupils who cannot articulate their needs. 'Art as therapy' is a useful medium with them!"*

*"Food and nutrition covers very important issues in relation to healthy eating which are important because the health status of Travellers is not good."*

27.4 Those teachers who did not think their main subjects were relevant for Traveller pupils taught French, religious education, and technology & design.

*"A modern language would not be high in the priorities of the Traveller family."*

27.5 The teachers interviewed were asked about the relevance of the curriculum in general for Traveller pupils. The most frequent comment made was that the curriculum was not relevant for a lot of pupils, Traveller or settled. A number of teachers suggested a more vocational curriculum for all children.

*"The curriculum isn't relevant for a lot of children. It could be more vocational/skill based for a lot of children."*

*"To be honest I don't think it's appropriate for the general educational needs of children per se, never mind Travellers…But I feel that all children, never mind Travelling children, could avail of more vocational skills being taught in secondary schools."*

*"I sometimes wonder whether the curriculum's relevant for the majority of kids in this school. We're following a national curriculum, we have to follow certain areas…As far as the Travellers go I think myself that they should be concentrating more on*

*literacy, numeracy. I think this idea of disapplying the curriculum in certain areas would be good for them."*

Teacher Expectations of Traveller Children

27.6 A report by DfEE/OFSTED (1999) entitled, *Raising the Awareness of Minority Ethnic Pupils*, stated that teachers' expectations of Traveller children when in school tended to be unreasonably low. Questionnaire respondents were asked for their views on the statement. To assist with the quantitative analysis of this question, comments made have been divided into two groups. Firstly, those that agreed with the statement or offered justification for low teacher expectations of Traveller children, and secondly those that disagreed or argued that the respondent or the school did not have lower expectations of Traveller children.

27.7 Approximately half of the questionnaire respondents either agreed with the statement or offered justification for low teacher expectations of Traveller children in terms of, for example, Travellers' poor attendance, early school leaving age and non-participation in examinations.

*"I agree. Teachers may find them exhausting to work with and may take the easy option of ignoring/placating them."*

*"I would agree with this statement due to bad attendance and poor discipline."*

*"They don't do any exams (both external and internal), rarely do homework and miss so much school."*

27.8 One of the teachers interviewed commented:

*"Why would you bother with them when they're never going to be tested, your ability's not going to be tested because they're not going to enter an exam so you don't ever have to prove yourself with this group. And again their attendance, if they're not going to come why should I, and no parent pressure to do well. So it's really up to the goodness of the teacher whether he or she does anything with the Travellers or not."*

27.9 The other half of the questionnaire respondents and the majority of the teachers interviewed disagreed with the statement or emphasised that they and their school did not have low expectations of Traveller pupils. This group commented that all pupils were treated equally, they had the same expectations for all pupils, and all pupils were streamed according to their ability and as much was expected of Traveller pupils as of other pupils in their stream.

*"All children are viewed as unique and equal in my school regardless of their background."*

*"I don't agree. We expect each child to achieve their full potential regardless of ethnic background."*

*"Some of the kids I have taught tend to be in lower streams and they are given exactly the same treatment as the other pupils in their class."*

*"I wouldn't think so – we stream all pupils on entry to Year 8.  No exceptions made for Travellers.  They go into the class that suits their needs best."*

Educational Attainment
27.10 Almost half of the teachers who completed the questionnaire described Traveller pupils' educational attainment as weaker than that of their settled peers. Several teachers attributed this to poor attendance.

*"If measured using the same criteria as their settled peers then generally it is lower – but since they are not coming to school with the same aspirations and expectations as the settled community, then we need to judge their success the way they do according to their value system, not ours."*

*"Generally do not attain as well, are often poor at reading but can express themselves well orally."*

*"Lower – due to poor attendance, lack of support in their background."*

*"Absenteeism prevents similar achievement, otherwise I would expect it to be the same."*

27.11 One-third thought Traveller pupils' educational attainment was similar to that of their settled peers.  Some of these teachers stressed that classes were streamed and Travellers were at the same educational level as those settled pupils in their class.

*"For most pupils it is equally comparable."*

*"The majority are of the same standard and some are in fact above average educational attainment."*

*"Due to considered form groupings and the nature of the 'settled' children, the Travellers' educational attainment is of a standard accepted of the whole class grouping."*

*"Similar – however they are in a low ability class."*

27.12 Small numbers of teachers stated that the educational attainment of Traveller pupils could be compared to that of their settled peers in the first couple of years of post-primary school only.  Teachers also commented that the Traveller pupils were not as focused or organised.  Others said it was difficult to generalise about Traveller pupils' educational attainment. (REC.9 relates to the above section)

Learning About Minority Ethnic Groups
27.13 The vast majority of questionnaire respondents believed pupils in schools throughout Northern Ireland should be provided with more opportunities to learn about minority ethnic groups.  The most frequent comments made by these teachers focused on the claim that education could help to break down barriers and that additional information could enable settled pupils to become more aware and understanding of Traveller culture.

*"With the increasing diversity of cultures in our society it is essential to be informed as a means of promoting tolerance."*

*"Intolerance is best undermined by an informed population."*

*"Pupils don't know a lot about Travellers' traditions and need to understand them a bit more."*

*"This would allow other pupils to appreciate the lifestyle and culture of Travellers."*

27.14 While agreeing that pupils should have more opportunities to learn about minority ethnic groups, some teachers expressed concern about where it would fit into an already overcrowded curriculum.

*"But given all the targets to be met in the mainstream subjects, plus the citizenship, bullying, drugs and numerous other awareness programmes, where is the time to learn about ethnic groups going to come from?"*

27.15 A number of teachers stressed that pupils should learn about various traditions and cultures rather than solely focusing on Travellers.

*"In a society which is so divided as Northern Ireland I think it is important to learn about all other groups."*

27.16 The nine per cent of respondents who felt that there is no need to provide pupils with more opportunities to learn about minority ethnic groups did so for a variety of reasons. They believed that pupils already learn about minority ethnic groups; it would isolate the Traveller pupils more; and since Northern Ireland is not yet an integrated, multi-cultural society, why should pupils learn about minority ethnic groups. (REC.10 relates to the above section)

## 28. Relationships in Post-Primary School

Traveller Pupils' Relationships with Teachers
28.1 Almost half of the questionnaire respondents described their relationship with the Traveller pupils in their classes as similar to the relationship they had with the settled pupils. However, some of these teachers then went on to specify issues they had with Traveller pupils, for example, that they were being more difficult to handle and required more teacher attention.

*"Very similar to other children. I do not make any difference between any of the children I teach. I normally find them very straightforward and easy to get on with."*

*"Very similar. I find Traveller pupils in most cases very pleasant and well mannered."*

*"My relationship with them is no different except that I tend to spend more time with them because of attendance and ability."*

*"No real difference – more difficult to handle when older."*

*"Same, in most cases!  The girls are all fine.  Boys have issues with women!"*

28.2 Over one-third of questionnaire respondents and most of the teachers interviewed described their relationship with Traveller pupils in a positive light.

*"I have a good relationship with these pupils but I would have to remind them about being on task slightly more."*

*"I enjoy teaching my Traveller boys.  They have settled extremely well in class."*

*"I thoroughly enjoy them – they are full of character and are generally very keen."*

*"I would say it's good.  You have to get to know them and then they'd talk to you and tell you things."*

28.3 Only a few teachers made wholly negative comments about their relationship with the Traveller pupils in their classes.

*"Very difficult to connect with these pupils as their sense of humour is different or perhaps they are more guarded and do not respond to kindness, concern or undue attention."*

*"At present problematic."*

Traveller Pupils' Relationships with Other Traveller Pupils

28.4 The majority of questionnaire respondents described the relationships that Traveller pupils had with other Traveller pupils as being very positive.

*"Excellent – there seems to be very strong bonds."*

*"Very good.  They are very 'tight.'  They look out for each other all the time."*

*"Very supportive of one another and always look out for each other."*

*"Very close knit and loyal."*

28.5 Several teachers felt they were clannish rather than close in that they tended to stick together and rarely mixed outside their own group.

*"Almost like a 'secret clan'.  They always remain together at break-time and lunchtime.  They all travel together to/from school."*

*"They stay very closely together and do not mix outside."*

*"They seem to be one big unhappy family at times.  They do associate and look out for each other in a kind of 'us and them' way but they squabble a lot among themselves. If outsiders become involved they band together against the outsider."*

28.6 A small number of teachers indicated that Traveller pupils' relationships with other Travellers could be contentious, with arguments and disagreements a frequent occurrence.

*"Very much stick together.  However can fall out with serious consequences at times. Sometimes boys have to be separated in class due to family feuds."*

*"It depends on which family they are from.  Sometimes the relationship is close and at other times it can be fiery."*

Traveller Pupils' Relationships with Settled Pupils
28.7 Approximately one-third of teachers described the relationship Travellers pupils had with settled pupils as friendly.

*"They fit in well and always have different little friends both Traveller and settled."*

*"The vast majority mix well."*

28.8 A further one-quarter of teachers stated that Travellers pupils generally had good relationships with their settled peers but noted a negative aspect to the friendship, for example, friction sometimes occurred or Traveller pupils were not wholly integrated on a social basis.

*"Usually good – occasional name calling."*

*"Most of the time they get on well – at least in classroom situations there seems to be no problems.  However, at break/lunchtimes they* (Traveller pupils) *seem to group together."*

*"Very good.  They have their friends but I do not think these relationships are carried on out of school."*

28.9 Approximately one-fifth of teachers made wholly negative comments about Traveller pupils' relationships with their settled peers, generally focusing on the fact that Travellers did not socialise with the settled pupils and vice versa.

*"Travellers tend to stick together, therefore do not allow other pupils to get too close and develop relationships."*

*"They tend to stay very much on their own and do not mix freely.  When involved in any dispute Traveller children are very aggressive."*

*"Unfortunately majority of other pupils ignore them or give them a wide berth."*

28.10 Several of the teachers interviewed noted that while there were some situations where integration between Traveller and settled pupils was evident, the general trend was for Traveller pupils to group together.

*"They* (Travellers) *do stick together in class, but you see them having the craic with others. It would always be like their real friend would be the other Traveller but then they do have positive relationships with others."*

*"They* (Traveller and settled pupils) *are very friendly, yet at break time all of the Travellers are together, they're not with the other members of their class."*

*"There's an amount of integration but no matter how good the integration they* (Travellers) *do tend to veer towards each other."*

Contact with Traveller Parents

28.11 Fifty-eight per cent of teachers who completed questionnaires had never any contact with the parents of Traveller pupils in their school. Some of these teachers failed to comment further. Approximately half of those who commented further noted that Traveller parents never attended Parents' Nights or meetings. A few teachers pointed out that other members of staff, for example, the teacher with responsibility for Traveller children or the principal, would have contact with Traveller parents.

*"In the 22 years of teaching only one parent ever turned in for a Parent-teacher meeting."*

*"Very hard to get parents to come up. If a problem arises we go up to the home of the Traveller pupil and visit the parent."*

*"I have never seen them, but the teacher responsible for Travellers visits them in their community."*

*"I haven't met any of them yet."*

28.12 Those teachers who had some contact with Traveller parents stressed that either parents' meetings were poorly attended or contact was infrequent and was made through specifically arranged meetings organised by themselves or the school.

*"Parents are asked to come in especially as they don't attend Parents' Nights."*

*"Parent-teacher meetings, although we have had to make special arrangements for their parents. They do not seem to like coming when the other parents are coming. They often break appointments so we contact them mostly by mobile phone and EWO."*

28.13 The main comment made by teachers interviewed was that it was difficult to get Traveller parents to visit the school.

*"We have great difficulty getting them into school. We've tried, we've sent cars down to take them up to parent-teacher meetings and they wouldn't come up. There's a shyness, they're intimidated by the big school institution. They themselves had a bad experience of school therefore they don't feel comfortable and so the best thing for us is to call down. I'm hoping that will change with the Traveller parents now moving into houses."*

28.14 One teacher revealed:

*"Because they don't come to parent-teacher meetings, you see where I have my Parent-teacher meetings, in Sainsbury's!"*

28.15 Even though Traveller parents were not seen very often, a few of the teachers interviewed described their relationship with them as good. In an effort to maintain good relations with Traveller parents, one teacher sent gifts home with Traveller pupils on special occasions, for example the birth of a baby.

## 29. Suggestions from Teachers

Help and Support for Teachers
29.1 When asked what help and support could be provided to assist with the teaching of Traveller pupils the majority of respondents suggested extra staff ranging for example from in-class support and classroom assistants to Traveller liaison officers.

*"Perhaps some classroom support and someone who can monitor and follow up attendance, homeworks and behaviour."*

*"Extra staff member responsible for Traveller needs in the school."*

*"If the school had a teacher for a couple of hours each day for support and liaison, willing to drive up to camp or home and be able to iron out any difficulties re trips and signed permission slips etc, it would be great."*

29.2 The second most frequent suggestion was that more information on Traveller pupils' culture would be of benefit.

*"Background on their environment and living conditions, not just 'hearsay'."*

*"More awareness about cultural differences would be useful, e.g. pamphlets about their expectations."*

*"Maybe a course on their beliefs and customs and what to expect from them and what they expect from us."*

29.3 Other suggestions included better parental support and more resources.

29.4 Those teachers interviewed provided a range of suggestions regarding help and support that could be provided for teachers of Traveller children. These included the provision of specific courses on the Travelling community; contacts between schools who had Traveller pupils; and more money/resources. One teacher concluded by adding:

*"We're always glad of any help; any money on the go would be useful. Though having said that I don't see them needing any more than anybody else. I mean they* (Travellers) *do have their own EWO and they do have their own ELB officer. I think there's plenty of support there for them, I honestly do."*

Suggestions to Help the Process of Integration and Social Inclusion

29.5 Sixty per cent of respondents to the questionnaire provided suggestions relating to the need to help with the process of integration and social inclusion of Traveller pupils.

29.6 The most frequently made suggestions included that schools should concentrate more on the induction process of Traveller pupils entering post-primary school and that an awareness of Traveller culture should be promoted among settled pupils and teachers.

*"A member from ELB (key representative) should provide an induction programme for these children including both parents and children. A key member of staff should be timetabled to be in as part of this programme, to create a bonding with the school."*

*"Attendance at the summer scheme prior to entrance into Year 8. Facilitates the transition from primary to post-primary and helps Traveller pupils to be more accepted."*

*"Develop more tolerance among the settled pupils and more awareness of Traveller culture."*

*"Let the other pupils and Travellers talk about the differences – not just sweep these under the carpet – not ignore these as is currently the case. We give the impression of shame of their lifestyle."*

29.7 Other suggestions included treating Traveller pupils like all other pupils and establishing more contact with Traveller parents. A small number of respondents, rather than suggesting what could be done to improve integration, highlighted the fact that Traveller children are already integrated well into their school.

29.8 A few of the teachers interviewed suggested that establishing and maintaining relationships with Traveller parents would help the process of integration and social inclusion.

*"It would be fabulous if there was someone from the Board or someone from CASS or someone somewhere along the line who could perhaps have the Travellers with the parents in a wee session in school together. Even get them working together and then maybe have, you know if you even had them in with their children first, seeing what's happening, observing, feeling a part of the school community."*

29.9 In one school where behaviour problems had arisen between both settled and Traveller pupils in a particular class, teachers recently devised a programme to help with the integration of Traveller and settled pupils.

*"The main aim is that they* (Travellers) *can express their culture and lifestyle and that the settled community can express their culture and lifestyle and let the two address how one perceives the other and how they can come together as a unit. Even to be just basically within a classroom situation not beyond that, not necessarily having to move out and become friends beyond, but just to integrate in a classroom situation."*

29.10 One teacher felt that Travellers were not being acknowledged in the school and that both settled pupils and teachers required education about Traveller culture.

*"It's like having a black child in the room and just ignoring the fact that they're black and their daddy's from West Indies."*

Encouraging Traveller Pupils to Remain in School
29.11 Sixty-six per cent of teachers provided suggestions regarding what could be done to encourage Traveller pupils to attend post-primary school up until compulsory school-leaving age.

29.12 The most frequently made comments included offering a more relevant curriculum; helping Traveller pupils and their families realise the value of education; and offering financial incentives.

*"If alternative curricular provision, i.e. training scheme one day a week or work experience is offered, especially at Key Stage 4 for those who do not want to focus on GCSEs and exams. Personal one-to-one advice on options and discussions with parents and liaison/support teacher."*

*"Educate them on the importance of having an education."*

*"Maybe give a grant to those children who stay on to school leaving age."*

29.13 A number of the schools that took part in the research already offered alternative education provision (AEP) to pupils in Years 11 and 12. For example, in one school pupils on the AEP programmes attended the school three days per week, spent one day gaining work experience, and the other day attending a college of further and higher education to gain vocational qualifications. However, regular attendance was one criterion taken into consideration by the schools when allocating AEP places.

29.14 A few teachers commented that leaving post-primary education at an early stage was a cultural issue for Travellers and would be very difficult to change. One of the teachers interviewed noted:

*"I think really it'll happen in due course. As Travellers become more settled and as it filters through from one generation to the other, the problem will become less. But at the moment I think really there's still a very strong Traveller culture which doesn't give a lot of respect to formal education and as long as you have that you're going to have problems of non-attendance."*

29.15 The main suggestion put forward by those interviewed, with regards to encouraging Traveller pupils to remain in school until compulsory leaving age, centred on a more vocational curriculum.

*"If you're going to hold on to them longer, if you're thinking that we're going down the traditional GCSE route here, you're going to waste your time."*

*"We could put kids out on work experience three days a week, four days a week if we had to and that would give them skills. They would be out learning whatever trade along with coming in to maintain their basic English and numeracy."*

*"I feel that all children, never mind Travelling children, could avail of more vocational skills being taught in secondary schools. A lot of those children, and they'll say to me as well, 'why do we need to be doing French, why do we have to be going to geography?' I do feel that more vocational skills could be taught."*

29.16 The important role of Traveller parents in encouraging their children to remain in school was also highlighted.

*"Education of the parents to see the benefits of school because I don't think at the moment they really do see it as beneficial."*

29.17 A few teachers suggested incorporating legal sanctions or withholding financial benefits as a means to ensure Traveller parents send their children to school.

*"I think there's that much legislation protecting them, you know, that you have to be so careful. But I wonder, could you use legislation the other way to bring their children to school? Using the legislation this time to ensure they send their children to school until the end of Year 12, regardless of what age they are."*

*"I always say until it hits their hip pocket they will not think about it on a regular basis, and that is why I want to see them being taken to court."*

*"Withholding family allowance is a good one…not exclusive to the Travellers, all young people. Ok, your child is not coming to school, you are not fulfilling your duty as a parent, give us your family allowance."*

29.18 One teacher emphasised the important role of the EWO in encouraging Traveller pupils to remain in school up to compulsory leaving age.

*"Keeping good contact with parents, having a good EWO especially one specifically for Traveller children who'll go down and keep going down when they're not at school…It's harder to track down the Traveller children so I think there should be more emphasis on EWOs working very closely with the school and really concentrating their energies into getting them to come. You saw what we did today, down talking to Traveller parents urging them to send their kids to school next year. You can't keep doing those sort of things."*

Other Comments

29.19 Some teachers provided other comments relating to a variety of issues, such as including emphasis on their belief that all children should be treated the same, and criticism of the NIC for its lack of relevance for the education of Traveller pupils. Some teachers also used this space to express their enjoyment of teaching Traveller pupils.

*"I have taught Traveller pupils for five years. I enjoy them immensely! They tend to be quiet and sensitive in class so in my subject – English – I constantly try to enthuse and encourage them to have the confidence to find their own voice!"*

*"I enjoy teaching Traveller pupils as much as settled. Contacting parents can be difficult, perhaps a teacher/parent liaison would help."*

29.20 Others made less positive comments.

*"A considerable amount of time and money is directed at the Traveller children. Is this an effective or efficient use of funds re private taxis, buses etc, compared to the lack of similar funds for settled pupils?"*

*"Traveller children that I have taught are not as disadvantaged as is made out. They are very good at surviving and are very competitive and ambitious. They have more talents than they are given credit for. Not many Travellers who leave our school do not have a new van/car within a year. I'm teaching for many years and I have never managed to buy a new car – point made!"*

## 30. Interviews with Principals/Vice-Principals

30.1 Four principals and one vice-principal were asked whether settled parents or pupils had ever made an issue of the fact that Traveller children were attending the school.

<u>Settled Parents</u>
30.2 Two of those interviewed felt that this was not an issue which had ever been raised by parents. One of these principals commented:

*"The issue has been more around Traveller family and feuds. Some Traveller parents will tell you, 'I don't want my daughter put in with such and such a family'."*

30.3 Two principals explained that the attendance of Travellers at their schools had previously been an issue but had since been resolved.

*"Years ago you might have got someone saying, 'I don't want my so and so in with* (Traveller pupil's surname omitted)*'. At Open Nights or Parents' Nights it's not an issue, probably because we have too few Traveller children in the school."*

*"It has been in the past, but at present it is not an issue. Traveller children were perceived as bold, they did not have the same standard of uniform. Some parents did not want their children to be placed in class with Traveller children. Because the school couldn't exclude or refuse to admit Traveller children it lost some pupils. The issue was addressed by appointing strong staff, in particular one teacher who is the Travellers' form teacher."*

30.4 Settled parents refused to send their children to one school because Traveller pupils attended. The principal of the school commented:

*"My experience of it is that you don't get parents who will very often mention it to you directly, it's a subject that really they wouldn't want to talk about. There would be some parents, I don't know whether to call them parents or not because they're not parents of pupils of this school, there are some parents out there who have told me and told other people that they don't send their children to this school because of the Travellers at it. So that's one major impact on the school."*

Settled Children

30.5 Two of those interviewed felt that settled pupils did not have an issue with Travellers attending their school.

*"There are no problems with the other children although the Travellers tend to socialise together, probably for protection."*

*"No, I haven't been involved in any disputes with settled children and Travellers."*

30.6 Two principals indicated that there were current problems in their school involving fighting and name-calling between settled and Traveller pupils.

*"There are some skirmishes and the Traveller children stick together. There's a bit of racist name-calling."*

*"To some extent it's not too bad in the school. But I'll give you an example no more recently than yesterday where there was a fight between two girls, a Traveller girl and a non-Traveller girl. When the two girls were brought into me and I interviewed them separately the non-Traveller girl said, she used the word 'gypsy' which is a very offensive word as far as the Travellers are concerned. She said, 'what are you going to do about this, these gypsies run this place and they can do whatever they like?' That isn't the case but that's the perception so it is."*

## PART THREE: VOLUNTARY GROUPS

### 31. Introduction

31.1 Part three presents the research findings from interviews held with representatives from Traveller Support Groups and focuses on the education of Traveller pupils at post-primary schools. The interviews were informed by the following areas of discussion: the role and responsibilities of the interviewees and the services provided by their groups relating to education; contacts and relationships with other groups regarding Traveller education; main issues associated with the integration and social inclusion of Traveller pupils in post-primary schools with suggestions relating to promoting and enhancing this; and ways in which Traveller pupils could be encouraged to attend post-primary school up to compulsory school leaving age.

31.2 Traveller Movement (NI) is an umbrella organisation for Traveller Support Groups and was originally founded as the Northern Ireland Council for Travelling People in 1981. Each of the Traveller Support Groups that participated in the interviews is a member of Traveller Movement (NI) and has been operating for a number of years.

### 32. Services Provided

32.1 Traveller Movement (NI) advocate Travellers' rights and are committed to working in partnership with statutory and voluntary agencies in the fields of: education; pre-school playgroup provision; economic regeneration; women's education and training, and youth work provision. Their programme of work aims to secure a "long-term commitment from statutory and voluntary agencies to resourcing appropriate responses to the needs of the Traveller community". They have organised conferences on equality for Travellers and developed an anti-racist training pack and training is delivered by both a Traveller and a settled person. In addition, they employ a regional community development worker who visits rural areas where Travellers have no access to support groups.

32.2 The services provided by the Traveller Support Groups varied enormously, depending on the size of the local Traveller population and the groups' success in gaining funding. For example, one relatively small Traveller Support Group concentrated their efforts on ensuring Travellers had access to existing services, such as youth groups in the 'settled' community. Conversely, Derry Traveller Support Group have a purpose built Traveller Centre which opened in 2001 after five years of fundraising and accommodates a wide range of programmes for Travellers. These include a pre-school playgroup, a homework club, a youth club for young men and a youth club for young women, as well as men's and women's groups.

### 33. Education Programmes

33.1 Examples of education programmes offered for young Travellers by the Traveller Support Groups are given below.

- As part of an early years project an outreach creative play programme and parent support programmes are offered.
- Young Traveller men (14+) have embarked on taster courses in personal development, IT, woodwork, bricklaying and plumbing, with the support of an Institute of Further and Higher Education.
- Young Travellers between the ages of 13-18 have received training on values and beliefs; basic office skills; organisational skills; basic IT skills and Traveller Pride (a short course which explores self-identity).
- One group recently received confirmation, subject to economic approval, of funding to offer a full-time three year EOTAS programme for ten Travellers.

33.2 It should be noted that the information above provides a very brief outline of services and education related programmes. In addition Traveller Support Groups offer various other programmes for example on health-related issues. They also offer general advice and information and actively seek to influence government policy.

## 34. Cultural Awareness/Anti-Discriminatory Practice Training

34.1 One of the groups has developed a cultural awareness training programme which is being marketed to a range of statutory and non-statutory organisations, including schools and youth clubs. This programme explores the history, culture and language of Travellers and includes practical exercises that for example examine issues of prejudice, discrimination and racism.

34.2 In several of the support groups which gave interviews employees are qualified to deliver anti-discriminatory practice training. One group was at the discussion stage in marketing this training to organisations, whilst another group stated they had already begun to do so, with mixed success.

*"Social services has taken it up, the Council has taken it up. We're looking at doing it with the Training and Employment Agency. Schools haven't even as much as written back to us, none of them. There's a cost to it, that's why."* (REC.11 relates to the above section)

## 35. Relationships With Other Organisations

35.1 The education subgroup of Traveller Movement (NI) meets quarterly and includes representatives from the other Traveller Support Groups. Some interviewees cited examples of projects or issues they had worked collaboratively on with other Traveller Support Groups, and one interviewee explained how their group had linked up with other more established Traveller Support Groups to utilise their expertise.

35.2 Some of the Traveller Support Groups described good working relationships with Education and Library Board employees while others had minimal contact. One interviewee commented, *"it's not been an easy relationship"*, and felt they were *"kept at arms length"*, while another identified *"a lack of support from social services."*

35.3 The Traveller Support Groups have very little contact, if any, with post-primary schools.

*"We tried to build contacts and there didn't seem to be an awful lot of interest in building partnership."*

*"Not very much, the contact would be made through* (Traveller liaison officer's name omitted).*"*

*"Our staff would visit schools in relation to a particular child or programme they're running, that's all."*

**36. Main Issues**

Racism and Bullying
36.1 Racism and bullying were among the main issues identified by Traveller Support Groups in relation to Traveller education.

*"The issue of racism in schools and bullying, this is an issue which young Travellers have raised."*

*"The bullying is the major issue probably. Also the attitudes of teachers. Travellers would tell you that if there is any kind of dispute a settled person will always be believed. I don't know how many Travellers have told me that."*

*"Teachers were not believing the young people. If anything happened the Traveller was blamed. Some teachers are fine, other teachers have their own prejudices."*

36.2 Some interviewees stated that the racist attitudes of some settled pupils and teachers and incidents of bullying contributed to Traveller pupils' early school leaving age.

*"Again there's bullying that children would have indicated, that parents would have cited as a reason for not sending them to school. They're being identified as Travellers, they're being picked on. There's been name calling, racist incidents within the schools and rather than deal with that with the school they just pull their children from it."*

*"Some of the children would say that they were bullied at school so therefore when they come to about 15 they drop out."*

*"If their child comes home and says they don't want to go back there again they've been there, they're not going to send their child back to suffer that again."*

Discrimination in the Workforce
36.3 Several interviewees commented that the discrimination faced by Travellers when seeking employment led them to question the benefit of an education and whether gaining qualifications would make any difference to their chances of getting a job.

*"Some of them looks out and says what the hell do we need education for, where's it going to get us? I'll still be a Traveller, I'll still be discriminated against. I could*

*have a load of 'O' levels and all them things but will it take away stigma that people has against me?"*

*"The other thing that different Travellers have said, what is the point in getting qualifications when nobody's going to give us jobs? So the discrimination is coming in there as well."*

*"They're never going to get a job as a Traveller, I've been often told that. What's the point? I would like them to read and write because I can't, but other than that they can't see a value in education at all."* (REC.12 relates to the above section)

Accommodation
36.4 Interviewees commented that Traveller accommodation was an important issue which impacted on every aspect of a Traveller's life, including education.

*"Accommodation has been a major issue in here which has a knock on effect on everything."*

*"I know school is very important but if you have no home, somewhere to call a home, that's your foundation…It affects everything, schooling is affected as well."*

36.5 Some highlighted the practical drawbacks of living in a trailer.

*"Getting accommodation, the environment some Travellers live in isn't conducive to education, e.g. there are no laundry facilities in* (town name omitted) *so the children's uniform can't be washed…Traveller children have no concept of play, there is no space for them to play in the caravan. There is no privacy for children to do homework."*

*"If you're living in a mobile home on a cold winter's dark morning, if you've to get up and light a fire, you've no electricity, you've no hot water, and your clothes might be wet from the night before. People don't understand, there's no washers, no driers, no microwaves. Survival is the main thing. Having your uniform pressed for school, that wasn't a priority."* (REC.13 relates to the above section)

Relevance of the Curriculum
36.6 The relevance of the Northern Ireland Curriculum for Traveller pupils was questioned by many of those interviewed.

*"From speaking to young Travellers the girls in particular would be saying to me there's nothing on the curriculum. Obviously that's not their words that's mine. They say, 'what is the point in us learning French, what is the point in us learning? We're going to get married, we're going to go home and mind children'. So they decided that there was very little relevance to them of what's been provided."*

*"And then also the subjects are not something that appeals to them. Travellers, I'd say from my experience, are more into the creative side of things, skills, that type of thing."*

36.7 The curriculum was one of the factors identified by Traveller Movement (NI) as affecting Traveller participation at post-primary schools.

*"A post-primary curriculum which is not perceived as relevant to the vocational and cultural aspirations of the Traveller Community. A post-primary curriculum which fails to meet the needs and aspirations of Traveller children and parents."*

Other Issues
36.8 Many other issues were raised by representatives. These included: the lack of value placed by some Traveller parents on academic achievements; low expectations some teachers have of Traveller pupils; the poor literacy skills of some Traveller pupils; the need for Traveller children to have support outside of school, e.g. with homework; the advantage many settled children have of attending pre-school, and the problems that segregated primary education in Belfast creates for the post-primary integration process.

## 37. Traveller Pupils' Early School Leaving Age

37.1 Most of the Traveller Support Group representatives cited cultural issues when explaining why Traveller pupils did not remain in school until compulsory school leaving age.

*"You have the cultural issues, the girls being trained in childcare within the home, the boys opting into the Traveller economy."*

*"It's always been the case. Girls get taught from home from about 13 or 14, an apprentice thing, housework, childminding, cause they get married young. So it gives them two or three years of education in housekeeping before they get married. It's the same as the young fellas, you worked beside your father from 10 or 12 when you were strong enough to work. You learned the skills."*

*"For some girls…all they can see is getting married or whatever, and they don't have to worry about having exams."*

37.2 Other reasons proposed by some included the lack of value placed on education; the inappropriateness of the courses available and racism.

## 38. Suggestions From Traveller Support Groups

Promoting Multiculturalism and Addressing Prejudice
38.1 A number of suggestions were made about how integration and social inclusion could be facilitated and about how Traveller pupils could be encouraged to stay on in post-primary school. Principally these suggestions concerned the promotion of multiculturalism and addressed prejudice in schools.

*"I think the Traveller culture and other ethnic minorities culture should be promoted very much so."*

*"Even if within schools if there was more work done on citizenship and multiculturalism put into that, and value for cultures and stuff like that, and raising*

*the issues of prejudicing and discrimination. That has to be part of the curriculum where it's not accepted or not tolerated."*

*"Also I think prejudice needs to be addressed at an early age as well, I mean everybody carries prejudice, but I think school might be the place to start addressing it."*

38.2 A few Traveller Support Group representatives proposed introducing anti-racist training.

*"Because the issue of cultural awareness training, while it is useful in one sense, there tends to be a focus on members of minority ethnic communities explaining themselves and their culture as if somehow it has to be justified. Anti-racist training on the other hand focuses on the prejudices of individuals and all of us have our prejudices...I would see that really as number one but I think cultural awareness training is also important as well. It's additional to anti-racist training, not a substitute."*

*"Within a school it has to be the teachers, the cleaners, the dinner ladies, everyone who has contact with the children needs to have cultural awareness and anti-racist training."*

Teacher Training
38.3 A number of interviewees emphasised the need for teachers to receive relevant training to raise awareness of Traveller culture and the educational needs of Travellers.

*"I think the problem there is that a lot of the teachers have their own hang ups and they're afraid to deal with the challenges themselves because they're not educated. Training for all teachers, that's a major issue that has to be dealt with."*

*"Teachers directly involved with Traveller children will require an extensive programme of in-service education. All practicing teachers should be provided with pre and in-service training relating to the general area of Traveller education."*

*"The training for teachers and the training for pupils and trying to address the bullying and name calling and all that sort of thing."*

The Curriculum
38.4 The Traveller Support Groups felt the provision of a more relevant curriculum would encourage Traveller pupils to stay on longer in school.

*"Again, trying to make the curriculum more interesting, things that would be beneficial to them."*

*"They can do anything with DVDs and televisions and anything that can be fixed. So more training in that kind of field, something in the curriculum that would help them to improve those skills more."*

38.5 All interviewees were in favour of a more vocational curriculum, for example EOTAS, being offered to pupils.

*"DENI should consider developing a more flexible post-primary curriculum in consultation with Traveller organisations for children aged 14+ for whom a mix of educational and technical/vocational training may be more appropriate. This may enhance the employability of Traveller children."*

38.6 A few groups felt it would be beneficial if they could offer such courses.

*"You know the way they have EOTAS, our Travellers would not go to that with settled people. But could we not incorporate that down here and could we not access funds that EOTAS get because they're not at school? We could have a group here of eight Travellers. Could you imagine that for two years, what they would gain out of that?"*

Collaborative Approach
38.7 Interviewees and some literature from Traveller Support Groups recommended a more collaborative approach between those involved with Travellers in both the statutory and non-statutory sectors.

*"I would say more widely, in relation to the whole area of education for Travellers, there is a lack of effective co-ordination. One of the questions here again is the link contacts with other statutory/voluntary organisations that are interested in Traveller education."*

*"If there's an opportunity to work with support agencies who have contact with parents, who parents trust, and get us all round the table to work together for the young people to keep them in school then we should be taking these opportunities."*

*"Greater communication between School Principals, Education Welfare Officers, Traveller Liaison Officers/Teachers and Voluntary Groups should take place in order to co-ordinate help for families. Traveller Movement (NI) recommends that Traveller Liaison Officers co-ordinate help for families."*

38.8 In relation to the Forum for the Education of Traveller Children (NI) one interviewee commented:

*"It's all statutory and we feel very much like second-class or third-class because of this organisation. You're not considered somebody who has enough professional knowledge or ability to contribute to discussions about the education of Traveller children, Travellers employed or people who have experience of running projects."*
(REC.14 relates to the above section)

Other Suggestions
38.9 Other suggestions proposed included the need to encourage Traveller parents to send their children to pre-school; the importance of promoting the value and benefits of education to Traveller families; and the need to monitor attainment levels of Traveller pupils to ensure educational progress can be measured.

38.10 Several interviewees said that achieving success in persuading more Traveller pupils to stay on in post-primary schools would be a gradual process and change would also have to come from within the Traveller community itself.

*"I can see a sort of slight change will come maybe in the next generation but the parents that we have, that we're working with at the moment are still very very traditional."*

*"Travellers also need to look at themselves, the two groups need to come to a mutual acceptance."*

*"I think you're going to have to change a whole generation's way of thinking for starters in terms of Travellers and in settled people, but especially Travellers. Until they start to value education they're not going to be empowered to go and challenge themselves what's going on in school. It's not for us to change it. I think Travellers will speak best for themselves but they have to be empowered to do that, they have to be given the skills."*

**PART FOUR: STATUTORY AGENCIES**

## 39. Introduction

39.1 Part four presents the responses from representatives of the five ELBs and CCMS who were interviewed. The areas of discussion which informed the interviews included: policy regarding Travellers and post-primary education; the role and responsibilities of the interviewees and the services provided by their organisations relating to education including training, support and resources; and main issues associated with the integration and social inclusion of Traveller pupils in post-primary schools and suggestions relating to promoting and enhancing this. Some findings have been supplemented by documentation provided by those interviewed, and information obtained during interviews with Traveller support teachers employed by ELBs.

## 40. Policy on Traveller Education

40.1 The Southern Education and Library Board (SELB) is the only ELB which has their own written policy on Traveller education, produced in 1995 and derived from the Department of Education's policy at that time, Circular 1993/37, 'Policy and Guidelines for the Education of Children from Traveller Families.' Representatives from three other ELBs stated they each adhered to the Department of Education's policy (formerly Circular 1993/37, superseded by the Departmental Action Plan 'Strategic Report on Travellers'), and the remaining ELB was guided by the Forum for the Education of Traveller Children (NI). The Western Education and Library Board (WELB) has produced a booklet detailing educational support for Traveller children within the ELB area.

40.2 CCMS has never issued a specific policy information draft on Traveller education. Their representative commented:

*"In terms of equality, all children educated in Catholic maintained schools are subject to the same policies, procedures and protocols in the interest of equality."*

40.3 The only document which exists from CCMS is an internal paper entitled *Primary Education for Traveller Children in Belfast*, which was produced in 2000.

## 41. Employees with Responsibility for Travellers

Board Officers
41.1 Three of the ELBs (BELB, SELB and WELB) employ officers with sole responsibility for Traveller pupils. In the SEELB there is a limited number of Traveller pupils to warrant a Traveller specific post, however, the assistant advisory officer who has responsibility for pupils with English as an additional language is also responsible for Traveller pupils. In the NEELB the post with responsibility for Traveller children was vacant at the time the interview took place. However, it had previously been filled by an assistant education officer responsible for post-primary education. These ELB officers, along with their line managers, work collaboratively through the Forum for the Education of Traveller Children (NI), which was established to promote and support the statutory education of Traveller children.

41.2 Examples of duties which ELB officers with sole responsibility for Traveller pupils have are outlined below.

- Encouraging access to education and regular attendance.
- Promoting the successful transfer of children from primary to post-primary school.
- Liaising where necessary on matters relating to the education of Traveller children:
    - between schools and Traveller families;
    - between schools and the ELB;
    - with other ELB personnel as appropriate, e.g. Behaviour Unit, Youth Service, Education Welfare Service;
    - with colleagues in other ELBs;
    - with other statutory and non-statutory agencies.
- Responsibility for Traveller Support Teachers.
- Organising/delivering appropriate training for teachers of Traveller pupils.
- Contributing/responding to policies and strategic plans.

Traveller Support Teachers

41.3 The arrangement in each ELB regarding Traveller support teachers is outlined below.

- The BELB employs a literacy support teacher specifically for Traveller pupils in post-primary schools. This teacher is based in St. Gerard's Resource Centre and visits four schools at present.
- In the SEELB there are currently no Traveller children in post-primary schools. (The ELB has one part-time curriculum support teacher for Travellers).
- The NEELB employs one full-time support teacher who currently works with two primary schools and one post-primary school.
- The WELB has five permanent Traveller support teachers, each working with primary and post-primary schools.
- The SELB differs from the other ELBs in that it does not employ any peripatetic teachers for Travellers. Where there are significant numbers of Traveller children the ELB will provide, where possible, additional teacher support, on a part-time or full-time basis. Their representative commented, "*it would be more reflective of nomadic people and nomadism if we had a facility where teachers could move if needs be.*"

## 42. Training Provided for Traveller Support Teachers

42.1 The training received by Traveller support teachers varied considerably across the ELBs. One week's training is given at the beginning of each academic year by one ELB. This training covers such areas as Traveller specific resources and liaison with support groups, families and ELB personnel. In other ELBs the support teacher shadowed the ELB officer with responsibility for Travellers before taking up the post, or spent some time in schools in another ELB area to find out how they operated.

### 43. Format of Support to Traveller Pupils in Post-Primary Schools

43.1 The support provided by peripatetic Traveller support teachers varies.

- In the BELB priority is given to Year 8 and Year 10 pupils, and Traveller pupils receive help on a one-to-one basis. Cultural and social issues are addressed in addition to literacy.
- In the NEELB support is provided in Year 8 and Year 9. Children receive mostly literacy support in withdrawal groups usually consisting of four Traveller pupils and two settled pupils. In-class support is provided for numeracy.
- In the SELB (which does not employ peripatetic teachers for Traveller pupils) for example, one part-time teacher funded by the ELB focuses on literacy and numeracy, and pupils are given one-to-one support or small groups of Traveller pupils are withdrawn from class.
- In the WELB social skills are addressed in addition to literacy and numeracy. The format of the help provided by the five Traveller support teachers depends on the school and the needs of the children. It could be one-to-one support if a pupil was very weak and intensive help was required. Some schools favoured in-class support while pupils were also taken out of class in integrated groups.

### 44. Relevant Resources

44.1 The use of culturally specific and intercultural resources for Traveller pupils is encouraged in each of the ELBs.

*"If you deny the Traveller their culture and they don't see their artefacts and they don't see their history and they don't see their stories and images, well it's almost denying that there's a culture there at all so that's not the way forward."*

44.2 One representative expressed a preference for celebrating Traveller culture through an intercultural approach:

*"The way forward is to appreciate the richness of the cultural diversity of all cultures including Traveller culture as one, but I think it's best, if possible, not to single it out. I think it's best done in an intercultural setting and in an intercultural way."*

### 45. Forum for the Education of Traveller Children (NI)

45.1 The Forum for the Education of Traveller Children (NI) has developed two intercultural resources. The first, *Interlinks*, is a CD-ROM for Key Stage 2 which introduces pupils to eight characters, whose experiences are based on real children in Ireland today. Pupils can explore the characters' interests and traditions and learn more about their daily lives. The second resource developed in association with the Forum is *Netconnect at Key Stage 3*, accessible at the following website address: http://www.ccea.org.uk/NetConnect/webpages/intro.html. This is an interactive website which has been specifically designed within the context of Northern Ireland.

This site offers teachers and pupils opportunities to explore issues of equality and diversity in the classroom.

## 46. Main Issues

46.1 Interviewees were asked what they considered to be the main issues associated with the integration and social inclusion of Traveller children in post-primary schools. Cultural issues were frequently raised.

Valuing Education

46.2 Interviewees highlighted the lack of value placed on education by Traveller parents.

*"There's no history of seeing the value of education, it's not part of their culture."*

*"I think it has to be remembered that Travellers have only been involved in education for 50 or 60 years whereas our own culture has had education for hundreds of years. They are newcomers to education and they're not convinced at this stage of the value of it."*

46.3 Linked to the issue of value was the need to see tangible benefits of an education.

*"Travellers will not value education until they see education providing for their child what they currently provide, which is a way to earn a living."*

*"Travellers don't see themselves getting a job even with NVQs...If as a parent you constantly see discrimination then you'll encourage your children into the home economy so they can earn a living. They have to see an end product."*

Home Economy and Early Marriage

46.4 The 'home economy,' whereby boys follow in their father's footsteps to make money, for example, selling tools or scrap and the tradition of early engagement and marriage were identified as issues impacting on Traveller education.

*"I think that one of the difficulties is that in the culture Travelling people are expected to go out and work in the Traveller economy. Their males are involved in the various male aspects of the Traveller economy, earning money and trading. The females tend to go into the domestic roles, the cooking and cleaning, the life skills, the family preparation."*

*"Well the obvious thing is the influence of the home and that, there are cultural issues about preparing the girls for marriage and what role education has, because so few of them actually do go out to work."*

*"Girls have been groomed to take over the role of their mother from 13. There are arranged marriages at 13 and 14 so it's totally different and they see themselves as adults and they're perceived by their parents as almost adults."*

Cultural Conflict

46.5 Some representatives raised the issue of conflict between Traveller culture and settled society.

*"You're looking at the traditions of the Traveller culture against the norms of the society that we live in. There's a tension between where their identity is."*

*"There's a kind of cultural conflict going on and I think it's a major thing. Certainly schools and teachers can do their best for the children and I think, given the circumstances, they are doing their best, but it is very difficult to compete against a very strong influence of the culture."*

Non-Attendance

46.6 Non-attendance at school was raised and explanations given for this centred on cultural traditions and included Travellers' nomadic lifestyle and frequenting family events, for example weddings and christenings.

Literacy

46.7 The importance of the literacy of both Traveller pupils and their parents for integration was discussed.

*"What a Traveller child needs in order to promote effective integration is the ability to read. I think that's a big key to it because quite often the Traveller child comes into secondary school with limited reading skills and there's a sense of feeling ashamed or not as good as the other children... And the teacher's writing things on the board and he can't understand it and the child just feels lost and he plays up sometimes. Not all Traveller children, some Traveller children."*

*"The current parents haven't come through education, it is unknown to them. They can't support literacy."*

*"Lack of help from parents or inability to help."*

The Curriculum

46.8 Several interviewees noted the lack of relevance of the Northern Ireland Curriculum for Traveller pupils in post-primary schools.

*"There is a culture of dissatisfaction in schools Travellers are in because the Curriculum is inappropriate for weaker children."*

*"It probably has a lot to do with the National Curriculum not being particularly relevant."*

*"Ensuring that there's a curriculum that's relevant and broad and matched to their needs is a crucial factor."*

Other Issues

46.9 Other issues raised included the 'stigma' attached by some in the Travelling community to older pupils attending school and Traveller parents hiding their children to ensure they did not have to attend school.

*"I've heard parents teasing children, calling them schoolboy and nicknames, and children ashamed to be going to school."*

*"I've known a situation where adults are not saying where their children are, they're saying their children are in England. That's sad, they're hiding children. Again if the child doesn't want to go to school in the Traveller culture it's just, 'the child doesn't want to go to school, leave the child'."*

## 47. Suggestions

47.1 Representatives from the five ELBs and CCMS provided a variety of suggestions for enhancing the integration and social inclusion of Traveller pupils and retaining them until compulsory school leaving age.

Traveller Parents
47.2 The role of Traveller parents in conveying the value of education was highlighted throughout the interviews. The need to make Traveller parents aware of the importance of pre-school education and to encourage them to send their children to nursery school were considered essential. One representative noted that improving the current situation may not be easy. It would require an inter-agency approach whereby health visitors promote education for parents from the very beginning and social services would need to encourage and train parents to use play to help educate their children. Other related suggestions included providing a 'nurture class' to fast track Traveller children who are disadvantaged during their stages of development as a result of inadequate parenting skills.

*"Education has to be seen to be valued at the beginning...right down from when women are pregnant and before. You need some sort of value placed from day one - grow from roots and flourish."*

*"A lot of support at nursery level as a way forward, not just play-group, full-time nursery."*

47.3 Addressing the problem of adult literacy was also raised.

*"They're disadvantaged right from the beginning because their parents can't read. Maybe if those literacy difficulties were addressed, just to help them with everyday living."*

47.4 Interviewees stressed the need to work with Traveller parents and promote the value of education generally.

*"I do try to encourage Traveller parents to avail of education. I point out that their children can benefit better and they can become their own care workers, social workers and their own teachers, and they can do form filling in their own writing, and they can be independent and can have their own jobs. But that takes time and I think it would be good if there were programmes which were specifically about educating the parents about the value of education."*

*"Money and resources are needed to push things on, to target the parents. We need to skill the parents."*

*"I think that you'll find there needs to be a considerable amount of work done with Traveller parents in terms of looking at value."*

47.5 One interviewee added:

*"Progress is slow in that area, people are not easily convinced to change their culture and say, "Well this is better for you and go that road". It's slow work."*

47.6 The CCMS internal paper 'Primary Education for Traveller Children in Belfast' states:

"The Council supports the development of 'Family Literacy Centres' on group housing sites to promote learning amongst adults as well as children. It sees these as fundamental to helping parents appreciate the value of education and also develop the skills and abilities to support their children's learning. The Council envisages these as a support to the formal education service not as an alternative".

Educating Teachers
47.7 Raising teachers' awareness of Travellers and other minority ethnic groups was proposed as essential by several of those interviewed.

*"Teachers are in need of greater education. Prejudices need to be broken down. The profession needs to understand that Travellers hold minority ethnic status under Section 75."*

*"Materials for teacher training. We need resources for structured training, we need to create awareness."*

*"There should be in-service training for all teachers of Traveller children."*

47.8 One interviewee felt a lot more could be done for Traveller teachers to help them deal with behaviour issues, especially in relation to young Traveller males.

The Curriculum
47.9 Several of those interviewed suggested introducing a more diverse curriculum for Traveller pupils, incorporating for example more social skills and EOTAS provision.

*"I think that teaching Travellers life skills, for example teaching girls mothering skills, would be very useful. Social relationship skills, personal and social development, that would be another core kind of skill."*

*"I just think a practical-based curriculum would probably suit Travellers better. And one that focused more on personal development would be useful too."*

*"Absolutely, vocational, for them and for a lot of other children because they're not alone in that."*

47.10 The CCMS internal paper 'Primary Education for Traveller Children in Belfast' states:

"The Council supports the principle of the development of a more flexible curriculum at 14-19 which extends educational experience, motivates and appropriately challenges all pupils and students and provides vocationally relevant courses with credible and accepted accreditation".

47.11 The internal paper continues:

"The Council is open to supporting all strategies for addressing the needs of Travellers including 'Education Other Than at School' (EOTAS) and further education provision at Key Stage 4 for individual pupils who might not be motivated by the statutory curriculum".

47.12 One interviewee highlighted the unsuitability of the current method of assessment in post-primary schools.

*"I think too probably the type of system we have at the moment where assessment is always based on hand-written reports where you have to sit down and write an examination, it doesn't particularly suit a lot of Travellers. If it was modularised and broken down…Who's going to wait five years to come out of this system? If you're a Traveller you're used to looking at an instant mode, surviving day to day kind of thing."*

## 48. Other Comments

48.1 The following additional comments were made regarding Traveller education:

*"Equality of access and equality of opportunity are human rights, they're based in European legislation so therefore it's a matter for education, health and all the various statutory agencies to apply some joined up thinking. Looking at these issues you cannot look at the Traveller community without looking at the structural issues of accommodation, of health, of education, they're all one."*

*"Travellers have suffered historical injustice and this needs to be addressed."*

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*The Young Travellers' Project* (2000).  Supported by the Edinburgh Youth Social Inclusion Pilot Programme.  Available at:
[http://www.youthinclusion.org/Pdfstore/Travellers_Report.pdf]

# **APPENDIX**

92

# **Traveller Children in Post-Primary Schools Questionnaire**

*This research is funded by the Department of Education and is concerned with the process of integration and social inclusion of Traveller pupils into mainstream post-primary schools.*

*Please **do not** discard this questionnaire as it acts as a platform for you to comment on your experience of teaching Travellers and suggest initiatives that would be beneficial for both teachers and Traveller pupils.*

*We are interested in your experience of teaching Traveller pupils generally rather than your experience of teaching any particular Traveller child.*

*This questionnaire is **completely confidential**. No individual or school will be identified in the research.*

*Please return the completed questionnaire in the attached freepost envelope before* .

*(Please tick the boxes that apply)*

*GENERAL DETAILS*

1. Male ☐          Female ☐

2. Age range
   20-25 ☐          41-50 ☐
   26-30 ☐          51-60 ☐
   31-40 ☐          61+ ☐

3. Number of years teaching experience
   1-5 ☐            16-20 ☐
   6-10 ☐           21+ ☐
   11-15 ☐

4. What (a) <u>main</u> subject AND (b) other subject(s) do you teach?

   Main subject ………………………...Other

   subject(s)...……………………………………

5. *How many Traveller pupils, approximately, do you teach? (please give a breakdown of boys and girls)*

   ……………(Boys)      ……………(Girls)

6. Number of years experience teaching any Traveller pupils

   Less than 1 ☐        3    ☐          6-10  ☐

   1           ☐        4    ☐          11-15 ☐

   2           ☐        5    ☐          16+   ☐

*TRAINING AND SUPPORT*

*7. How would you describe your knowledge and awareness of Traveller culture/lifestyle?*

*Excellent* ☐
*Good* ☐
*Fair* ☐
*Poor* ☐

8. Have you received any information/training on issues related to minority ethnic groups i.e. Travellers?

Yes ☐ Please give details below
No ☐ Please go to Q10

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9. If you *have* received information/training on issues related to minority ethnic groups i.e. Travellers, has it benefited your teaching?

Yes ☐ Please comment below
No ☐ Please comment below

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10. Do you think there is a need for you to receive (further) information/training on issues related to minority ethnic groups i.e. Travellers?

Yes ☐ Please comment below
No ☐ Please comment below

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11. Please tell us about any support (in-school and/or out-of-school) you receive to help with teaching Traveller pupils, e.g. from the School SENCO, ELB, Traveller Support Groups or any other Statutory/Voluntary Agencies.

*In-school support*……………………………………………………………………
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**<u>Question 11 contd.</u>**
*Out-of-school support* ……………………………………………………………………
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## ISSUES

12. Previous research has highlighted various issues associated with Traveller pupils in mainstream post-primary schools.  Please list below _four main current issues_ you have identified from your experience of teaching Traveller pupils.

*Issue 1*

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*Issue 2*

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*Issue 3*

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**_Question 12 contd._**
*Issue 4*

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## CURRICULUM AND LEARNING

13. Do you employ the same methods <u>for both Traveller and settled pupils</u> when addressing the four issues previously identified by you?

Yes, exactly the same methods are employed ☐ Please give reasons below
No, slightly different methods are employed ☐ Please give details below
No, totally different methods are employed ☐ Please give details below

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14. Do you use resources in your teaching that are relevant to the Traveller culture/lifestyle?
Yes                    ☐ Please give details below
No                     ☐ Please comment below
N/A for subject taught ☐ Please go to Q15

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15. Do you feel your main subject is relevant for the educational needs of the Traveller pupils you teach?
Yes      ☐ Please explain below
No       ☐ Please explain below

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16. A report by DfEE/OFSTED (1999) entitled, Raising the Attainment of Minority Ethnic Pupils, stated that teacher expectations of Traveller children when in school tended to be unreasonably low. What are your views on this statement?

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17. How would you describe the educational attainment of the Traveller pupils you teach in relation to their settled peers?

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18. Do you think pupils in Northern Ireland should have more opportunity to learn about minority ethnic groups?

Yes ☐ Please comment below
No ☐ Please comment below

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19. Do you think your school/ELB should provide special support for Traveller pupils?

Yes ☐ Please comment below
No ☐ Please comment below

*School*..................................................................................................
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*ELB*..................................................................................................
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## *RELATIONSHIPS*

20. How would you describe your relationship with the Traveller pupils you teach in comparison to other pupils?

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21. (a) How would you describe the relationships that the Traveller pupils have with other Traveller pupils?

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    (b) *How would you describe the relationships that the Traveller pupils have with settled pupils?*

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22. What contact do you have with the parents of Traveller pupils you teach, e.g. parents' nights?

No contact ☐ Please comment below
Some contact ☐ Please comment below

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## *SUGGESTIONS*

23. What help/support would you suggest could be provided to help with your teaching of Traveller pupils?

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24. Do you have any suggestions regarding what could be done to help with the process of integration and social inclusion of Traveller pupils into mainstream post-primary schools?

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25. Do you have any suggestions regarding what could be done to encourage Traveller pupils to attend post-primary school up until compulsory school leaving age?

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26. *Any other comments?*

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*Thank you for your co-operation.*
*Please return the completed questionnaire in the freepost envelope.*

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