

# Building Futures: Developing trust

A focus on provision for children from  
Gypsy, Roma and Traveller backgrounds  
in the Early Years Foundation Stage

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#### Instructions for running your DVD-ROM

Insert the DVD-ROM into your DVD-ROM drive. Your computer may automatically run the program if you have a feature called Auto run enabled. If it does not automatically run, take the following steps:

- For PC users, double click on My Computer to open it, and then double click on the DVD-ROM icon to open the DVD-ROM.
- For Mac users, double click on the DVD-ROM icon on your desktop to open the DVD-ROM.

Double click on the file 'index.html' to run the resource.

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The websites referred to in these materials existed at the time of going to print.

Please check all website references carefully to see if they have changed and substitute other references where appropriate.

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Note: The information and ideas contained in this document may be applicable to practice with other families who may be at risk of underachievement.

Both parents and carers of children are included in the term 'parent' when used in this booklet.



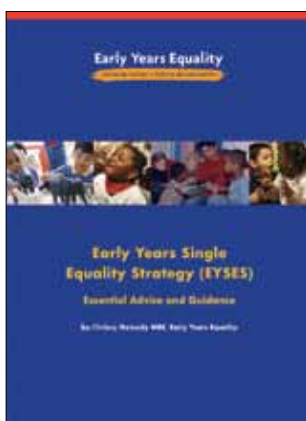
# Building Futures: Developing trust

## A focus on provision for children from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller backgrounds in the Early Years Foundation Stage

This guidance invites practitioners across the whole range of Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) settings to reflect on the quality of their provision for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) children and their families. The resource is set within the context of the themes, principles and commitments of EYFS and adds to the guidance on inclusive practice contained within the statutory framework and the practice guidance. It is one of a set of materials that aim to increase practitioners' knowledge and understanding of potentially vulnerable groups, so that providers give informed consideration to their particular circumstances and requirements.



The resource consists of a booklet and a DVD-ROM, which contains the written materials with additional case studies and footage to exemplify the experiences of local authorities (LAs) and individual settings that are developing effective practice. Additional resources on the DVD-ROM include *Early Years Outreach Practice: Supporting early years practitioners working with Gypsy, Roma and Traveller families* by Save the Children.



To consider the wider context for equalities, it will be helpful for leaders, managers and practitioners in settings, as well as LA officers, to refer to the Early Years Single Equality Strategy (Early Years Equality, March 2008).

Thumbnail image from Meleady, C (2008) *Early Years Single Equality Strategy (EYES)*. © Early Years Equality. Used with kind permission.



## What is this booklet about?

The Early Years Foundation Stage statutory guidance states:

*All children, irrespective of ethnicity, culture or religion, home language, family background, learning difficulties or disabilities, gender or ability should have the opportunity to experience a challenging and enjoyable programme of learning and development.*

This booklet provides guidance for all practitioners so that this entitlement is met for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children. It will support and challenge practitioners in their understanding of how, by working in partnership with families and with a range of services, they can begin to address some of the barriers to achievement that currently exist for some of these children. It will require practitioners to examine their attitudes, preconceptions, stereotypical assumptions and prejudices in order to ensure that every child matters, in their setting, and that due regard is given to the particular circumstances of diverse groups who may be at risk of underachievement.

Discussing the underachievement of vulnerable groups can be uncomfortable for practitioners, particularly when the groups are defined by their ethnicity. Children and families who are Gypsy, Roma or Travellers of Irish heritage, particularly when they are 'settled' and no longer travelling, are often 'invisible' because most are white and their ethnicity is not obvious, but they are recognised and protected under the Race Relations Amendment Act. These frequently excluded groups experience prejudicial and often openly hostile attitudes and racism.



Deep-seated prejudice towards travelling communities may be unashamedly voiced and hostility is openly displayed. Anti-Traveller feelings are often publicly expressed without fear of criticism and have been described as 'the last "respectable" form of racism' (Trevor Philips, 2004). Such sentiments cannot be allowed to penetrate a profession that cares for and about all children and families.

Where prejudice, often built on fear, exists, it should be explored in a safe and confidential space among colleagues. Histories, cultures, traditions and stereotypes hold deep-seated feelings that should be openly acknowledged. The complexities surrounding inclusion, exclusion, lifestyle-choice, ethnicities, as well as eradication of cultures, change and social engineering, are too broad-ranging to be covered in any depth in this booklet; practitioners are encouraged to explore the issues in an informed way through further reading and discussion.

## Who are our Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children?

Throughout these guidance materials, reference is made to Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children, parents and communities. This collective grouping includes:

- Gypsies
- Scottish Travellers or Gypsies
- Welsh Gypsies or Travellers
- Roma
- Travellers of Irish heritage
- show people
- fairground families
- circus families
- New Travellers
- bargee or canal boat families.



## Ascription

The collective grouping described above includes those families who may share aspects of a similar lifestyle but do not necessarily share the linguistic and cultural heritages of the Roma, Gypsies and Travellers of Irish heritage and would not therefore ascribe to that ethnicity.

The current term used by the DCSF, Gypsy, Roma and Traveller, gives regard to the legal terminology surrounding the minority ethnic status of the two main groups, 'Gypsy or Roma' and 'Travellers of Irish heritage', and includes those families who now live a more settled lifestyle and travel infrequently.

Those working closely with Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities, such as the Traveller Education Support Services (TESS), are often aware of families from these heritages who choose not to reveal their ethnicity and so may ascribe to a different group, such as White British, Irish or, perhaps, White Other if from an Eastern European Roma background. It is not surprising, therefore, that data held at national level indicates cohort sizes for children from Gypsy, Roma or Travellers of Irish heritage families to be smaller than some local knowledge suggests.

While ascription to an ethnicity is a matter of choice, that choice should not be based on fear of discrimination or persecution. However, for too many families, revealing their ethnicity or cultural heritage as Gypsy, Roma or Traveller when they can otherwise remain anonymous would be to take that risk of persecution. For other families it may be that because they are no longer travelling they do not consider themselves to be 'Travellers'; there may be some misunderstanding about ethnicity, culture and lifestyle and about the importance of ascription. It may also be that the families who do not ascribe consider their ethnicity and heritage to be no one else's business but their own.

Data about ethnicity is collected so that children's progress can be tracked and any gaps in achievement can be recognised, addressed and closed. The more accurate the data about children's backgrounds is, the more likely it is that funding streams and targeted support will be effective.

It is therefore particularly important that those collecting the information, who may be administration staff or practitioners, have the knowledge and understanding to help families ascribe correctly and that the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller families are confident that their ethnicity will be respected.

Further guidance on Gypsy, Roma and Traveller ascription is provided in Appendix 1.

## Why has this guidance been written?

The EYFS Framework was developed in recognition that Early Years experiences have a major influence on children's future life-chances. At the core of the Framework is the notion of inclusion and the belief that all children are competent, unique individuals who are entitled to the kind of high-quality care and learning experiences in all their Early Years provision that will support them in achieving the five Every Child Matters outcomes.

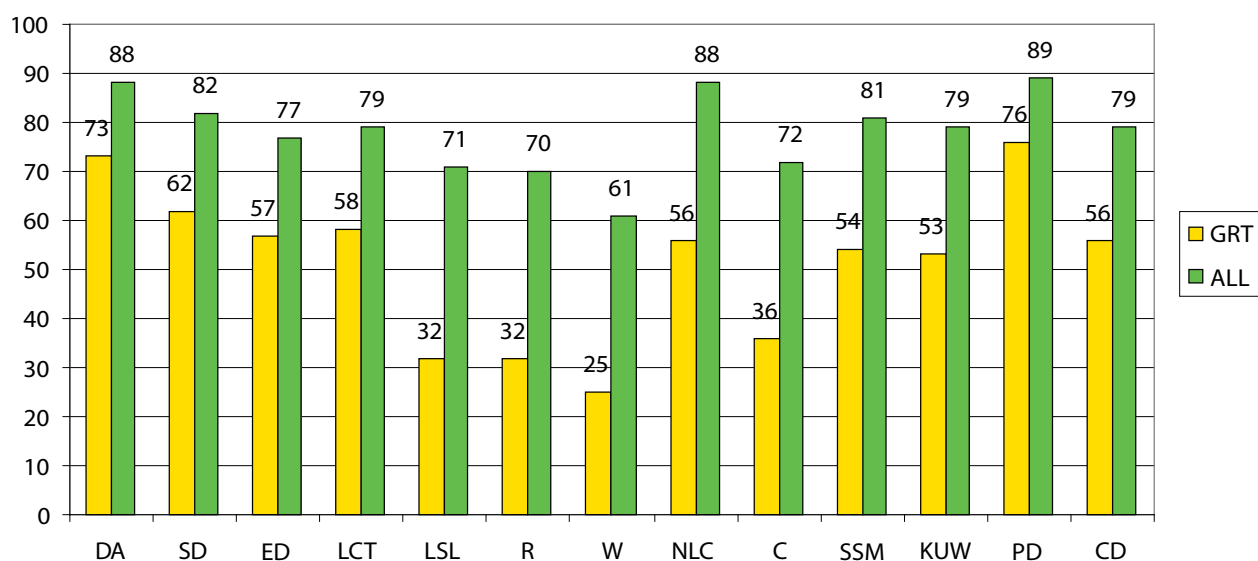
The Early Years Foundation Stage Profile (EYFSP) provides a holistic broad-based measure of progress across the six areas of learning and development outlined in the EYFS Framework. National data collected between 2004 and 2008 suggests that there is a significant gap between the achievement of those children who are ascribed to the ethnic categories of Gypsy or Roma and Travellers of Irish Heritage and children from all other groups for whom this information is collected.

Note: The EYFSP is the national statutory instrument used to assess outcomes for young children. It is used as a formative assessment tool from entry to school and as a summative assessment to inform parents and Key Stage 1 teachers of children's achievements at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage. The national data sets are derived from the end-of-key-stage formative assessments.

## 2008 National EYFSP scores

The chart of results shows the gap in achievement between all children ascribed to the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller and Travellers of Irish heritage combined and 'all children'. The differences at this early stage are already apparent across all thirteen scales.

### 2008 FSP Percentage of children scoring 6+ in each scale

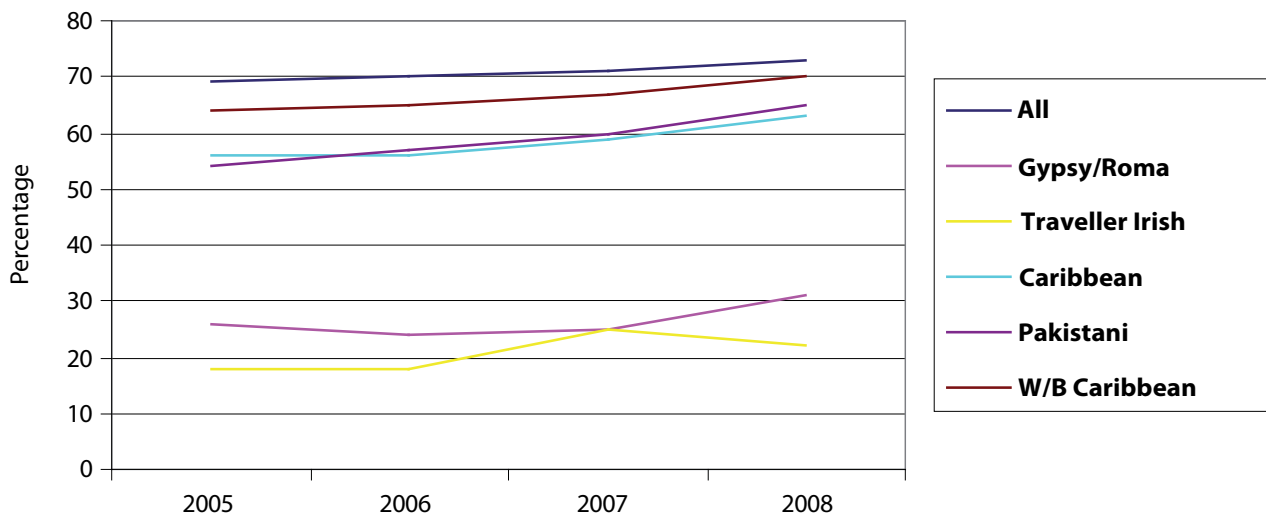


2008 percentage of children scoring 6+ in each scale

The gap between the educational attainment of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children and all other children, which first appears in the Early Years, is one that widens steadily up to the end of statutory school age.

The chart below shows trends from 2005 to 2008 for children attaining level 4+ in English and mathematics at the end of Key Stage 2 and illustrates the gap between Gypsy, Roma and Traveller achievement and all other groups.

### KS2 L4+ in English and mathematics



Key Stage 2 level 4+ in English and mathematics

## Why might Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children underachieve within our education system?

The available data indicates that children from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities do less well than any other children, as a whole group, from the Early Years Foundation Stage onwards. This does not mean that all such children do less well than their peers, nor does it mean that no children from these groups excel. While there may be no inherent reason why children from these communities do not do well, there are clearly some reasons for the picture that this data shows.

One reason is ascription. The data can only show results from the small numbers of families who have chosen to ascribe their children to these categories in the Foundation Stage. If these numbers rise to reflect the greater numbers of children who are thought to be from these communities, a more accurate picture of their attainment would emerge.

The factors known to affect children's achievement include the quality of the home learning environment, socio-economic status and the quality of care and education in schools and settings. While these factors will also affect children from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller backgrounds, the picture is further complicated by the historical reluctance of many families to subscribe to the education provision offered at all key stages.

*The quality of the home learning environment is known to have the most lasting and significant impact on children's achievement. Gypsy, Roma and Traveller parents provide a learning environment which is constant and provides continuity for their children as they transfer from one setting or one school to another. Most of a child's day is spent, not in an educational setting, but with their family and the wider community.*

Many Gypsy, Roma and Traveller parents prefer not to send their children to school before they reach statutory school age, the term following the child's fifth birthday. Reasons for this will vary within individual families but, for many Gypsy, Roma and Traveller families, early childcare has been seen as the responsibility of the family and, in particular, the mother. It may be felt inappropriate or unsafe for anyone outside the community to be looking after the children. Trust is certainly a very important aspect of working with Gypsy, Roma and Traveller families. Because these families are among those least likely to take up their free entitlement to Early Years provision, whether because of high mobility, lack of trust or lack of information, it is likely that their children will have had less time in EYFS provision than most other children. This means they will have had less time to become familiar with the way provision is organised and structured and to understand what the expectations of them as young learners are.

Another factor that may affect outcomes at the end of the EYFS is that the assessment processes are based on practitioners' judgements. As a result of low take-up and high mobility, there is less time for practitioners to get to know a child from the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller community, to identify what the child already knows and assess what the child can do. All assessments are to some extent culturally biased; children may be assessed on skills they do not have, while not having an appropriate context in which to display those skills they do have. Practitioners may have less knowledge and understanding about Gypsy, Roma and Traveller families than about those from other backgrounds; parents from these families may be reticent in offering information about their children.

What takes place in the home influences what children value and how they react to the experiences offered to them in a setting. If parents do not appear to value aspects of Early Years provision then children are likely to lose their enthusiasm. Practitioners throughout the EYFS need to ensure that they get to know the fears and aspirations of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller families, in order to create an environment in which they feel included and able to 'opt in' to the provision, wanting their children to achieve well within it.

## Language matters

Most of the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children in Early Years settings are likely to speak English as their home language, the exceptions to this being European Roma, who may record their home language as Polish, Slovak or another European language.

However, many English and Irish Gypsy and Traveller families will use Romani or Gaelic languages among themselves, usually interspersed with English and with varying degrees of fluency. Some children entering Early Years settings may use words and phrases that are unfamiliar to their peers and practitioners.

Practitioners may not understand what these children are saying and may not recognise the presence of another language; they are therefore more likely to view this from a deficit point of view, perhaps treating the situation as a language delay or disorder rather than approaching it as an issue relating to English as an additional language (EAL). Parents are often guarded about the language of the home, whether for fear of intrusion or a feeling that it lacks currency and would not be taken seriously. Several TESS have published information booklets about the languages; their websites and others can be interesting sources of further information.

*Roma families have a very strong allegiance to their traditions, which can be traced back to northern India and ancient Persia (modern Iran and Iraq). Their first language is Roma, and their second language is generally that of their point of departure, e.g. Polish, Czech, Slovak, Albanian, Romanian or any of the languages of the former Yugoslavia.*

*Oral traditions are strong and many adult Roma speak at least four languages. Children generally learn to speak English very quickly, and add an oral ability in English to their families' multilingual repertoire.*

Extract from *Traveller Achievement Service: Ealing LA, GRT Information*. © Ealing Local Authority and the BIG Lottery GRT Project. Used with kind permission.



Practitioners working with Roma children will need to develop strategies to support their developing English and are advised to refer to the guidance booklet, *Supporting children learning English as an additional language* (DCSF, ref: 00683-2007BKT-EN), and to the New Arrivals Excellence programme guidance materials and CPD modules.

## Roma children

As for most Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children, attending an Early Years setting is likely to be the first time Roma children have been left in the care of anyone from outside their community, possibly their family. Roma families may have experienced racism and persecution in their homelands at an institutional level; they may also be very wary of Early Years education initially. They are likely to find the notion of Early Years provision culturally unfamiliar and may need specialist outreach services, including interpreter support and additional commitment from practitioners, before they are convinced of the value to their children of such provision before statutory school age.

The Save the Children Early Years project website is also a source of information and further reading: [www.savethechildren.org.uk/earlyyears](http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/earlyyears). A direct link to the site is available on the accompanying DVD-ROM.



Further guidance on pre-school education and transition to primary education for Roma and Traveller children is available from the UNESCO and Council of Europe website: [www.coe.int/t/dg4/education/roma/publications\\_en.asp](http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/education/roma/publications_en.asp).

## Reflecting on practice and provision in EYFS settings

All children and families are entitled to experience the benefits of high-quality care, teaching and learning that Early Years provision can offer. Ensuring that all children and families can access such provision depends on inclusive practice. Inclusion is about attitudes as well as behaviour and practices.

- *The attitudes of young children towards diversity are affected by the behaviour of adults around them and by whether or not all children and families using the setting are valued and welcomed.*
- *Focused discussion and training are needed to help practitioners and settings consider the nature of discrimination and develop inclusive practice.*
- *Inclusion is not optional: children have defined entitlements in this area and settings have legal responsibilities.*

### Effective Practice Commitment 1.2

In order to meet their responsibility to 'ensure positive attitudes', practitioners may need first to examine their own attitudes towards difference and diversity. To remove or help to overcome 'barriers for children', practitioners need to be aware that those barriers, not always obvious or instantly recognisable, exist, particularly if some of those barriers are attitudinal.

*Building Futures: Developing trust – A focus on provision for children from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller backgrounds in the Early Years Foundation Stage* is for all practitioners, whatever their ethnicity, and recognises the discomfort likely to be felt by any practitioners when discussing their own attitudes and those of each other. However, unless we are able to examine our feelings and attitudes, sensitively but openly, successive generations of children may continue to feel alienated from educational provision and miss their entitlement to succeed within it at all key stages.

10 The National Strategies | Early Years

Building Futures: Developing trust – A focus on provision for children from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller backgrounds in the Early Years Foundation Stage

Practitioners working in the Early Years who have a particular interest in the achievement of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children will benefit from reading the primary and secondary guidance materials, *Moving forward together: Raising Gypsy, Roma and Traveller achievement*, which are included on the DVD-ROM accompanying this booklet.



## Outreach for in-reach

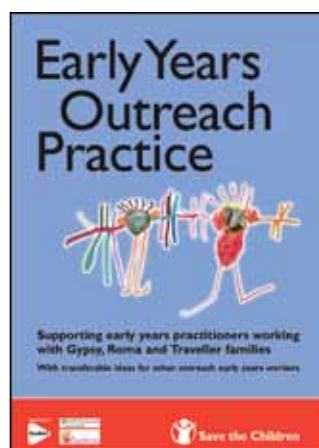
Over the years, education services, including provision of play opportunities, have been delivered through outreach (on sites and to roadside trailers) for many Travelling families, predominantly by members of TESS. Partnership with other service providers has increased the range and effectiveness of activities and services provided. The intention has been that, as well as benefiting cognitively from play-based learning, the youngest children become acclimatised to the culture of pre-school provision and develop the social and emotional aptitude for making relationships with adults outside their usual family and social group, so that transition to school is smoother. Attempts to ensure Travellers take up their entitlement to free provision is part of this work, with the aim that, in time, outreach will lead to 'in-reach', whereby families engage with services through attending settings rather than the services coming to them.



For many families it is essential that the process begins with outreach and, for children of some highly mobile families, outreach is the only opportunity to access continuity in their experiences of provision of play with a trusted practitioner.

Developing trusting relationships in order to engage the families is an essential part of this work. Families have to be certain that the specialists are working in the best interests of the children and see the benefit of the provision in order to engage with it.

Where possible, practitioners from local settings should work in partnership with the TESS to develop the skills and confidence needed to provide the outreach service themselves, building relationships with children and families. It takes time, energy, patience and a level of personal and professional commitment to persevere and become successful in bringing families to settings. Continuity of staff helps to build up trusting, respectful relationships. Flexibility and adaptability, and an understanding that what works well on one site will not necessarily work well on another because people have different needs and preferences, are necessary prerequisites before the practitioner embarks on the task.



*Early Years Outreach Practice: Supporting early years practitioners working with Gypsy, Roma and Traveller families* was published by Save the Children to meet the needs of outreach workers in providing high-quality outreach provision for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children. The booklet supports the statutory EYFS Framework and outlines how this should underpin high-quality outreach practice.

The guidance is available on the DVD-ROM accompanying this booklet as well as being downloadable from the Save the Children website.

Thumbnail image from Save the Children, *Early Years Outreach Practice: Supporting early years practitioners working with Gypsy, Roma and Traveller families* and offering transferable ideas for other outreach early years workers.

© The Save the Children Fund 2006. Used with kind permission. Further training information can be found at [www.savethechildren.org.uk/earlyyears](http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/earlyyears).



## What do practitioners need to do?

Practitioners should never underestimate the influence they can have on the lives of children and families. While the role of setting leaders and managers is vital for policy change, all practitioners have a responsibility to reflect on their own practice and can:

- ensure that they provide a learning environment in which Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children and their families feel welcomed, respected and valued;
- enter into genuine partnerships by creating a space for dialogue – listening to the voices of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children and their parents;
- provide a rich learning environment with relevant, culturally reflective resources. and creative and challenging learning opportunities;
- recognise that good teaching is a vital ingredient in achievement and ensure that Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children experience good role-models in all areas of learning and development;
- include positive role-models where possible from the Traveller community to be involved in the setting;
- develop patience, understanding, respect, adaptability and flexibility and be prepared to think of different ways to engage with families and to meet their needs;
- keep careful records of children's progress from entry to the setting, ensuring that expectations and progress of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children is in line with other groups, and investigating possible causes where variance arises;
- consider assessment procedures – checking that observational assessments of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children are fair, honest and free from influences of stereotyping;
- reflect honestly on personal attitudes, feelings, preconceptions and tendencies to stereotype, challenging negative attitudes within the setting (this is both possible and necessary);
- work closely with the LA's TESS to draw on and learn from their experience and expertise in working with Traveller families;
- encourage families to ascribe to the appropriate group by ensuring a positive attitude to diversity and encouraging pride in all heritages;
- recognise the status of Gypsy, Roma and Travellers of Irish Heritage within the Race Relations Amendment Act (2000);
- make race equality and cultural diversity training a priority for whole-setting professional development;
- review and implement, monitor and evaluate their race equality policy.

# Using the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) principles to inform and develop practice

The EYFS clearly establishes four overarching principles to inform practitioners' thinking and practice in order to meet all young children's entitlement to rich and engaging learning experiences.

On the following pages, these principles are used as a framework to support practitioners and settings in reflection, self-evaluation and the continuing development of their practice. Each section has an example of practice that supports the learning and achievement of Gypsy, Roma or Traveller children in the EYFS, suggestions for effective practice, possible challenges and dilemmas and questions for reflection.



The Early Years Foundation Stage

## Principles into Practice

The four Themes of the EYFS are:

The Early Years Foundation Stage
Every Child Matters  
Change For Children

A Unique Child	Positive Relationships	Enabling Environments	Learning and Development
<p>These four <b>Themes</b> express important <b>Principles</b> underpinning effective practice in the care, development and learning of young children.</p>	<p>Each <b>Principle</b> is supported by four <b>Commitments</b> which describe how the Principle can be put into practice.</p>		
<p><b>The four Principles of the EYFS are:</b></p> <p>Every child is a competent learner from birth who can be resilient, capable, confident and self-assured.</p>	<p>Children learn to be strong and independent from a base of loving and secure relationships with parents and/or a key person.</p>	<p>The environment plays a key role in supporting and extending children's development and learning.</p>	<p>Children develop and learn in different ways and at different rates and all areas of Learning and Development are equally important and inter-connected.</p>

# A Unique Child

## Early Years Foundation Stage principle: Every child is a competent learner from birth who can be resilient, capable, confident and self-assured

### Commitments

1.1 Child development: Babies and children develop in individual ways and at varying rates. Every area of development – physical, cognitive, linguistic, spiritual, social and emotional – is equally important.

1.2 Inclusive practice: The diversity of individuals and communities is valued and respected. No child or family is discriminated against.

1.3 Keeping safe: Young children are vulnerable. They develop resilience when their physical and psychological well-being is protected by adults.

1.4 Health and well-being: Children's health is an integral part of their emotional, mental, social, environmental and spiritual well-being and is supported by attention to these aspects.

**Use the Principles into Practice cards for 'A Unique Child' to think about your provision in relation to children of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller heritages.**



The theme of A Unique Child gives practitioners an opportunity to embed positive change for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children and their families in all Early Years settings. The commitment (1.2) to inclusive practice under this theme is that 'The diversity of individuals and communities is valued and respected. No child or family is discriminated against.' This commitment is a golden thread throughout all of the EYFS themes and principles and requirements.

Gypsy, Roma and Travellers of Irish heritage have specific recognition under Articles 29 and 30 of the United Nations Convention for Rights of the Child (UNCRC), as minority ethnic children; their ethnicities, cultures, languages, religions or beliefs should therefore be given due recognition, acknowledgement, consideration and attention.

Every child has a distinct identity comprising multiple elements; for example, a child might be a boy, he might have Irish Traveller ethnicity, he might also have British nationality or he may have dual nationality; he might be disabled; he might speak English, Gaelic Irish, Cant or some or all of these; he might have a religion or belief or he may be of no religion or belief; other elements such as his interests, life experiences, aspirations, talents and attainments, all make up his distinct identity, as a unique child.

From the initial contact with families, Early Years practitioners should ensure that children and their parents from the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities are given every opportunity and support to identify their unique identities and requirements themselves. Where negative and racist depictions of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller cultures and ethnicities prevail, children who are formulating their own self-concepts and self-identities can, from a very early age, transfer negative and inaccurate attributes onto themselves and others as a result of these influences.

Particular attention should be paid to the unique identity of looked-after children. These children are known to be particularly vulnerable to poor Every Child Matters outcomes, often stemming from a lack of confidence in their identity. Children of Gypsy, Roma or Traveller heritages may or may not be aware of their cultural identities but have a right to know, and to be placed with families who can nurture their sense of self. There is a case study relating to a looked-after child, Jemboy, in Appendix 2.

The commitment to health and well-being is one that may be a new challenge for some EYFS practitioners. Many Gypsy, Roma and Traveller families have historically had very poor access to a range of services, including primary healthcare. EYFS practitioners, particularly in children's centres, can have an important role in supporting families to overcome barriers to accessing health services through identifying and promoting information, advocacy and professional networking.

The principle of the unique child has a vital part to play in providing all children, not only those from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities but from all other communities as well, with positive affirmations, reflections and experiences of their cultures and identities.

## Case study

### JJ, a roadside Traveller's story

JJ and his family have lived 'roadside' on unauthorised encampments. After being settled for a period of three months on common land, the family had to move in autumn, and have since set up encampments on a number of unauthorised sites, being moved on every two to three weeks.

The family's highly mobile lifestyle made it impractical for JJ to attend an early years setting; outreach was the only effective and practicable means of supporting him.



A typical roadside encampment; everything that is visible in this photograph has a specific purpose, for example, water cans, gas bottles, petrol for the generator; a small cage for the dog's puppies

JJ's parents expressed concerns about his speech and language development to the TESS Early Years Advisory Teacher (EYAT), who advised them on ways to support his early language skills and referred JJ to the Speech and Language Therapy department.



An initial assessment revealed a general expressive language delay and phonological disorder, which was unlikely to improve without targeted input. An individual programme was developed by the Speech and Language therapist and delivered weekly by the EYAT to JJ in the trailer. The Speech and Language therapist made visits every six weeks, to monitor progress and update the programme as necessary. Visits by both professionals were made to the family, wherever they were based at the time.



The language-focused sessions with the EYAT were an opportunity for JJ to explore play and creative activities as a means of developing his early learning skills and experiences. Picture books were used to help develop his comprehension and expressive language skills. A variety of resources and experiences were introduced to extend his opportunities for play.

JJ responded very well to the speech and language sessions and additional support from his parents. His level of vocabulary increased rapidly, he developed his use of verbs and pronouns and his auditory discrimination skills improved steadily. JJ also began to produce targeted initial sounds correctly; this had a significant impact on his self-confidence as he was delighted once he realised he could make himself understood. He worked hard at communicating his needs by repeating words, signing or taking the adult to what he wanted.

JJ's parents have been delighted with his progress and continue to support him at home with his language development.

The TESS worked with the county council's First Admissions department to ensure that JJ was allocated a place in school for September. The TESS were able to ensure that the admissions team understood that, although the family would be travelling through the summer, they would be returning to the county and a school place would be needed for JJ to ensure a smooth transition.

JJ has been allocated a place in Reception for when the family return from travelling in September. The TESS and the Speech and Language Therapy department will continue to support JJ once he returns to the county and the EYAT will also support his transition into school.

Case Study from Heath, H, JJ, *A roadside Traveller's story*, Norfolk Traveller Education Service. With grateful thanks for their contribution.

## Pause for reflection and discussion 1

Do you know how JJ's needs might have been met if his family had camped in your local authority?

What systems do you have in place to ensure you have information about children who arrive mid-term? What opportunities do you have to discuss past and future learning achievements, progress and needs with parents?

If home visiting is part of your school transition programme, does this extend to all children and families?

How would you assess and accommodate the learning needs of highly mobile children with experience of living 'at the roadside'?

## Case study

### Pa, an Irish Traveller from a large site

Pa is an Irish Traveller boy who lives on a large private site with his mother Eileen. Rachel, a children's centre family worker, first met Pa during a regular visit to the site, when he was two years old. Rachel visited the site with a home-school liaison officer and teaching assistant from the TESS to inform families about school term dates, to ensure that the children were registered for school and to inform parents about their entitlement to Early Years provision.

Pa was very quiet and nervous; he rarely spoke and was unused to being with anyone other than his mother. Eileen was very keen that he should have every opportunity to get a 'good education' but her lack of knowledge of the education system, and concerns for Pa as a vulnerable child, made her anxious about the prospect of him starting pre-school at the age of three.

Rachel then offered on-site play sessions and Pa enjoyed the small world play, story sacks, messy play and culturally reflective stories that Rachel took along each week. Gradually Pa's confidence grew and he developed a warm and trusting relationship with Rachel. Pa was talking and playing for the first time with an adult other than his mother.

Just before his third birthday Rachel accompanied Pa and his mother on a visit, which she arranged, to the local pre-school. Eileen wanted Pa to attend and, helped by Rachel, she filled out the application form. Pa was able to access one of three places reserved by the pre-school and funded for Traveller children by the local authority.

The pre-school arranged for Pa's key worker to make a home visit to get to know Pa and his mother a little, and assist the transition. Rachel delivered a training session to the setting staff, focusing on the inclusion of Traveller children. Pa settled easily into pre-school and regularly attended five sessions a week throughout the autumn term. He moved from being a reluctant speaker to become a chatty little boy who played confidently with other children.

During the course of Pa's first term in pre-school, Eileen assisted another Traveller parent to enrol her child into pre-school without any involvement from the Traveller education team or Rachel. This shift in confidence and movement away from dependence on professionals was really great to see.

Case Study from Bishop, J, A Unique Child Case study 2 Pa, an Irish Traveller. © Cambridgeshire Local Authority. Used with kind permission.

### Pause for reflection and discussion 2

Without the initial visits from the children's centre, Pa may not have experienced any EYFS provision before starting school. What elements made his transition from home successful?

Consider the benefits for Pa and, potentially, for his family and wider community. How could further community links be fostered through the children's centre?

How would you have responded in a similar situation?

## A Unique Child

### Effective practice

Practitioners are effective when they:

- support babies and children to have a positive self-image;
- encourage children to recognise their own unique qualities and the characteristics they share with other children;
- start from children's strengths, interests and learning preferences by observing, listening and tuning into each child as an individual;
- find out how children play at home and value different approaches to play;
- react when children exclude each other because of differences, by supporting the excluded child and addressing these issues with all the children;
- actively promote equal opportunities and anti-discriminatory practice, ensuring that all children and families feel included, safe and valued.

### Challenges and dilemmas

- To remember that children learn from everything they experience, including stereotypes and prejudice.
- To understand that our behaviours towards children can impact negatively as well as positively on their self-esteem.
- To treat all children and babies with equal care, concern and tenderness when family expectations and behaviours can be very different from our own.
- To make time to listen to children and give them space to express their feelings individually in all types of setting.
- To help families and children be proud of their ethnic and linguistic heritages and be confident in ascribing their child to the appropriate category without fear of discrimination.

### Reflecting on practice

- Are practitioners aware of how babies and children are affected by their behaviour?
- How is each child's individual development supported by the setting?
- Are resources and displays full of positive images that acknowledge and celebrate diversity?
- Think about each child in the group. Consider their unique development, individual interests, communication styles and learning styles.

# Positive Relationships

**Early Years Foundation Stage principle: Children learn to be strong and independent from a base of loving and secure relationships with parents and/or a key person**



## Commitments

2.1 Respecting each other: Every interaction is based on caring professional relationships and respectful acknowledgement of the feelings of children and their families.

2.2 Parents as partners: Parents are children's first and most enduring educators. When parents and practitioners work together in Early Years settings, the results have a positive impact on children's development and learning.

2.3 Supporting learning: Warm, trusting relationships with knowledgeable adults support children's learning more effectively than any amount of resources.

2.4 Key person: A key person has special responsibilities for working with a small number of children, giving them the reassurance to feel safe and cared for and building relationships with their parents.

**Use the Principles into Practice cards for 'Positive Relationships' to think about your provision in relation to children from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities and heritages.**

The relationships we foster within our Early Years settings are the underpinning of everything else which happens there. One of the most crucial aspects of work with Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities is building up trusting and positive relationships with them. Although this is true for all children and families, it is perhaps heightened for communities who are often living on the 'margins' or the periphery of conventional societies and, for many reasons, either feel or actually are excluded from mainstream provision of a range of services, including education.

Exclusion may or may not be self-chosen; assumptions should not be made, based on stereotypes or on previous experiences with other families from similar backgrounds; all families are unique. Improved outcomes for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children will only occur where real efforts are made to establish trust, mutual respect and understanding.



Respect and trust need to be earned. The Principles into Practice cards reinforce the importance of respect. The commitment (2.1) to 'respecting each other', as professional EYFS practitioners, must be demonstrated in order to gain that trust; professional status alone is not guaranteed to confer trust and respect.



Gypsy, Roma and Traveller parents may also need additional reassurance about security of the premises, indoors and out, to allay their genuine fear of 'child stealing'. Safety and trust are two of the pivotal concepts that practitioners need to address in order to establish positive relationships with these groups.

*Like I said, we've got a good relationship there with the teachers. And I trust them, so I know the children are looked after. You got that trust. You have to build that trust up. Once you've got that trust, you know your child's safe.*

**Lisa, English Gypsy parent**

These concerns may only come to light when time is made to 'listen to parents and learn about their feelings', as practitioners are reminded in the effective practice guidance (Principles into Practice card for Commitment 2.1). It is important to reassure parents about the integrity and professionalism of all team members, including managers, administration and maintenance staff as well as those directly supporting their children.

Genuinely respectful relationships can increase confidence within the community about the value of early educational experiences.

*When each person is valued for who they are and differences are appreciated, everyone feels included and understood, whatever their personality, abilities, ethnic background or culture.*

### **Early Years Foundation Stage 2.1: Respecting each other**

The EYFS commitment to recognising parents as partners acknowledges that parents are children's first and most enduring educators. Working together for a positive impact on children's learning requires that practitioners and parents develop a mutual understanding. 'Warm, trusting relationships with knowledgeable adults support children's learning more effectively than any amount of resources,' (Commitment 2.3, Supporting learning). To establish such relationships with families who have an historic distrust of mainstream authority figures and institutions may require particular sensitivity and patience.

Some Gypsy, Roma or Traveller parents will have unhappy memories of school themselves; practitioners need to recognise the very real fears of those parents about discrimination, negative stereotyping and racist bullying, which they may have experienced first hand. Although some will have happy memories of outreach play services or primary school education, many will have limited experience of Early Years provision before statutory school age and may need convincing of its relevance to their children. When practitioners, confident in their own practice, can show that they recognise and value parents' beliefs and opinions, as well as knowledge about their children, then they can begin to work together for the child's benefit. Practitioners are reminded to ask parents for their views on the care and education they provide; this is not just to affirm what they consider to be good practice but to learn from the parents they serve.

Displaying resources that reflect different cultures will demonstrate a setting's positive attitudes to all cultures, including those of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities. This helps to make families feel valued and that their culture is respected; it is a good starting point to help develop a dialogue.

It is important to make sure that parents entering the setting receive a friendly welcome and that staff are aware of any cultural sensitivity. Specialist training will ensure practitioners have cultural awareness. This is crucial to their ability to have increased understanding and to make valuable observations that will effectively support children's learning.

The commitment to a key person should cause all practitioners to consider how this role can be most effective. Part of the role is to ensure children feel safe and cared for; fundamental to this role is the ability to build effective relationships with parents and carers. Families of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller heritage often live or travel in small, well-established, extended family groups. Children may be entering a setting where, for the first time, most of the adults they encounter are not family members and are not Travellers.

Outreach work by TESS and joint home visits by practitioners from the setting are effective strategies in building trusting relationships to gain parental confidence in the staff team's ability to 'look after' their children. This can also be a way to establish an effective relationship with the key person to aid the settling-in process. A positive and trusting relationship with a key person should enable families to access a wider range of support, as the key person becomes their link to other agencies.



## Case study

### Developing relationships with the community

**This case study features a Nursery Education Centre in East London, which developed positive relationships with the local Travellers' site. Together they celebrated Gypsy, Roma and Traveller History Month (GRTHM).**

The Nursery Education Centre, together with a local primary school, developed a working partnership as part of their involvement with the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Achievement Programme (GRTAP). Both schools, which had been associated with the local permanent Traveller site for over 35 years, broadened the remit of their Vulnerable Children's Policy to include Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children. A detailed rationale for this is given on the DVD-ROM, in an interview with the headteacher.

As part of the 'Achieving Together' partnership, all the parents and children on the LA site were visited. During these visits, school staff found out what Traveller families expected and hoped for from them for their children. This included how the families wanted to be represented and acknowledged in school, and in the information and resources their children brought home in their book bags. At the same time, the schools carried out audits of their resources to see just how well they currently represented the lifestyles and experiences of the Traveller communities they served.

The joint site visits improved the schools' communications with each other, and between the schools and the families, thus enabling positive relationships to flourish. Traveller families' fears and aspirations were allayed by contact meetings, on site, without recourse to formal action regarding attendance. Practitioners were more comfortable making home visits; this was no longer the sole remit of the TESS.



Other benefits resulting from participation in the programme and the improved relationships included:

- a visible increase in self-esteem among both children and adults;
- an open acknowledgement and valuing of ethnicities;
- higher levels of achievement in Personal, Social and Emotional Development (PSED);
- increased attendance, leading to higher literacy levels;
- increased interest in reading, particularly sharing books reflecting Traveller heritages and cultures;
- establishment of good practice and use of the Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL) programme to support behaviour and smooth transitions;
- increased parental involvement, including participation by fathers;
- greater numbers of Traveller parents attending parents' evenings and open afternoons;
- greater willingness to speak with teachers, and parents increasingly allowing their children to attend educational visits outside the school.

The culmination of the positive links and renewed relationships was a celebration of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller History Month event in June 2008, when the families on the site opened their trailers and chalets for the children and staff from the schools to visit. The presence of both schools' headteachers at the open day confirmed the high status given to this project, and to the community.

The parents have big plans for the GRTHM in 2009. It is anticipated that the 80% participation by site residents in the street party will be raised to 100%, as those families with no young children are as keen to be involved as those who were hosts to their children's school friends. Positive cross-generational relationships are a strength of this community, from which others can learn.

Case Study from Wormington. A, *Developing relationships with the community*. © Newham Traveller Education Service, Newham Council. Used with kind permission.

### Pause for reflection and discussion 3

Home visiting can be very beneficial in forging positive relationships with families. Do you offer home visits to all your families including Gypsy, Roma and Traveller families?

How do you know what the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller families in your locality think about early years provision?

How does your setting show that it welcomes Traveller families?

Have you considered celebrating Gypsy, Roma and Traveller History Month (GRTHM), whether or not there are currently any children from these communities in your setting?

## Case study

### Only a phone call away – reassuring anxious parents

#### A school's response to the settling-in period needed for families during transition from home to school



Practitioners in a village school describe their experience of settling Traveller children into school and what has helped to reassure parents.

*If it's not the first child in the family then, by and large, they settle a lot more quickly because the family are aware of the school and the set-up and attendance becomes much better. But if it's the first child, and we've got two this year, it's taken a lot of settling for the parents.*

*We've had to build up a relationship with the parents so they feel they've got ownership of the classroom. It's not just for the children, it's not my classroom, and the parents are welcome in the morning and it takes as long as it takes.*

*We are very flexible, with staggered admission, and if the parents know that they've got the leadership, if you like, along with us, to say, this is what I feel, this is what I want; we are open to discussion.*

*We have also made it a little bit easier so that when they are away, if they get anxious about their child, they just have to pick up the phone. We have a phone in class one so that messages are relayed back. In actual fact, little Joseph spoke on the phone the other day because somebody from the office phoned to say that mum was on the phone asking: 'How is Joseph settling in?' And he just happened to be right by me so I said: 'He'll tell you!' So he was on the phone to the office and that was really good, wasn't it? That was good.*

*We used to write daily accounts of what the child had done and how the child was and a lot of photographs of the children engaged in activities. This allays all the fears that the parents have that the child is going to be unhappy.*

**Lorna**

*Before Harley left at the end of the day we took the photographs out to mum so that she could actually see and she wasn't relying on feedback from him. So he went out and she said: 'Have you had a good day?' She could actually see the photographs to show that he had had a really good day.*

**Amanda**



*It is just reassurance. That's all they need, really, is the reassurance that their child is happy because all Traveller parents are protective of their children and they want them all to have good experiences. We've got to give them the information and the opportunity.*

**Lorna**



## Pause for reflection and discussion 4

In what ways do you ease the transitions between home and your setting, and between settings for children and parents who are least familiar or comfortable with Early Years provision and school settings?

Are office staff prepared to 'go the extra mile' in taking telephone calls and reassuring Gypsy, Roma and Traveller parents their children are settled?

Do parents and carers in your setting feel able to say to say: 'This is what I feel, this is what I want,' are you, like Lorna, 'open to discussion'?

Do Gypsy, Roma and Traveller parents in your setting feel 'ownership' of the settling-in process?

Lorna said: 'It takes as long as it takes.' How do you meet the diverse needs of children and parents as they adjust to their new situation?

## Positive Relationships

### Effective practice

Practitioners are effective when they:

- respect and value every child's family and home background, their cultures and communities and the important events in their lives;
- work closely with Gypsy, Roma and Traveller parents and families, developing mutual understanding of how children learn through play and the importance of building on children's interests;
- know or find out about the community and local dynamics;
- involve Gypsy, Roma and Traveller fathers and mothers in drawing up policies, for example on learning and development, inclusion and behaviour;
- take time to listen to people from different backgrounds and are open about differences of language and approach;
- make time to listen to parents and their feelings and concerns;
- ensure parents have regular opportunities to add to children's records;
- ask parents for their views on the care and education they provide.

### Challenges and dilemmas

- To reach Gypsy, Roma and Traveller families isolated from our provision and who may not know what we can offer.
- To ensure information reaches all parents, particularly those with low literacy levels.
- To develop relationships strong enough to overcome the barriers created by experiences of sustained prejudice.
- To sustain relationships when there is separation due to travelling.

### Reflecting on practice

- Do we know Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children and families as well as we know other children and families who come to our settings?
- Are policies and procedures screened for cultural bias and revisited in terms of their impact and outcomes for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller groups?
- Does our everyday professional practice reflect our policies?
- Do we create opportunities for two-way learning, knowledge and expertise between Gypsy, Roma and Traveller parents and practitioners?
- Do we rely too heavily on newsletters and other written material to communicate with parents who may not be literate? What other means of communication can we use?

# Enabling Environments

## Early Years Foundation Stage principle: The environment plays a key role in supporting and extending children's development and learning



### Commitments

3.1 Observation, assessment and planning: Babies and children are individuals first, each with a unique profile of abilities. Schedules and routines should flow with the child's needs. All planning starts with observing children in order to understand and consider their current interests, development and learning.

3.2 Supporting every child: The environment supports every child's learning through planned experiences and activities that are challenging but achievable.

3.3 The learning environment: A rich and varied environment supports children's learning and development. It gives them confidence to explore and learn in secure and safe, yet challenging, indoor and outdoor spaces.

3.4 The wider context: Working in partnership with other settings, other professionals and with individuals and groups in the community supports children's development and progress towards the outcomes of Every Child Matters: being healthy, staying safe, enjoying and achieving, making a positive contribution, and economic well-being.

**Use the Principles into Practice cards for 'Enabling Environments' to think about your provision in relation to children from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities and heritages.**

*We need to create an inclusive learning environment for all children. All cultural backgrounds should be understood and respected. Children from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities should feel safe and cherished in school and therefore parents and pupils will be proud to identify themselves.*

**Lord Adonis, 2008**

Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children live within communities that have rich and unique cultures that have long been marginalised and excluded. It is crucial to the learning development of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children that service providers rigorously scrutinise their learning environments for ways in which they can promote positive outcomes for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children. Settings that work together with children, families and other professionals develop those learning environments that best provide for the needs of all children.

The Principles into Practice cards and the Effective Practice Extended Guidance for the EYFS remind us that children learn best when they feel safe, secure and supported as well as excited and motivated. Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children need to see their culture embedded and celebrated in the resources, activities and continuous provision of all settings. Seeing themselves and things that are familiar to them represented in schools will make them feel happy and confident. It will also reassure parents that their children belong and their culture is recognised in a positive way.

The enabling environment that is inclusive and celebratory of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller cultures teaches **all** children about the world around them. Every setting is part of its community, even though not all the children may live in the surrounding neighbourhood. When a setting values the local community it encourages different groups to work together for the benefit of all. Many Gypsy, Roma and Traveller families experience discrimination and prejudice; settings that reflect the cultures of these communities can challenge the myths surrounding them and serve to promote community cohesion. At the same time, Gypsy, Roma and Traveller parents gain the confidence to record their children's ethnicity correctly and begin a process of sharing and learning.

It is understood that working with a new community and the issues it can raise may be difficult for some practitioners. However, if they work with other agencies in the local authority, such as the TESS, to discuss curriculum ideas and resources and to receive training, this will benefit all children and help build positive relationships with parents and carers.

## Case study

### Creating an enabling environment for a mobile community

Traditionally, the first funfair in the showmen's calendar in Norfolk is the King's Lynn Mart, when new rides are tried and old favourites brought out from winter storage.

Showmen and Travellers working at the Mart were able to access services and activities for families and their children, from birth to five, offered by Nar Children's Centre outreach team, in partnership with Norfolk TESS, the Health-Visiting Service and the Library Service, at a local setting for the whole of the two-week period.

Activities included:

- baby weighing, health visitor and dental health advice sessions for parents;
- story and rhyme-time sessions, led by the library service;
- playgroup sessions, which were available for two hours every day over the two-week period.

Procedures were put in place to ensure the setting met with statutory EYFS requirements. The TESS produced an information pack containing a flier with a timetable of activities and a map of the location, which they distributed to the families.



Playgroup sessions were well attended by the families, most of whom used the resource on a daily basis, with numbers ranging from 4 to 11 per session. It was half-term during the first week so some older siblings joined the younger ones, which helped them to settle during the second week when they then came on their own. Parents were asked to stay with children under three, unless an older sibling attended.

The provision was a great success. Fairground families acknowledged that it can be very boring for the children when they arrive in a new town where they tend to stay inside the trailers or around the carpark compounds. The families were very pleased to have provision dedicated to their children and felt confident about leaving them, knowing that they were either with siblings or with other children they knew. Parents felt that attending a setting was preferable to having outreach visits in the trailers, as more children were able to benefit from the provision.

Each family was given a disposable camera, to make a record of their time at the Mart, and these were put into individual special books for the children, alongside other pieces of work that they had completed while coming to the playgroup. The cameras were a huge success with the families; photos were taken in the trailers and of rides, creating an excellent vehicle for discussion about their experiences.

The partnership is committed to continuing the provision annually.

Case Study from Heath, H, *Creating an enabling environment for a mobile community*, Norfolk Traveller Education Service. With grateful thanks for their contribution.

## Pause for reflection and discussion 5

This case study is specific to a small group of children and families and describes a time-limited resource.

Consider what circumstances in your local authority, or within your setting, call for short-term measures to support specific individuals or groups of children who are highly mobile.

How are children who would benefit from Early Years provision identified?

Where are resources to support their needs located and how might they be used?

As a practitioner, what would you prioritise in order to create an enabling environment for the children for a short time?

## Enabling Environments

### Effective practice

Practitioners are effective when they:

- are aware of the impact of both the emotional and physical environment on the well-being and self-esteem of all children;
- observe Gypsy, Roma and Traveller heritage children's choices of play, sensitively joining in to support and extend learning when appropriate;
- think creatively about the environment, experiences and activities they have on offer to ensure they meet the needs of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children;
- ensure role-play areas incorporate play themes that engage Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children;
- are prepared to listen to and learn from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children and families and adapt the environment accordingly to meet needs;
- share different artefacts, foods, music and clothes, and talk about each other's practices, habits and rituals;
- carefully monitor how Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children use both the indoor and outdoor environment, using the information to improve conditions for their learning.

### Challenges and dilemmas

- To ensure that the whole staff team agrees on a similar approach to valuing, respecting and working with Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children and their families.
- To ensure the provision reflects the experience and interests of the children and families.
- Truly to incorporate families' practices, habits and rituals into the everyday provision and routines without them becoming a novelty.

### Reflecting on practice

- How does the environment support children's independent choices to follow their own interests, with and without adult support?
- How well do staff know the children's home environments and lifestyles and use this knowledge in planning for children's learning?
- Does the provision meet the needs of all children as both a place to feel at home and a place to learn?

# Learning and Development

## Early Years Foundation Stage principle: Children develop and learn in different ways and at different rates and all areas of learning and development are equally important and interconnected

### Commitments

4.1 Play and exploration: Children's play reflects their wide-ranging and varied interests and preoccupations. In their play children learn at their highest level. Play with peers is important for children's development.

4.2 Active learning: Children learn best through physical and mental challenges. Active learning involves other people, objects, ideas and events that engage and involve children for sustained periods.

4.3 Creativity and critical thinking: When children have opportunities to play with ideas in different situations and with a variety of resources, they discover connections and come to new and better understandings and ways of doing things. Adult support in this process enhances their ability to think critically and ask questions.

4.4 Areas of learning and development: The Early Years Foundation Stage is made up of six areas of learning and development. All areas of learning and development are connected to one another and are equally important. All areas of learning and development are underpinned by the principles of the Early Years Foundation Stage.

**Use the Principles into Practice cards for 'Learning and Development' to think about your provision in relation to Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children.**



Thoughtful consideration of the commitments linked to the theme of learning and development will help practitioners to provide the most appropriate environments for all their children. Understanding the lifestyles, circumstances and opportunities of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children will enable practitioners to build on what they already know and can do, and extend their range of experiences within the setting.

The theme of A Unique Child reminds us that children's experiences will all be different. Their home environments and opportunities to play and develop their interests will vary within as well as between communities; practitioners need to find out about individuals rather than make assumptions based on stereotypes.

Traveller children are often used to outdoor play; the indoor pre-school environment may be unfamiliar or overwhelming. Practitioners should be aware that it may take time for a child to get used to the rooms and space within a setting.

Play has long been understood to be the way in which children learn about themselves and their environments. Role-play is a form of play that most children will initiate and adopt for themselves, whether or not practitioners facilitate this. A lifestyle in which children are by their parents' side for most of the time is most likely to result in their learning a great deal about what their parents do and how they do it. In Gypsy, Roma and Traveller families where a traditional lifestyle is maintained, the expectations are that children will learn to be like their parents, to emulate their actions and follow in their footsteps. Traveller children may be included in adult activities, for example, washing down a trailer or – for boys – going out with their fathers on a work day. Play is often associated with the work of adult life. The demands of unfamiliar learning styles may be particularly challenging for Traveller children: for example, sitting on a carpet and listening to verbal instructions about an activity may not be as natural as standing next to an adult, watching and copying them. Practitioners need to recognise that the same learning outcome can occur through different learning styles.



Enabling children to act out within the setting elements of their home lifestyles can be a helpful starting point in surroundings where so much may be unfamiliar. It can be the springboard for a range of challenges that can be built on and applied to other situations and activities. In order for children to experience active learning that will sustain their involvement and engagement, practitioners should provide a learning environment resourced in ways that enable this to happen. This is the case for all children; when practitioners know and understand the lifestyles of the children they can better provide the resources that will stimulate their learning.

Adult involvement in children's play can extend their learning and thinking, when it is sensitive and appropriate. Discussing observations with colleagues and with parents will help practitioners know how and when to intervene in play situations. Play with peers is crucial and should be facilitated by practitioners; barriers to inclusive play, such as racism and social exclusion, need to be challenged. The role of the practitioner is crucial in this area and the creation of a positive and welcoming ethos and attitude within the setting are vital for underpinning success. Robust equality policies, coupled with effective systems for monitoring, recording and responding to racist incidents, are essential.

*Practitioners always intervene in play if it is racist, sexist or in any way offensive, unsafe, violent or bullying...*

#### **Principles into Practice card 4.1: Commitment to Play and Exploration – Adult Involvement**

It is always important for practitioners to discuss provision of play opportunities with any parent who may have a different cultural attitude to, or experience of, the role of play in children's learning; this is particularly relevant when this provision is delivered in a setting that is part of a school and the expectations may be for a more 'formal' approach to learning. Sharing observations with parents of children's playful learning will help them to understand how their children are learning and may increase their interest and involvement with play activities in the home environment. It can also create further opportunities for meaningful dialogue between parent and practitioner.

Providing experiential workshops for parents and opportunities for them to stay and play with children, before they attend by themselves, are tried and tested ways to engage parents. Building effective two-way partnerships will help parents develop confidence that Early Years provision can support their children's learning and development, in ways that will not undermine or threaten their way of life.

Two crucial areas of learning and development that underpin the ability to benefit from educational provision are Personal, Social and Emotional Development (PSED) and Communication Language and Literacy (CLL). Specific points about these two areas are important for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children.

## Case study

### Building on Traveller children's expertise

The project began as a result of practitioners observing children playing alongside each other, looking for places where creatures might live. Conversations turned to places where people live and one child said he didn't live in a house but in a trailer. The practitioner introduced the group to a large wooden model caravan in the construction area. This became a focus for play; close observation and sustained shared thinking allowed practitioners to follow and build on the interests of the children in the setting.

Two of the Traveller boys, Paddy and Tommy, sought out other adults in the setting to show them 'their' trailer. Paddy gathered a large group of children so he could tell them about it. The boys led the session of caravan play, becoming the experts in the group.

The practitioners developed this theme by involving children and their families in planning the project on 'Homes', with the emphasis on trailers and caravans. The Traveller families were given a camera to take photographs of their homes and the site where they live, which were then used to introduce the project to the other children, along with a variety of Traveller-specific resources.

It was decided that role-play trailers were needed and that the children should design and make them. They began by drawing plans to help them; they looked at models and pictures to help.



Practitioners and children looked at the drawings and made lists of what was needed for their homes. As the garden is an extension of the classroom, they made two trailers, one for inside and one for outside. The children were given large sheets of cardboard, after Connor and Molly decided: 'We can use the boxes. They have to be big so we can all get in.'

The five Traveller children involved in the project took the lead in the planning and execution of the work, their parents – both mums and dads – visited school to see what the children were doing and what the end result was like. They were invited in to have refreshments in the trailers when they were complete.

All areas of learning and development were covered during the project; details and an extended case study are on the accompanying DVD-ROM.





Case Study from Millward, J, *Building on Traveller children's expertise*, Wolverhampton Traveller Education Service. With grateful thanks for their contribution.

## Pause for reflection and discussion 6

How have you, or could you, involve Traveller parents in their children's learning?

How would you use a project like this to:

- build self-esteem and positive identities;
- strengthen relationships with the community?

What impact might this work have on the self-esteem and identity of the Traveller children and of non-Traveller children?

## Case study

### James Patrick comes to school

In a small village school, a TESS advisory teacher worked with a class teacher to develop a Traveller 'persona doll' story with a mixed Reception and Year 1 class. Initially the advisory teacher introduced the doll, James Patrick, for a storytelling session to give non-Traveller children an insight into the home lives of some of their Traveller friends, most of whom live on a nearby permanent local authority site. The aim was also to engage the Traveller children and raise their self-esteem. The 'persona' of James Patrick, who lived in a trailer and travelled regularly, was developed and quickly became very popular, his visits to the class increased and he became an honorary member of the class.



Planning meetings involving the class 1 team and the TESS advisory teacher determined the way that James Patrick's story would develop and the ways in which this could support all children's learning and development.

The role-play area became James Patrick's trailer, with a display featuring Gypsy, Roma and Traveller history and artefacts. Practitioners had observed children's interest and involvement with the role-play area and had seen how the Traveller children became the 'experts' when discussing aspects of life inside a trailer, for example, emphasising the importance of everything having a specific place and making preparations for moving, which has involved problem-solving and afforded opportunities to extend children's reasoning and explanation skills.

There are plans to allow James Patrick to visit children's homes and to keep a record of his adventures with them. One Traveller child in particular became very attached to the doll and used it to support her play activities; she also gave him the school meals she didn't want to eat!

The advisory teacher developed a book showing James Patrick in a variety of situations and engaged in a range of activities. James Patrick has written letters to the children and they, in turn, are encouraged to write to him. As he is a beginner writer it is hoped that the efforts he makes will inspire and motivate the children to write back to him.

A role-play trailer is being developed in the class outdoor area. Here the Traveller support worker, who is from a Traveller background herself, reported that the children were using Romani words as they welcomed one another in to their role-play trailer home.

Video footage of the persona doll being used with the class can be seen on the DVD-ROM.

## Pause for reflection and discussion 7

The use of puppets and Persona dolls is increasingly popular.

What are the benefits of having dolls and puppets that reflect the ethnicities of children in your setting, and children who are not in your setting?

How comfortable would you feel, using resources like these?

How would you avoid reinforcing stereotypes and getting into difficult situations with children's questions and observations?

How do you think relationships in this school between children, parents, staff and families might be affected by this work?

How do you introduce children to a diversity of lifestyles?

How do you sensitively acknowledge and encourage linguistic diversity, sharing words and phrases from languages and dialects other than standard English?

## Learning and development

### Effective practice

Practitioners are effective when they:

- recognise that every child's learning journey is unique to them;
- involve the children in learning that takes them into the local community;
- actively listen, giving Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children the time they need to express themselves in different ways;
- monitor Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children's progress regularly, sharing findings with the children and parents and planning next steps that will engage and motivate them;
- analyse progress by ethnicity (and gender) and act upon the findings.

### Challenges and dilemmas

- To make the learning opportunities relevant to all children, so that they are engaged and motivated and continue to learn.
- To ensure well-intentioned policies and planning are put into everyday practice.
- To maintain connections and motivation when children move away for long periods of time.

### Reflecting on practice

- What open-ended activities do you provide for children in your setting?
- How do you value what Gypsy, Roma and Traveller parents tell you about the ways in which children behave and learn at home?
- How do you involve children in planning for their learning?
- How do you share children's learning with their parents and carers?
- How do you support children and parents in understanding learning and development opportunities?



# Appendix 1:

## Improving ascription

Gypsy and Roma people have been recognised as a racial group since 1988; Travellers of Irish heritage received legal recognition as a racial group in 2000. Gypsy, Roma, Travellers of Irish heritage and Scottish Travellers are therefore protected by race relations legislation. In 2000, the DfES introduced ethnic group monitoring within the Annual School Census. Since 2003 the two minority ethnic groups of Gypsy or Roma and Travellers of Irish heritage have been included as ethnic categories.

Other groups traditionally included within the generic terminology of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller are fairground families, show people, circus families, New Travellers and bargees or canal-boat families. These latter groups do not have minority ethnic status and are not specifically listed as categories within the Annual School Census. However, schools should respond to the educational needs of these children, taking into account their particular and special circumstances and the demands and constraints placed on many in relation to their nomadic lifestyle.

The UK government, in common with administrations across Europe, has very limited statistical and ethnographic data on these communities, their actual population cohorts, size of families, numbers of children and the communities' access to and uptake of public services. A recent report on Roma, published by the European Union (2004), emphasises the data-deficient environment surrounding Gypsy, Roma and Traveller families and suggests a possible connection to the racial and social status of the communities. It suggests that responsible governments should establish reliable data as a foundation for establishing positive policy responses to identified need.

At the time of the inclusion of these two ethnic categories within the Annual School Census, it was recognised that voluntary ethnic self-ascription rates would be low, given a number of complex reasons pertinent to these particular communities. The ethnically disaggregated data generated by the Annual School Census has revealed cohort sizes for Gypsy, Roma and Travellers of Irish heritage that appear to be at odds with both the data held by LAs' TESS and the estimates of the DCSF. These data sources all suggest that the actual number of children may be anything from 50 per cent to 70 per cent larger than the official ascription cohort size. In order to strengthen the quality of information arising from the Annual School Census in relation to Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils, the DCSF has been concerned to enhance the level of voluntary self-ascription by these groups. Further guidance is given in *The inclusion of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children and young people* (DCSF 2008).

Both the oral and written history of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller of Irish heritage communities confirm the reality of racist persecution and discrimination faced by these communities over many centuries. Many parents are thus concerned not to expose their children to the negative and damaging impact of prejudice and discrimination at school. They make judgements in this context, based on their own difficult experiences of school, and fear the manifestation of prejudice in the form of teachers' attitudes and racist bullying by peers. Without sufficient support and the confidence of a strong school ethos of welcome and inclusion at the point of registration, a majority of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller parents are disinclined to record their children's ethnic status as Gypsy, Roma or Traveller of Irish heritage. The 'White other' or 'White British' boxes are much safer alternatives for completing the form, which is frequently completed in front of the administrative staff of the school.

LAs and schools also need to be aware of the particular circumstances of Roma immigrant families from Central and Eastern Europe. (Some families may be asylum seekers or refugees, but a majority now are migrant workers who are legitimatised within the UK as migrant labour by the Treaty of Accession of the European Union 2003.) Most of these families have come to the UK to escape both poverty and racist abuse and discrimination in their home countries. These families will be anxious about declaring their

ethnic status, as opposed to their nationality status, when in the UK. Many of these families will have suffered gross discrimination in education in their country of origin, which will have frequently resulted in their children ending up in either substandard segregated schools or special schools for those with learning disabilities. Although empirical evidence is slight, some of these families are reported to be very pleased to be in the UK, with the opportunities that schools appear to offer their children. Their appearance does not unleash the extreme and abusive treatment that many Roma have traditionally received in their countries of origin. However, fears exist and may also relate to the families' lack of confidence in speaking, reading and writing in English.

In addition to the factors above, a significant number of Gypsies, Roma and Travellers who reside in houses may feel intimidated in ascribing to the ethnic status of Gypsy or Roma or Traveller of Irish heritage when registering their children at school. They may be acutely aware of the potential for such a declaration to invoke racially prejudiced behaviour, both for their children in the school setting and for their family as a whole, within the local community. Some families may also feel that schools will raise potentially embarrassing issues, in the mistaken belief that once Gypsies or Travellers settle in a house they, in some strange way, shed their ethnic minority status. This ill-informed attitude is prevalent within both schools and the population at large.

It is recognised that for a significant number of families the actual terminology of the two categories as 'Gypsy or Roma' and 'Traveller of Irish heritage' may, in fact, be a disincentive to self-ascribe. For example, for those families where the parents are of mixed heritage, there is no appropriate box to tick. The DCSF has thus recently changed the terminology relating to the ethnic categorisation for these two ethnic-minority groups. This is intended to encourage more parents to feel sufficiently confident to ascribe with greater accuracy. The new categories are 'Gypsy', 'Roma' and 'Traveller', with the last term enabling further specification of heritage by including a sub-category tick-box of 'Irish' or 'Scottish'.

Schools need to be aware that they have a duty to create circumstances conducive to Gypsy, Roma and Travellers of Irish heritage feeling sufficiently confident in them to ascribe their children voluntarily within their accurate category determination. This is part of their general duties under the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000, to promote equal opportunity and good race relations.

*Moving forward together: Raising Gypsy, Roma and Traveller achievement, Booklet 1: Introduction*

# Appendix 2:

## Additional case studies

### Case study 1

#### Jemboy, a looked-after child

Issues surrounding identity need to be approached with particular sensitivity. This case study illustrates how even very young children can be subject to racism because of their ethnic heritage. The case study also exemplifies what can and should be done to support children and families who experience such trauma.

Children who are in local authority care and are from Gypsy, Roma or Irish Traveller backgrounds may not be regarded as having culturally diverse backgrounds but it is important for all children to know about their cultural heritage. In this case, one of the carers shared the child's heritage and some of their experiences.

Early Years practitioners can play an important role in supporting children and families in understanding identity. Many practitioners will find this a difficult area to address and most would need some additional professional development opportunities to support their understanding and give them confidence to support the child and family.

Jemboy is a four-year-old boy of White Irish Traveller ethnicity and British nationality who was taken into local authority care at the age of 11 months. He was adopted by a White British father and a White English Gypsy mother when he was three years old. Initially Jemboy was allocated a placement in a community childcare service and then attended a local school.

Jemboy's adoptive parents endeavoured to promote his awareness of and pride in his identity and he had brought in old photographs of his paternal grandparents in a Bender Tent to share at circle time. Other families expressed discontent with Jemboy's presence in the Reception class as a result of this.

The family were subject to anti-Irish and anti-Irish Traveller racism, which impacted negatively on them all. The adoptive parents reported that the school did not challenge this racism; it either ignored it or denied Jemboy's Irish Traveller ethnicity to other children and parents at the school.

Jemboy's parents sought the support of the children's centre he previously attended, as they felt that, despite many attempts, their concerns were not being taken seriously by his new school. The parents were adamant that they did not want to 'cause trouble for the staff and school' but needed 'the racism to stop'.

The family had not engaged with Gypsy, Roma or Traveller communities but the children's centre provided cultural mentoring to Jemboy, via their Irish Traveller staff, to repair the damage done to his sense of worth and his ethnic identity. The children's centre supported the family in liaising with the school and local authority. They also made contact with the TESS, who had not been made aware of Jemboy's attendance at the school or the abuse to which he and his family were being subjected.

The centre liaised with the national charity Early Years Equality and they, with the TESS, provided Irish Traveller awareness-training and support to the school, reviewed the school's policies, procedures and practice with the governors, staff, parents and children. They designated a mentor to the Reception staff. Centre staff modelled identity and rights-supporting activities and interactions in the setting for the staff, Jemboy, and the other children and parents concerned.

Early Years Equality also supported the setting by hosting parent meetings and delivering specific focus-group activities with the parents who had raised objections to Jemboy's presence in the school. The school has, within its vicinity, housed and site-based Gypsy and Traveller families, who refrained from attending this school over a number of years.

The local Gypsy and Traveller community, supported by the TESS, the children's centre, Early Years Equality and the LA Community Safety Team, held collaborative meetings between the settled community and the Gypsy and Traveller communities. These meetings allowed community tensions that had been festering for some time to be aired openly, for myths to be dispelled and negative racial stereotypes to be challenged and redressed.

The school has worked hard to respect and give due, fair, inclusive and equal regard to Jemboy's ethnic identity in compliance with Race Equality Duties and EYFS requirements.

Case Study from Meleady, C (2008) *Looked after children*. © Early Years Equality. Used with kind permission.

## Case study 2

### Involving Roma families

A community nursery and children's centre in Sheffield realised that this was a group of families who were not accessing their provision and took active steps to encourage their participation.

*The nursery has always worked hard to promote community cohesion and to encourage all sections of the community to use our services, so we felt we had to put strategies in place to address this gap. We home visited the Roma Slovak families with an interpreter and, although they would agree to bring their children to nursery, most would only attend for one or two sessions and then we wouldn't see them again. We realised we had to build up stronger relationships with the families and, after researching the Roma experience of education in Slovakia, we began to understand the barriers they faced and their lack of trust in education.*

*We employed an interpreter, not just to home visit and help with registration but also to be in nursery when children arrived, stay during the session and to follow up absences and concerns from parents. This was very successful – when we had the interpreter in place we had 12 Roma children attending on a fairly regular basis and we were able to support the transition of some of these children across to the local school.*

*We have also tried other approaches, such as asking Roma parents and older siblings to be ambassadors, forming a link between the nursery and the community. In April 2009 we held an event for the local Roma community to show a film about a Roma child moving from our nursery to the school nursery – over 60 people attended. In May 2009 we are visiting Slovakia to look at some of the innovative work that has been carried out there to encourage integration and we hope to use these ideas to further develop our practice.*

Case Study from Pearse, S, *Involving Roma families*. © Tinsley Parents and Children's Consortium. Used with kind permission.

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Thumbnail image from Save the Children, *Early Years Outreach Practice: Supporting early years practitioners working with Gypsy, Roma and Traveller families and offering transferable ideas for other outreach early years workers*. © The Save the Children Fund 2006. Used with kind permission. Further training information can be found at [www.savethechildren.org.uk/earlyyears](http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/earlyyears)



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