INCLUSION OF TRAVELLERS IN EDUCATION

Report of the seminar held in the Carlton Shearwater Hotel, Ballinasloe on December 7th 2007, as part of Traveller Focus Week
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Irish Traveller Movement

Galway Traveller Movement
Inclusion of Travellers in Education

Foreword to the Report

On behalf of the Irish Traveller Movement Education Working Group and Galway Traveller Movement

The focus for this seminar came from a discussion between the Irish Traveller Movement (ITM) Education Working Group and Galway Traveller Movement (GTM) Rural Primary Health Care Programme.

The Education Working Group, as the policy forum for ITM members to discuss strategies for achieving education for Travellers, regularly meets Traveller learners and parents to ensure that local issues are informing national policy development. While there has been considerable progress for Travellers in education over the last number of years in regard to many parts of the education system the reality is that many issues still exist. Through contact with Travellers locally, it is clear that while there has been progress much remains to be achieved in achieving equality of outcome in education for Travellers. In many areas, the experience for Travellers in education is poor, with poor outcomes, low attendance and little or no positive interaction between schools and parents.

However, the Irish Traveller Movement (ITM) is committed to developing innovative models of best practice in order to support genuinely inclusive intercultural, inclusive education in Ireland. It became clear from a discussion between the women on the GTM Rural Primary Health Care Programme and the ITM Education Working Group that experiences for Travellers in education in Loughrea, Ballinasloe, Athenry and Craughwell were very positive. During this discussion it was felt that this positive experience, which was the result of strong parental involvement in their children’s education and positive attitudes from schools and teachers, should be celebrated.

While it is important that the good work undertaken in the schools in these areas is acknowledged and celebrated, it is also important that the work underpinning these successes is analysed and taken on board by other schools across the country. Much of the positive experiences for Travellers in education in these schools, both as parents and learners, comes from a willingness from teachers to engage Travellers. We feel that there is much to learn from the inputs today to ensure that Travellers can experience equality in education in Ireland: equality of access, participation and enrolment, where Traveller identity is respected and validated in a fully inclusive education system.

Many thanks must be given to many people who made the Education Event in Ballinasloe such a success.

The main drivers behind this day from the first stages of developing it, were the participants of the GTM Primary Health Care Programme. As parents, they wanted to recognise how important education is to them and how schools have involved them and made them feel welcome, which naturally impacts on their children’s education. Secondly, the schools who made time from their schedules to get involved in the day and share their expertise on how good relationships were developed and maintained, and how this has impacted on Traveller outcomes in education. Inputs from the ITM, GTM and the Department of Education and Science also added to the day by placing a wider policy context in relation to Traveller education. Finally, thanks must be given to those who gave their time to get involved on the day and generated much discussion on how to progress outcomes for Travellers in education.

We genuinely feel that the parents and schools have produced a model of interaction that can be easily adopted by schools across the country and hope that the discussion from the day, captured in this document will lead to many other schools developing strong, long-lasting relationships with Travellers, which will lead to positive education experiences and outcomes in the future.
The following are the contributions made by the speakers on the day:

**Winnie Mongan GTM Rural Primary Health Care Project**

On behalf of our Primary Health Care group I would like to take this opportunity to welcome you all here today.

We are a group of women from Ballinasloe, Loughrea, Kilconnell, Craughwell, Athenry and Killimor. We are currently doing a three year primary health care course on the health of the Travelling Community and how we can make things better for ourselves and other members of the Travelling Community.

Since we started our course there is so much that we have learned. Some of the training we have done so far includes Women’s Health, Environmental Health, Speech and Language, Diabetes, Asthmatic Care, Community Development, Aromatherapy, Holistic health and much more. We had a very successful day with CROI recently where we organised for 38 travellers to have heart, weight and cholesterol screening.

Our project is funded through the Western Region H.S.E and is a FAS L.T.I Training programme. At the end of the Training we hope to be employed through the H.S.E as community health workers to improve traveller health issues across South East Galway. We look forward to working with all of you in the future.

The parents that are speaking today are all from the Primary Health Care Project and we are glad you could all come and celebrate with us during Traveller Focus Week. Enjoy your morning and thank you.

**Damien Peelo, Director, Irish Traveller Movement.**

I would like to thank you all for attending this seminar on Including Travellers in Education, which takes place as part of Traveller Focus Week

This year the ITM is coordinating the Traveller Focus week, with over 30 events taking place across the country, and for the first time ever, with the involvement of An Munia Tober and the Equality Commission in Northern Ireland, Traveller Focus Week has an all-Island dimension.

The theme of the week this year is INCLUSION. This theme was chosen as it is one of the key objectives of the National Action Plan Against Racism and represents a real challenge in the work with Travellers. For the first time, Traveller Focus Week will have an all-Island focus.

The week will specifically focus on Traveller inclusion in cultural and public life in Irish society. It will provide an opportunity to document and celebrate Travellers contribution to Irish art, drama and music. It will also focus on inclusion of Nomadism in Irish society, inclusion of Travellers in education and promoting the inclusion of Young Travellers within the Movement.

The main objectives of the week are:
Inclusion of Travellers in Education

- To develop Travellers pride in their Irish identity and cultural background
- To develop awareness and promote an understanding of Travellers position in Irish society
- To highlight Travellers contribution to Irish society
- To promote Traveller participation in public life and policy development

Today’s seminar is a celebration of the positives in education and a recognition that inclusion of Travellers in education, can and does happen. The ITM and GTM Loughrea PHCP are delighted to be able to highlight the positives in education in East Galway and celebrate this as part of Traveller Focus Week.

However, it most be recognised that in large number of areas, the experience for Travellers in education is poor, with poor outcomes, low attendance and little or no positive interaction between schools and parents. The ITM is committed to developing both the policy context and models of good practice that will produce equality for Travellers in Education and has worked with its members and the Department of Education and Science in order to develop new policies that will produce real inclusion for Travellers across the country, with positive outcomes in terms of attainment and promoting closer links between Travellers, Traveller organisations and schools.

In order to progress these issues nationally, it is important to recognise and learn from real progress locally. Today gives us that opportunity and space to recognise that positive steps can have positive outcomes.

I would like to finish by thanking everyone for attending today, particularly Jim Mulkerrins from the Department of Education and Science, and also the schools who have done such great work and agreed to share some of their knowledge and experience with us today.

I would like to finally express my thanks to the GTM Loughrea Primary Health Care Programme for investing so much time and effort in making today happen, particularly their enthusiasm for education and their keen involvement in the day. Special mention must be made for Orla and Rebecca for their work behind the scenes and the ITM Education Working Group for their inputs on what should happen on the day.

Final mention must go to the parents for being the real drivers behind today’s events and their enthusiasm for education, not only for their children, but also for themselves and their keen involvement in promoting the positives for Travellers in education here today.

Bridie Cawley GTM Rural Primary Health Care Project

My name is Bridie Cawley. I am going to talk about the education that the Travelling children in Ballinalsoe are getting, in particular in Scoil Croí Naofa. There is a large group of Travelling children attending the school.

The education of Travelling children has changed so much in the last few years. As a parent of 6 children, 5 attend school in Croí Naofa. I find that my children are getting a great education and they are involved in all the activities that goes on in the school. A lot of young children now go to pre-school and this gets children involved with all the children of different communities.
There are a lot of Travelling children in secondary school in Ballinalsoe and a lot have done their Leaving cert and got on very well and in the years to come I would hope that our children will go into third level education and become doctors, teachers and get good jobs.

As a parent I feel that I can go to Scoil An Croí Naofa if I have a problem and I get great respect from the school. They treat me with a good welcome and I feel they listen to me very well.

My children are involved in everything in school. They are going ice-skating for Christmas. They are in the Christmas choir and going carol singing. Scoil An Croí Naofa started a homework group for children and I find that it is very good for my children. They also are the only school I know of that have Speech and Language classes for children in their school that need speech and language support. They also started the Healthy Eating programme in the school last September which is great for all the children.

My oldest daughter started Ard Scoil Mhuire in September and I find that she has learned a lot even since she started. I also heard from other parents with children in Ard Scoil Mhuire and Garbally college that they treat Travellers with great respect and I am happy that my children will be attending these schools in years to come.

I would like to thank Scoil an Croí Naofa and Ard Scoil Mhuire for all the help and support they have given my children, especially Scoil an Croí Naofa.

Jim Mulkerrins, Social Inclusion Unit of the Department of Education and Science

Jim gave an input that looked at the “Report and Recommendations for a Traveller Education Strategy” which was launched by the Minister Mary Hanafin, T.D. in November 2006. He highlighted that the overall Aim of the Strategy was to ensure that Travellers receive a high quality, integrated education from early childhood to adult education underpinned by the principle of inclusion and mainstreaming, and that the principle of provision of supports would be in response to “individual educational need” rather than “Traveller identity”.

The key Issues addressed by the Report are:

- The current situation with regard to Traveller Education
- Traveller parents
- Pre-schools: early childhood education
- Primary education
- Post Primary education
- Further education
- Higher education
- Other educational issues

In summary, a lifelong learning approach is adopted and all components to be addressed

Jim outlined the Department of Education and Science structures that have been put in place to aid imple-
Inclusion of Travellers in Education

The priorities within the report are:

- Mainstreaming – closure of segregated schools
- Improvement in attendance – Travellers rights and responsibilities
- Raising of attainment levels
- Training in Equality, Diversity and Interculturalism for teachers
- Traveller adults and their role in education
- Pilot Project re Travellers as Community Education workers

Data collection - to facilitate ongoing policy evaluation

Within the report, the key recommendations are that:

- 50% of the 41 Traveller specific pre-schools should be amalgamated with mainstream early childhood care and education provision within five years, and no new segregated Traveller pre-schools should be established.
- All pupils, including Traveller pupils, in primary and post-primary schools should have absences of less than 20 days per year.
- The enhanced capitation funding provided for Traveller children over 12 years attending primary schools should cease.
- The remaining special primary school and the special school which caters for Travellers aged 12 – 15 years should be closed by summer 2008 and future students integrated into mainstream schools.
- Training in equality and diversity should be prioritised for primary, post-primary and further education.
- Transfer of Traveller pupils from primary to post-primary should increase from 85% to 100%.
- 100% of Traveller students should complete the junior cycle and 50% of these students should continue on and complete senior cycle or its equivalent.
- A representative sample of young people, including Travellers, in primary and post-primary schools, should be consulted every second year.
- Payment of allowances to all young people including Travellers, less than 16 years, should cease.
- No Travellers under 18 years should be enrolled in Senior Traveller Training Centres.
- Progression to further education, training or employment should increase for Travellers in Senior Traveller Training Centres from 53% to 75% within the next five years.
- Consideration is being given to the funding of a pilot project, which will assess the possible role and benefits accruing from the provision of Traveller Community Education Workers within the education sector. Such a project would consider how such posts would complement existing services in particular the VTST, the HSCL and SCP or whether there would be overlap and duplication.

Geraldine Harty GTM Rural Primary Health Care Project

My name is Geraldine Harty. I am a Traveller parent from Loughrea. I have done my presentation mainly on dealing with the resource teachers in the two schools my children go to, as I would have got involved with them a lot over concern for my own childrens education.

My four children attend two primary schools in Loughrea. My sons attend St. Brendan’s Boys school. My eldest son is ADHD and can be very easily distracted and his learning is below average. In September 06 I was asked to come to the school to meet the Principal and the resource teacher. They explained in great detail that his learning was below average and he would need extra help. They wanted...
him to meet the education psychologist. I had to agree and sign for this to happen, which I agreed and this happened within a few weeks. He needed a special needs assistant in the yard and the class, which was got for him. My son has four resource teachers now.

I really feel that the Principal and resource teacher has gone out of their way to help my son and get the best possible education they can give him. They have always understood my sons needs and are always prepared to help him.

Anytime I go to the school I don’t feel threatened or afraid and I know they are willing to discuss any problem that might arise with my son. This is very important to me.

My two daughters attend the girls school in Loughrea, St. Ita’s. I get on very well with the resource teacher and she is a great influence over the Traveller children in the school as she is always encouraging them to do their best. When my eldest daughter went in to first class, the resource teacher Mrs. Glynn rang me to come to the school. She explained that my daughter needed extra help in some subjects, but I had to sign a form for this to happen. I was very happy leaving school that day because I would never have known my child needed help. I think it is important that Traveller children get additional help if they need it, like any other child, but only if they need it, not because of the fact they are a Traveller. Mrs. Glynn has put so much confidence in my daughter, she is always telling her she will go on to college and I believe she will.

I know from other Travellers in Loughrea that they can go in and talk to the principal and teachers in both schools without the fear of being put down and can talk about their children’s education. They will always be told how there children are getting on and how the teachers or parents can help to improve things. I know the teachers in Loughrea have a great interest in Travellers education. The teachers in both primary schools in Loughrea attend Traveller funerals and they would contact retired teachers who would also attend and call to the house. I was talking to my father recently and he said that when I was a child the Traveller parents in Loughrea got great support like we do now.

**Teresa Donohue GTM Rural Project**

I have 4 children attending the Gaelscoil Riabhach in Loughrea. When the school first opened my eldest child started and he is in 4th class now. This school first opened in the estate that I lived in which was very handy for me. I did not know any of the teachers from the start but as the time went on we started to form a friendship. The teachers would come out and talk to me and ask me if I had any problems with the school and if I had anything to talk to them concerning the children. I was never nervous about discussing any problems with them. The school is multi denominated which welcomes every one of different race, colour, culture and religion. When it comes to my children being happy in school – I know that this is something that would never be a problem as all my children talk about their teachers and friends all the time. The teachers listen to all the children and give everyone an equal chance of being involved in both the classroom and other activities like school plays and sport. Traveller children, like all children, need to feel valued and respected in schools and my children feel this way. I believe getting involved with the school is very important. My husband helps out with hurling training once a week. I felt delighted when the principal asked if my husband would help out. I think in this way, other men in the traveller community can become more involved with the school and their children. I have always felt the school wanted parents to be involved and have welcomed every opportunity for this to happen. They encouraged me to become involved in the Board of Management of the school, and although it did not work out this time, it is something I would be interested in the future. I know that the school are genuinely interested in Traveller parents becoming involved in the Board, and I think this is something all schools should be encouraging Traveller parents to do. Schools should also look at different types of ways of getting Traveller parents involved, like through sports or after-school activities.
I would like to talk about the teachers. My children’s teachers are more like friends to me and this how they have always made me feel. They do not treat me any different because I am a Traveller. I have always felt welcome in the school. I feel that if there is a good relation between parents and schools then this makes things easier. You are not worried about going to them and they treat you with the utmost respect.

Just recently I had to report an incident that happened in the school. When I told the school they could not have been more apologetic and solved this issue straight away, which is important. I think that the policies they have in place and the way they deal with things will solve any problem that might come up. All schools should investigate any incidents fully and act quickly and in the appropriate way to make sure all children have the chance to enjoy their time at school and get a good education. I want my children to continue their education and go on to college. I feel the school will support my children to stay in school for as long as possible and encourage them to go on to secondary school and then College. Between the school and myself and my husband I know we will achieve this.

Go raibh mile maith agat Scoil Riabhach.

Patrick Coyle, Principal, St Ita’s N.S. Loughrea

Travellers have been attending St. Ita’s N.S. for many years. A school project on the history of the school carried out in 1997 refers to and names some of the Travellers attending the school in the 1920’s. St. Ita’s has developed a long tradition and association with the education of Traveller children. During this time we have developed a positive working relationship with Traveller pupils and their families. We try to ensure that Traveller pupils along with non-Traveller pupils get equal opportunities to participate in the education system.

Our school ‘Mission Statement’ contains the following aspirations which enable us to facilitate the inclusion of Travellers in the primary education system:

1. We hold as central respect for the dignity and uniqueness of each child.
2. As a catholic school we uphold the teaching of Christian values and the education of the child for life. As a catholic school we strive to educate the children in the catholic faith and to prepare them for the sacraments.
3. We commit ourselves to maximise the potential of each child by developing self esteem, consideration of others and a critical evaluation of life.
4. We acknowledge that each education is a partnership and we maintain strong links with parents and see them as the primary educators of their children.
5. We value a spirit of co-operation and a happy learning environment and welcome partnership with the wider community.
6. We are committed to develop the right attitudes towards justice and tolerance and we respect diverging views of minorities within our school.

While we endorse all of the above statements as contained in our Mission Statement, we have our expectations that Traveller pupils along with pupils from the settled community adhere to school policies such as the Code of Behaviour, Attendance Policy, Homework Policy and Uniform Policy. These policies apply equally to all of the children attending St. Ita’s N.S.

During the school year you will find Traveller pupils learning in an integrated classroom setting as well as taking part in other school related activities such as –

- School Choirs
- School Camogie teams
- After School clubs e.g. Indoor Athletics, Chess
- Swimming Classes
Inclusion of Travellers in Education
Inclusion of Travellers in Education
Inclusion of Travellers in Education
Inclusion of Travellers in Education

- MACNAS Art and Craft.

As a school we are constantly facilitating the inclusion of Traveller pupils. We try to go the extra mile to ensure equality of opportunity. In June 2007 we made a very strong case to the Department of Education and Science to retain the Traveller Bus on the Loughrea bypass. During the school year, if a new Traveller pupil arrives in the middle of a term we ensure that school uniform, books etc. are provided to enable the pupil settle in immediately. During the course of the school year we liaise with the Visiting Teacher for Travellers on a broad range of matters concerning Traveller pupils.

In the event of a Traveller child presenting with special education needs, we contact the Special Education Needs Organiser and arrange for assessments and put the necessary supports (e.g. Resource Teacher and / or Special Needs Assistant) in place. Our Learning Support Classes are fully integrated and based on the withdrawal of pupils (Traveller and non-Traveller) from the classes on a timetabled basis. We liaise with the Galway Youth Federation concerning the provision of an After School Homework Club. We liaise with local secondary schools regarding the smooth transfer of Traveller pupils from primary to secondary school.

As we progress through the early years of the 21st century the challenges facing the education system are many and constantly changing. In this scenario the education of children from the Traveller community must continue to receive the priority and support levels that it has been accustomed to. St. Ita’s N.S. will strive to provide the best possible learning for all of its pupils. This aim combined with the aims outlined in our Mission Statement will provide the opportunity for our Traveller pupils to integrate, to achieve and to grow in a truly holistic way.

Marie Costello, Principal, Scoil an Chroi Naofa NS, Ballinasloe

To the best of my knowledge there were only 114 Travellers enrolled in the education system in 1966. Today there are around 5,900 Travellers enrolled.

We enrolled our first Traveller pupils here in Ballinasloe in 1978 and there have been very positive developments over the last 30 years.

The early days were difficult for all concerned. I suppose there was a suspicion and a lack of understanding right across the board. There were a number of contributing factors to this. Travellers lived in what can now only be described as 3rd world conditions, either on the side of the road or in unserviced halting sites. Integration was a major challenge because of this and did not become the norm in our school until the mid 80's.

The transient life of our Travellers had implications. It led to poor attendance records which in turn caused our pupils to have poor literacy and numeracy skills on completion of their time with us. 2nd level education was not an option for Travellers in the early days.

I am so proud to be able to say that there have been incredible leaps forward in the past 30 years. All Travellers are integrated into our mainstream classes and are given every opportunity to achieve to the best of their ability. We have 100% transfer of our Traveller pupils to 2nd level education. It goes without saying that all Traveller pupils participate in all school activities - school teams, school choirs, school plays etc. We were very proud that one of the girls became the first Traveller to represent Galway in an Athletic discipline last year - we had a big celebration.

Our Traveller parents are very supportive of both their children and the school. Pupil attendance is excellent. Parents always come to us when asked and they work closely with us. They also attend school functions and we are very proud of their support.

A multi-agency approach is the key to success. We are very aware and grateful for the support of the following agencies; D.E.S., H.S.E., Local Authority Agency, Family Support, Gardai. R.A.P.I.D.
I want to place particular emphasis on our staff. We have a dedicated, caring staff who have created an environment in which our pupils feel safe, valued and cared for. They challenge our pupils to be valued and responsible members of school community and between us all we work hard to encourage us all to grow in this challenging world of ours.

**Geraldine Donovan Ward, GTM Rural Primary Health Care Project**

Good morning, my name is Geraldine Ward from Loughrea. I am married with two children. I have a 7 year old daughter attending St. Ita’s National School in Loughrea. I am going to talk a little about St. Ita’s National School.

I attended St. Ita’s National School as a child and now my daughter is attending. As a parent I feel my child is treated no differently to any other child. Her teacher, principal and resource teacher are very supportive and helpful to her. They are always encouraging her to do the best of her ability. They are very good at organising her books after the summer holidays. She is always invited to take part in any activities that are going on in the school, as it should be in any school. She did 6 weeks swimming lessons and parents were invited on the last day to see the children being represented with their medals and certificates.

As a parent and from talking to other Traveller parents in Loughrea, the teachers are always very supportive and helpful of Traveller children. Parents are always welcomed and made feel very comfortable in the school. When talking to the teachers, we can talk freely, ask questions and we don’t feel put down or made to feel belittled of. The teachers are always willing to help in any way possible, from sorting out books to bullying to discrimination in any way or at any level. It is a better carefree environment when teachers are genuinely interested from the heart and not just because they feel it’s just a job they have to do. I honestly feel that the teachers in St. Ita’s are genuinely interested from the heart and it shows in the work that they do.

I would like to think of the teachers in St. Ita’s not only as teachers but as friends as well. When I meet them outside school they always have a smile and are always willing to talk. If there is a death in the Traveller community in Loughrea, one or two of the teachers will always attend the funeral which to me, as a member of the Travelling community, shows they have respect for us.

I feel that parents are the role model for their children. Nowadays Traveller parents are more involved in their children’s education. They ask more questions, attend parent / teacher meetings, are involved in homework classes and have a good relationship with teachers, they want to be involved in their children’s education.
I am very honoured to stand here today and have the opportunity to talk about my children’s education and St. Ita’s National School and the good work they truly do with our children. Unfortunately I have to highlight the fact that not every Traveller parent or child has experienced a good education and we, as primary health care workers, hope that this will change for the better as it has for our children. I personally feel that for every Traveller child to have a good education and be included in schools that every school should make sure parents are respected, listened to and involved and every Traveller child is treated equally and the same opportunities and rights as any other child.

I leave you now with a little thought:
I have often heard it said that education is a heavy load to carry, but in my opinion it depends on what kind of an education you got. If it was a bad experience it will be a heavy load and a burden to carry.

**Breda Mc Donagh, Galway Traveller Movement**

My name is Breda Mc Donagh. I’m an Education Worker with the Galway Traveller Movement and also the Chairperson of the Education Sub-Group within GTM.

I returned to Adult Education in 2004. I received a Diploma in Community Development Practice. I was also involved in the Legal Education for all Project (LEAP). I then went on to receive a distinction in both Communications and Information Technology Skills with a FETAC qualification. I am currently doing a diploma in Community Education in NUIG which support the area of work that I am involved in.

If someone was to tell me before 2004 that I would go back to Education I would have to say you must be joking. My school years for me were a long lonely struggle within the Education system. In primary school there was no interest shown towards me. I was placed at the back of the classroom. I always felt different from the other children.

I moved on to secondary school unable to read or write. But my experience in secondary was a much different one then that of my primary school years. I had many teachers for different subjects. I was so shocked that the teachers actually took an interest in teaching me. It was identified from the beginning that I needed extra help in all subjects.

I went on to sit my Group Cert and my Intermediate Certificate and just about managed to pass them, but the fact was I was still struggling to keep up with the rest of the class. In the weeks running up to my Leaving Cert I couldn’t take the pressure and decided to walk away. I remember the day so clearly. It was like this huge weight had lifted from my shoulders. And the months and years that followed I felt the same way.

Looking back on it now I felt let down by the Education System. But I wanted put my experience of the education system into being positive and to focus on the education of my children.

I was now more determined as a parent to make sure my children received a proper education.
Inclusion of Travellers in Education

I was involved in the decisions making with teachers regarding my children and I build a good relationship with the schools.

In 2005 my oldest daughter was one of the first members of my family and extended family to ever sit a Leaving Cert in which she received an excellence result. She then went on to third level for a further two years and received her qualifications and has now secured full time employment.

While the Education system is improving for Travellers this has to be welcomed. My children have a good experience, but unfortunately for some members of my extended family their experience is not so good.

From my personal experience and from working in the GTM these are the recommendations I feel are important so that every Traveller child has a positive experience in school

- Traveller culture should be included in the main curriculum to break down any barriers that may exist between Traveller and Settled.
- Efforts need to be made to look at equality of access, opportunity and outcomes for Travellers.
- More consultation with Travellers Parents concerning there educational needs of their children.
- A system needs to be put in place to monitor Traveller education
- After-school homework support.

Education is power.

Education will be freedom for our people in the future.

I believe Education is the way forward.

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Deachleachtas Oideachais leis an Lucht Siúil i nGaelscoil Riabhach

Educational good practice with members of the Travelling Community in Gaelscoil Riabhach; Pol Mag Lianain, Principal

Gaelscoil Riabhach was opened in Loughrea in September 2000. Our school is an Irish-medium school where subjects are taught through the medium of Irish. The school also has a multi-faith and multi-cultural ethos which the founders of the school established so that all groups in our community felt welcome.

Traditionally members of the Travelling Community have not enrolled in large numbers in gaelscoileanna but our school at present has five families, which represent about 8% of the school population. From the beginning we have tried to encourage enrolments by Travellers as they are one of the largest minority groups in our town.

Like most gaelscoileanna our school is democratically run and we believe that all parents have a right to have a say in the education of their children. Parents need to be constantly encouraged to become active in school life and to take an interest in their children’s education. Parental involvement in education holds the reward of higher levels of achievement and a better-rounded and more content student. From day one parents in our school from the Travelling Community have felt able to speak out, voice their concerns and take
Inclusion of Travellers in Education

an active part in school life. The result of this today has been Traveller parents helping with after-school activities and a parent from the Traveller Community standing for election for last year’s Board of Management elections. This is surely the biggest positive experience of Travellers in our school.

Due to its multi-faith ethos our school mission statement opens with the phrase that “everyone is welcome as an equal to our school”. If a child comes from a faith or culture outside the ‘norm’ our school must welcome them as equal to all others. Our core curriculum is framed so all children learn that differences are healthy and should be celebrated and each strand of the core curriculum brings a new culture or faith to be looked at by the children. Through this subject all children, Traveller and settled, learn to respect diversity. Most schools today pay lip-service to diversity but, personally, I believe that diversity and respect for it need to be taught as the centre of any school curriculum.

One of the things I feel as principal of a young school is that we are new to education in our area and can in no way compare the breadth of experience with the Travelling community we have with schools opened since the beginning of the last century. Still, we believe that new and fresh approaches need to be constantly tried especially as many young Travellers still talk about their negative experiences in schools. Traveller children need to see their culture, history, beliefs and values in the school system. In a history lesson pictures of Travellers from 1900 working in campsites should sit equally with pictures of farmers, explorers or politicians from the same period. Music lessons should include songs that reflect the Traveller culture. Toys in Junior Infants should include caravans and wagons and not just dolls’ houses. The list is endless.

I wish to raise one issue which is of concern to smaller schools and the Traveller parents in our school. A school with fourteen children from the Traveller community would have a full-time resource teacher to support their classroom work. If a school has twelve or eleven they get no additional support. The same applies to the higher level of capitation. Travellers should be at no disadvantage from choosing a smaller school or our school as the educator of their children.

On a final note I would like to commend all the schools taking part in Traveller Focus Week and the parents who organised this event. Maybe in ten years time one of the students from our school might be able to stand here and speak as a Traveller teacher. Until that happens and greater numbers of Traveller children move from first through to third level and on we will have to question if all schools are fully inclusive and supportive of Travellers.
List of people who attended the conference on December 7th

Mary Finnery          St Brendans N.S Portumna
Paddy Daly            St Marys School, Ballygar
Aine Deeley           Loughrea Family Resource Centre
Barbara Green         Loughrea Family Resource Centre
Midge Glynn           St Ita's Loughrea
Peter Gannon          Ballinasloe Town Council
Michael Maher         Loughrea Town Council
Maria Beattie
Pol Mag Lianain       Gaelscoil Riabhach,
Dermot Connolly       Galway County Council
Breda Coyle           Galway Rural Development
Anne Scott            St Brendans Boys National School Loughrea
Patrick Coyle         St Itas N.S Loughrea
Breeda Fahy           Health Centre Loughrea
Mary Gunther Nix      Town Council Loughrea
Rita Coen             Madonna Hse Ballinasloe
Kathleen Ward         Primary Health Care Tuam
Noreen Ward           Primary Health Care Tuam
Siofra Carroll        St Augustines N.S Clontuskert
Sr Regina de Roza     Garbally College Ballinasloe
Damien Peelo          Irish Traveller Movement
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
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<tr>
<td>Anne Feerick</td>
<td>DES Inspectorate Regional Office</td>
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<tr>
<td>Frank Kennedy</td>
<td>Garbally College Ballinasloe</td>
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<td>Jim Mulkerrins</td>
<td>Dept of Education and Science</td>
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<tr>
<td>Regina Stewart</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bridie Mongan</td>
<td>St Brendans Training Centre Loughrea</td>
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<td>Sarah Witherio</td>
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<td>Anne Marie Butler</td>
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<td>Damien Finneran</td>
<td>Pavee Point</td>
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<td>Dermot Sreenan</td>
<td>National Traveller MABS</td>
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<td>Veronica Mulhern</td>
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<td>Breda Hanley</td>
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<td>Maureen Waters</td>
<td>St Marys Pre School, Ballinasloe</td>
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<td>Gerald Hogan</td>
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<td>Raymond Sweeney</td>
<td>East Galway Mental Health</td>
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<td>Matt Crehan</td>
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<td>Evie Finlay</td>
<td>Galway Traveller Movement, Galway City</td>
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<td>Caroline Garry</td>
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<td>Teresa Reily</td>
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<td>Marie Costello</td>
<td>Ballinasloe</td>
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<td>Debbie Nightingale</td>
<td>Loughrea Family Resource Centre</td>
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<td>Minister Michael Kitt</td>
<td>Caltra, Ballinasloe, Co Galway</td>
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<td>Dympna Collette</td>
<td>Ballygar Adult Education Centre</td>
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<td>Mary Sherlock</td>
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<td>Eithne Nic Donnacha</td>
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<td>Ann Irwin</td>
<td>Researcher</td>
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<td>Hilary Mary Fallon</td>
<td>Visiting Teacher for Travellers Service</td>
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<td>John Heneghan</td>
<td>Traveller Access Initiative, Ul, Limerick</td>
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<td>Annette Flemig</td>
<td>LIT, Limerick.</td>
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<td>Michael Howe</td>
<td>Fas, Mervue Ind Estate, Galway</td>
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<tr>
<td>Monica Delaney</td>
<td>Marist Girls NS, Carrick on Shannon, Co Leitrim</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jean Farrell</td>
<td>Home Liason Teacher, Scoil Chroi Naofa, Ballinasloe</td>
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<tr>
<td>Brendan Kiely</td>
<td>Our lady of mercy primary school, Pearse Rd Sligo</td>
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<tr>
<td>Carol Browne,</td>
<td>Scoil Rois, Taylors Hill, Galway</td>
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<tr>
<td>Muireann Carroll</td>
<td>Castleheaney Educate Together School, Little Pace, Dublin 15</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ger Quirke</td>
<td>Schools inspector Kilkenny</td>
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<tr>
<td>Naomi Moran</td>
<td>Resource Teacher for Travellers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Helen Butler</td>
<td>Youth info co-ordinator, Marina Point, Ballinasloe</td>
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<td>Margaret Burke</td>
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