



# Survey of Traveller Education Provision

Inspectorate of the Department of Education and Science



AN ROINN OIDEACHAIS AGUS EOLAÍOCHTA | DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

INSPECTORATE

Evaluation Support and Research Unit

© Department of Education and Science, 2005  
ISBN 0-0000-0000-X

Designed by Total PD  
Printed by Brunswick Press Ltd

*To be purchased directly from*  
Government Publications Sales Office  
Sun Alliance House  
Molesworth Street, Dublin 2

*or by mail order from*  
Government Publications  
Postal Trade Section  
51 St. Stephen's Green, Dublin 2  
Tel: 01-647 6834  
Fax: 01-647 6843

€10.00



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## Table of Contents

<b>Foreword</b>	
Chapter 1 <b>Introduction</b>	1
Chapter 2 <b>Survey methodology</b>	13
Chapter 3 <b>Traveller pupils in primary and post-primary schools</b> <i>- Profile of enrolment, attendance and achievement in schools</i>	19
Chapter 4 <b>Traveller education provision in primary schools</b>	37
Chapter 5 <b>Traveller education provision in post-primary schools</b>	55
Chapter 6 <b>Summary, recommendations and conclusions</b>	69
<b>References</b>	83

# Acknowledgements

The Department of Education and Science gratefully acknowledges the co-operation of school principals and teachers in the thirty primary schools and six post-primary schools that were involved in the survey. Special thanks are extended to the Traveller parents and students who contributed to the survey.

The preparation and publication of this report was co-ordinated by the Evaluation Support and Research Unit (ESRU) of the Inspectorate. The Evaluation Support and Research Unit acknowledges the assistance of the primary and the post-primary inspectors who were involved in the survey in the thirty-six schools and in the drafting of this report. The co-operation of the members of the Advisory Committee on Traveller Education, the National Education Officer for Travellers and the members of the Visiting Teachers for Travellers Service who supported the work of the working group, is recognised.

Special thanks are extended to the staff, parents and pupils of the following schools for permission to use the photographs in this report:

- St. Patrick's GNS, Dublin Road, Limerick.
- Castlecomer Community School, Kilkenny
- St. Catherine's Pre-School, Carlow
- St. Kieran's College, Kilkenny.

## Foreword by the Chief Inspector



This *Survey of Traveller Education Provision* is published following an extensive survey of the participation and inclusion of Traveller pupils in a number of primary and post-primary schools. Findings in the publication are based on quantitative and qualitative data gathered by inspectors in schools and during focused interviews with parents, pupils, and teaching staff.

This publication outlines the successes that have been achieved to date and the significant challenges for the broader educational community in relation to the provision for Traveller pupils in our primary and post-primary schools. Such challenges include irregular attendance and considerable absenteeism. Furthermore, most Travellers are leaving post-primary school early and without qualifications. Most of the Traveller students in the post-primary schools reviewed for this research remained in full-time education for only one or two years. The early drop-out rate indicates that Travellers become increasingly alienated from the education system as they get older.

There is a need to focus more closely on the quality of Traveller pupils' experiences in school. Despite the almost full participation of Travellers in primary education, the low achievement level of the majority in literacy and numeracy is a matter of concern. Although irregular school attendance compounds the problem, it should not be used as an excuse to explain why these low levels of achievement still persist. Poor skills in literacy and numeracy on leaving primary school restrict the choice of subjects and the level at which these subjects are studied by Traveller students in post-primary schools.

The work of the Visiting Teachers for Travellers Service is acknowledged in this publication. Its contribution to the increased participation of Travellers in education has been significant. Building on this success, the Visiting Teachers for Travellers Service must now focus primarily on supporting schools in improving Traveller children's attainment and in promoting their fuller participation and engagement in post-primary education. The role of Traveller parents as partners in education must be developed, and they must be convinced of the benefits of the education system so that they will encourage their children's regular school attendance and dissuade them from early school drop-out.

Promoting inclusive educational experiences for Travellers as a group of learners is a challenge. Each school's plan for improvement and development needs to ensure a genuinely inclusive educational experience for its diverse student population. An intercultural approach is necessary to overcome the feelings of alienation which children of minority cultures experience in schools. This approach must permeate the school—its ethos, planning, curriculum, teaching strategies, classrooms, and playground, and its involvement of parents and the wider community. Many schools already have effective

policies and practices in place which ensure that Traveller pupils are fully integrated into school life. For others, there is still significant work to be done.

Working towards good practice in the education of Travellers is a shared responsibility of the educational community. This publication is intended for Traveller parents and their representatives, teachers, principals, school management, support services for schools funded by the Department of Education and Science, and policy-makers. I hope that it will serve as a resource for policy discussion and action at classroom, school and system levels and contribute to future policy renewal in relation to educational provision for Traveller children.

**Eamon Stack**  
Chief Inspector  
December 2005



Chapter 1

# Introduction





# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Introduction and background information

Irish Travellers are a small indigenous community who have been part of Irish society for centuries. They share a nomadic way of life, language, customs, values, traditions and history that mark them as a distinct group. The Equal Status Acts define the Traveller community as “the community of people who are commonly called Travellers and who are identified (both by themselves and others) as people with a shared history, culture and traditions including, historically, a nomadic way of life on the island of Ireland” (section 2 (1)).

The 2002 census of population recorded 24,000 Travellers, a figure that comprises less than 0.6 per cent of the total population. The census found that the age structure of Traveller families differs from that of the settled population. The Traveller community consists of a relatively large proportion of children and young people and a small proportion of older persons. It found that the average age of Travellers was eighteen years, compared with a national figure of thirty-two, and that older Travellers (i.e. those aged sixty-five and over) account for a little over 3 per cent of the total Traveller population, compared with 11 per cent for the general population. The census also found that almost half the Traveller population live in permanent accommodation, including private households and permanent halting sites. It found that approximately four out of ten Travellers live in temporary accommodation.

According to the 2002 census, 66 per cent of Travellers were educated to primary level only, compared with a national figure of 21 per cent. The census also reported that 13,680 Travellers were aged fifteen or over, and only 197 (1.4 per cent) had completed a third-level qualification; this compares with 21 per cent of the general population. Only 2 per cent of Travellers have completed the senior cycle at second level, compared with 23 per cent of the general population for all age groups.

*... 66 per cent of Travellers were educated to primary level only ...*

**Table 1.1: Educational levels achieved by Traveller children (census of population, 2002)**

	Traveller population	General population
Completed education at primary level	66%	21%
Completed senior cycle at post-primary level	2%	23%
Completed a third-level qualification	1.4%	21%

## 1.2 Traveller children in primary schools

When the Commission on Itinerancy published its report more than forty years ago, only 114 Traveller children were attending primary schools<sup>1</sup>. Statistics for the school year 2002/03 show that there is almost full participation by Traveller children in primary schools, with approximately 5,900 Traveller pupils enrolled<sup>2</sup>. These figures reflect significant achievements by the schools, Traveller parents and the support services in ensuring that Traveller children obtain access to primary education.

<sup>1</sup> Department of Education and Science, *The Education of Traveller Children in National Schools: Guidelines* (Dublin: Stationery Office, 1994).

<sup>2</sup> Statistics Section, Department of Education and Science, for the school year 2002/03.

During the 1960s and 70s, primary education for Traveller children was provided mostly in segregated classes and in a small number of special schools. This was in response to the perceived needs of the Traveller community at that time. The Survey by the Primary School Inspectorate of Traveller Participation in Education (1988) showed that while the number of Traveller children attending primary schools had increased to 4,300, there remained significant challenges in ensuring their full participation in mainstream education. The survey found that approximately 30 per cent of Traveller children were in special classes, 35 per cent were partly integrated in ordinary classes but were given additional assistance through withdrawal, and the remaining 35 per cent were integrated in ordinary classes.

### 1.3 Traveller education: policy background

Since the 1970s there has been a growing awareness within the education system of the need to encourage greater participation and inclusion by Travellers in education. Among the resources provided to increase participation and to support Traveller children's learning were

- the appointment of resource teachers for Travellers (RTT) in primary schools where Travellers were enrolled,
- the establishment of the Visiting Teachers Service for Travellers (VTS),
- the appointment of a National Education Officer for Travellers,
- the establishment of pre-schools for Travellers and,
- the provision of in-service education for primary teachers on Traveller education.

During the 1980s and 90s the emphasis in the Department of Education and Science's policy on Traveller education at primary level shifted from segregated provision to integrated provision. During the 1980s there was a continued growth in the participation by Travellers in the education system, and the provision of transport to school for Traveller children was a significant factor in this expansion of access. The DES policy on Traveller education was clarified with the publication of the *Guidelines on the Education of Traveller Children in National Schools* in 1994.

#### 1.3.1 Guidelines on the Education of Traveller Children in National Schools (1994)

In 1994 the DES policy on Traveller education was outlined in the publication *Guidelines on the Education of Traveller Children in National Schools*. It was stated as the goal of primary education for Traveller children that

*Traveller children have full access to education and that [they, like all children] are enabled to reach their full potential.*

The identification of Traveller culture as a distinct culture was emphasised, and the concepts of interdependence and cultural diversity were promoted. The guidelines also

outlined the DES policy in relation to a continuum of education for Travellers and clarified issues in relation to access, enrolment, and age-appropriate placement.

The guidelines asserted the rights of Traveller parents to have their children enrolled in a primary school of their choice, and this right of enrolment was extended to nomadic Traveller pupils who changed residence during the school year. This clarification was in accordance with rule 10 of the Rules for National Schools (1965), which states:

*No child may be refused admission to a national school on account of the social position of its parents, nor may any pupil be kept apart from other pupils on the grounds of social distinction.*

The guidelines also stipulated that boards of management should articulate explicit policies on enrolment, which emphasise the fact that Traveller parents have the same rights as parents from all other sections of the community to have their children enrolled in the school.

The guidelines advocated age-appropriate education that is, that children would be assigned to classes appropriate to their chronological age. They also advised, in accordance with rule 64 of the Rules for National Schools and with DES circular 21/85, that the arbitrary retention of pupils in infant classes should not be permitted, and certainly not where the child has reached the age of six-and-a-half years.

The guidelines recommended the placement of Traveller children in mainstream classes, with support at different periods during the school day from a teacher for Travellers or through withdrawal for periods of the day to a special class for Travellers. The rights of Traveller parents to make decisions about their children's placement in school were emphasised in the guidelines. Schools were advised to consult parents fully before making a decision on placement in special educational classes. The report recommended that Traveller children under the age of six be placed in mainstream classes, and that placement in special educational settings be phased out. The guidelines promoted the full integration of Traveller children in mainstream classes with children of the settled community.

### 1.3.2 Task Force Report and the White Paper on Education, 1995

In 1995 two important documents were published that had a positive impact on Traveller education at primary and post-primary level: the *Report of the Task Force on the Travelling Community* and the Government White Paper on Education, *Charting Our Education Future*. The task force report made explicit recommendations in relation to the education of Traveller children and stated that the "integration of Traveller children at primary level should be mandatory within an intercultural and anti-racist framework . . . The objective should be to have all Traveller children integrated by sixth standard so as to facilitate their progression to second level" (p. 64, 67).

The White Paper described the Government's policy objective that "all Traveller children of primary school age be enrolled and participate fully in primary education, according to their individual abilities and potential, within five years." It also recommended that

- the Visiting Teacher Service for Travellers should be expanded,
- school attendance patterns should be monitored,
- modules on Traveller culture in teachers' pre-service and professional Development should be provided, and
- comprehensive quantitative and qualitative surveys on Traveller education should be carried out regularly.

### 1.3.3 Traveller students in post-primary education

The enrolment of Travellers in post-primary schools was very low during the 1980s and 90s. The *Report on the National Education Convention* (1994) concluded that the participation rates of Traveller children at all levels of the education system were "unacceptably low for a democratic society" (p. 127). During this period some young Traveller students aged between twelve and fifteen received their education in Junior Education Centres. These centres were established in response to the perceived needs of Travellers in the area of vocational preparation and were the first serious initiative in the provision of second-level education.

The participation rate of young Travellers in post-primary education has increased significantly in the last ten years. In the school year 1997/98 there were 600 Travellers enrolled in second-level schools. In the current school year 1,860 Traveller students are enrolled in post-primary schools thus indicating a three-fold increase over a seven-year period. However, while positive developments have taken place in post-primary participation rates, the retention rate at second level is poor. Only 56 per cent of Travellers, who enrolled in post-primary school in 2002, remained in school to Junior Certificate level; the comparable retention rate for the general population was 94 per cent.

*In the current school year 1,860 Traveller students are enrolled in post-primary schools thus indicating a three-fold increase over a seven-year period.*

**Table 1.2: Participation of Travellers in post-primary education, 2002/03–2004/05**

School year	First Year	Second Year	Third Year	Transition Year	Fifth Year	Sixth Year	Post-Leaving Cert	Total
2002/03	650	482	272	26	102	62	14	1,608
2003/04	626	527	341	44	113	63	15	1,729
2004/05	671	556	357	44	145	72	13	1,858

Source: National Education Officer for Travellers: Data from annual survey 2004/05.

One factor contributing to the low participation rate of Travellers in the senior cycle of post-primary education is that they can enrol in senior training centres at the age of fifteen. These centres provide Travellers with an allowance. This is perceived as an important step into paid employment and marks their transition into the adult world. At present there are three junior education centres and one special school in operation, catering for Travellers

in the 12–15 age group, and thirty-three senior training centres for young adult Travellers. These centres are managed by the Vocational Educational Committees.

The present DES policy is that Traveller students should receive their education in mainstream post-primary schools and in an integrated way. This policy reflects the recommendations of the Task Force on the Travelling Community (1995), which state that “all Travellers do not share the same educational needs and, while special provisions may be required to meet the varied educational needs, access to mainstream provision must be regarded as the norm for Travellers” (*Report of the Task Force on the Travelling Community, 1995, recommendation 95*).

Each year a small minority of Traveller students progress to third-level education. The Visiting Teachers for Travellers Service estimates that twenty-eight Travellers are in third-level education in the academic year 2004/05.

### 1.3.4 Legislative framework for Traveller education

Since 1998, four pieces of legislation have secured the rights of minority communities, including Travellers, in areas such as education and employment. Firstly, the Education Act (1998) formalised the rights of all children to education, including the right of access to all schools, and conferred on parents the right to be consulted about their children's education and to be involved in the management of schools. This landmark legislation legally obliges schools to provide for a diversity of needs, values, beliefs, traditions, languages and ways of life in society. It also requires that boards of management of schools to outline the objectives of the school relating to equality of access and participation in the school and the measures the school proposes to take to achieve these objectives. The Education Act also grants pupils or parents with the right to appeal against a pupil's exclusion, suspension or expulsion from a school and also to appeal a decision by a board of management, or a person acting on behalf of a board, to refuse to enrol a pupil in the school.

*... the Education Act (1998) formalised the rights of all children to education, including the right of access to all schools, and conferred on parents the right to be consulted about their children's education and to be involved in the management of schools.*

Secondly, the Education (Welfare) Act (2000) was introduced to safeguard every child's entitlement to an appropriate minimum education. Under this act a child must remain at school until reaching the age of sixteen (raised from fifteen) or until the completion of three years of post-primary education, whichever is the later. A National Educational Welfare Board has been established. The educational welfare officers appointed by the board are requested to concentrate on children at risk and to work in close co-operation with parents, teachers, school managers, community bodies and other relevant agencies to promote regular school attendance and to prevent absenteeism and early school-leaving.

Additionally, both the Employment Equality Acts and the Equal Status Acts apply to most employment situations and to the provision of a wide range of goods and services, including education. The legislation prohibits discrimination on nine grounds: gender, family status, marital status, sexual orientation, religion, age, race, disability, and membership of the Traveller community. Section 7 (2) of the

*... the Employment Equality Acts and the Equal Status Acts . . . prohibits discrimination on nine grounds: gender, family status, marital status, sexual orientation, religion, age, race, disability, and membership of the Traveller community.*

Equal Status Acts states “an education establishment shall not discriminate in relation to the enrolment or access of a student to a school or a course, place terms or conditions on the participation of students or in the application of sanctions (including expulsion) which may restrict a student’s participation in education”.

Provisions on prohibiting harassment on the Traveller ground in schools are contained in section 11 of the Equal Status Acts. Principals, teachers and others in positions of responsibility in a school are obliged to take such steps as are reasonably practicable to prevent the harassment of students and other persons such as parents or anyone who has a right to be in the school. A school would be in breach of the Equal Status Acts in a case of student-on-student harassment where the school has not done all that it reasonably could to prevent such harassment occurring.

The Equality Authority has a mandate under the equality legislation for the enforcement of the Equal Status Acts. In 2003 and again in 2004 membership of the Traveller community was the second-largest source of the Equality Authority’s legal case work in schools (Equality Authority, 2005). In addition, many of the cases in educational establishments where multiple grounds of discrimination have been alleged concern members of the Traveller community (mainly Traveller pupils who have a disability).

Issues that have arisen in the Equality Authority’s work include

- refusal to enrol Traveller pupils or students, including an attempt to set a “quota” for the number of Traveller pupils (refusal has also included what has appeared to be an automatic referral of Travellers to other schools in a district),
- the withdrawal of Traveller pupils from core subjects,
- giving Traveller children art to occupy themselves while their classmates are being taught a core subject,
- an allegation of discrimination in the way a school’s code of behaviour was applied to a Traveller pupil, and
- harassment of pupils, on grounds of membership of the Traveller community, by other pupils (Equality Authority, 2005).

### 1.3.5 Advisory Committee on Traveller Education

The Advisory Committee on Traveller Education (ACTE) was established in 1998. Its terms of reference are to “advise the Minister for Education and Science on the provision of education services to members of the Travelling Community.” The ACTE comprises members drawn from the Department of Education and Science, teachers’ unions, school management authorities, and Traveller organisations.

## 1.4 Current policy developments related to Traveller education

### 1.4.1 Guidelines on Traveller Education in Primary Schools and Post-Primary Schools (2002)

In 2002 the Inspectorate of the Department of Education and Science published *Guidelines on Traveller Education in Primary Schools*. These replace the *Guidelines on the Education of Traveller Children in National Schools*, published in 1994. In 2002 also the Inspectorate published *Guidelines on Traveller Education in Second-Level Schools*.

The revised guidelines reflect the significant developments that have taken place in Irish education and society. They state that the central aim of DES policy on Traveller education is

*the meaningful participation and highest attainment of the Traveller child so that, in common with the children of the nation, he or she may live a full life as a child and realise his or her full potential as a unique individual, proud of and affirmed in his or her identity as a Traveller and a citizen of Ireland (p. 5).*

The Guidelines affirm that the policy of the Department of Education and Science is that Traveller children should receive their education in a mainstream school and in an integrated way. The Guidelines emphasise the importance of educating children through an intercultural approach, so that pupils are able to recognise inequality, injustice, racism, prejudice and bias and at the same time are able to appreciate the richness of a diversity of cultures.

### 1.4.2 Guidelines on the Assessment of Education in Places Other Than Recognised Schools (2003)

The Constitution of Ireland recognises the family as the primary educator of the child and defines the duties and responsibilities of parents and the state in the education of children. Parents, including Traveller parents, who choose not to avail of recognised schools to provide education for their children take on a most responsible and important role. They undertake to provide a certain minimum education for their child - a task that requires considerable forethought and effective implementation as well as a considerable commitment in time and energy.

Parents must register their children with the National Educational Welfare Board if they do not attend a recognised school. This necessitates an assessment of the education

provision by an authorised person so that the board may be satisfied that each child is receiving at least a minimum education. In 2003 the Inspectorate of the Department of Education and Science published *Guidelines on the Assessment of Education in Places Other Than Recognised Schools*. The guidelines are intended to assist the National Educational Welfare Board in fulfilling its responsibilities under the Education (Welfare) Act (2000). Drawing on legislation and on case law, the guidelines provide a working definition of “a certain minimum education” and guidance on how this may be assessed, given best educational practice and the nature of education provision in the home and other settings.

### 1.4.3 Intercultural Education in the Primary School: Guidelines for Schools (2005)

At the request of the Department of Education and Science, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) developed *Intercultural Education in the Primary School: Guidelines for Schools* (2005). The guidelines aim to support teachers, school managements and other members of the school community in enabling children to participate in a multicultural society. The publication explores opportunities for intercultural education in the curriculum areas for each class group, helps teachers to select appropriate resources, and gives advice regarding assessment with an intercultural awareness. It provides curriculum audits, exemplars and check-lists and information on such topics as racial and cultural diversity, racism, and the characteristics of intercultural education.

## 1.5 Existing supports

The Department of Education and Science provides additional supports, both material and human, for facilitating the inclusion of Travellers in mainstream primary and post-primary education and for addressing the qualitative aspects of Traveller pupils’ educational experiences. The following is a summary of the supports provided.

### Pre-school provision for Travellers

The Department of Education and Science supports approximately forty five pre-schools catering for Traveller children and it also provides funding for two pre-schools where Travellers and settled children are fully integrated. The Department funds 98 per cent of the tuition costs (teachers’ salary) and transport costs involved in this service. It also allocates an annual equipment grant to each pre-school.

### In-school support at primary level

Support is provided for an estimated 5,879 Traveller children at primary level<sup>3</sup>. More than 500 resource teachers for Travellers (RTT) work with children attending ordinary primary schools. The required pupil-teacher ratio for the appointment of an RTT is 14:1. The role of the RTT is to support and optimise teaching and learning opportunities for Traveller

<sup>3</sup> Statistical information provided by the Statistics Section, Department of Education and Science, for the school year 2002/03.



pupils and to provide learning support for those identified with low achievement or learning difficulties. The RTT works with the child either in the mainstream classroom, in collaboration with the class teacher, or withdraws the child from the mainstream setting to provide additional regular support. Where a school has been allocated such a post, an enhanced capitation grant is payable in respect of each Traveller child. The standard capitation grant equivalent is intended to be expended by the board of management on the daily running costs of the school. The additional grant is intended to finance Traveller education and may be used for purchasing books, resources, and teaching materials.

### In-school support at the post-primary level

Post-primary schools that have access to a resource teacher for Travellers receive an enhanced capitation grant to support their participation in the life of the school. There are now approximately 1,860 Traveller children attending second-level school. An ex quota 1.5 teaching hours per week per Traveller child enrolled is sanctioned, and additional full-time equivalent teaching posts are sanctioned as a result.

Further schemes at present provided by the Department of Education and Science that help promote the education of Travellers in primary and post-primary schools are

- Giving Children an Even Break (incorporating the Primary Disadvantaged Areas Scheme and Breaking the Cycle),
- the Disadvantaged Areas Scheme for post-primary schools and related projects in post-primary schools supporting access to third-level education,
- the Home-School-Community Liaison Scheme,
- the Primary and Post-Primary School Books Grant Scheme, and
- the School Completion Programme.

In May 2005 the department announced an action plan for educational inclusion, Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools. This plan will address the educational needs of children and young people from disadvantaged communities, from pre-school to post-primary education (three to eighteen years). Its core elements comprise

- a standardised system for identifying and regularly reviewing levels of disadvantage, and
- a new integrated School Support Programme, which will bring together and build upon existing interventions for schools and school clusters or communities with a concentrated level of educational disadvantage (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools. p. 9).

Most of the schemes listed above will be integrated, in phases, in the School Support Programme.

## The provision of school transport

The Department of Education and Science provides grants of 98 per cent of school transport costs. Traveller children who live in permanent accommodation are eligible for school transport in the same manner as children from the settled community. For Traveller children who live in temporary accommodation, eligibility for transport is considered case by case, subject to cost limits.

## National Education Officer for Traveller Education

This post was established in 1992 to develop, promote and facilitate the education of Traveller children and to advise the Department of Education and Science on particular needs in this area. The National Education Officer works closely with the visiting teachers for Travellers and with members of the Inspectorate.

## Visiting teachers for Travellers (VTT)

There are forty posts for visiting teachers for Travellers throughout the country. These teachers seek to provide opportunities for Traveller parents, their children and schools to engage in a process of development that maximises participation and attainment and promotes an intercultural education for all. Visiting teachers provide supports to Traveller students and parents during the State Examination process. They also have a role in supporting students in accessing third-level education and support programmes.

## The School Completion Programme

The School Completion Programme has been implemented to identify all pupils, including Travellers, who are considered to be at risk of early school-leaving. It is in operation at eighty-two centres around the country and provides pupils with a range of in-school, out-of-school and after-school supports.

## Special school for Travellers

The Department of Education and Science now advocates a policy of integration for Travellers in mainstream schools, and in recent years there has been a gradual reduction in the number of special schools. A special primary school for Travellers is located in Bray, County Wicklow. A special school for post-primary aged Travellers is located in Clonshaugh.

## Senior Traveller training centres

Senior Traveller training centres provide a programme of integrated general education, vocational training, work experience, and guidance, counselling and psychological services. Approximately eight hundred Travellers annually participate in these programmes.

In September 2004, for example, approximately sixty-five Traveller students left mainstream schools to transfer to these centres. In addition to the senior Traveller training centres, approximately 320 Travellers participate annually in Youthreach programmes for early school-leavers.

## **1.6 The report structure**

Chapter 2 of this report describes the procedures and the methodology employed in gathering data in schools for this report. A profile of the primary and post-primary Traveller pupils is provided in chapter 3 with regard to enrolment, attendance, and achievement. Chapter 4 describes the quality of education provision for Traveller pupils in primary schools, and chapter 5 outlines the provision in post-primary schools. Finally, chapter 6 outlines the main findings and recommendations.





Chapter 2

# Survey methodology



# 2 Survey methodology

## 2.1 Purposes of the survey

The Inspectorate reviewed Traveller education provision in a number of primary and post-primary schools in 2004. The main purposes of the survey were to:

- report on the inclusion of Travellers in mainstream education;
- report on the additional teaching supports provided to Travellers;
- identify good practice in schools and draw attention to areas where development was required.

Arising from this review, it was intended that a number of recommendations would be made that would facilitate schools in providing enhanced education provision for Travellers at local and at the national level.

## 2.2 Scope of the survey

In 2004 a working group of inspectors, supported by the Evaluation Support and Research Unit (ESRU) of the Inspectorate, examined a number of issues concerning the provision of Traveller education in primary and post-primary schools. The group reviewed DES guidelines and policy documents. It also engaged in discussions with the Social Inclusion Division of the department in relation to its work on the Traveller Education Strategy.

Arising from these discussions and consultations a number of themes were identified for further investigation in the survey at both the primary and post-primary level. These were:

- Traveller enrolment, attendance and retention in school,
- accommodation and resources,
- in-school provision for Travellers, including access to the curriculum and to learning supports,
- attainment and achievement among Traveller pupils, and
- the role of the support services in Traveller education.

## 2.3 Selection of schools

A convenience sample of thirty primary schools and six post-primary schools was selected to participate in the survey. The schools included single-sex and co-educational schools and were in both urban areas (cities and large towns) and rural communities in eighteen counties. All primary schools selected had a resource teacher for Travellers or shared a resource teacher with another school in the locality. Therefore, most primary schools selected had at least 14 Traveller pupils enrolled. The post-primary schools surveyed had ex-quota hours allocated to provide for Traveller pupils. The data generated for the survey reflect the experiences of schools where a large number of Traveller children were enrolled. The findings

of this survey may not be representative of schools with a smaller number of Traveller children on rolls.

School principals completed a pupil data form, and provided information in respect of 683 pupils, or 12 per cent of the full Traveller population, in the primary setting and 112 pupils, or 6 per cent of the total Traveller student population, in the post-primary setting.

## 2.4 Main phase of the survey

The survey was conducted in the period April–June 2004, and the following actions were undertaken.

- A questionnaire and data form were sent to schools for completion, and this data provided information on Traveller attendance, enrolment, attainment, and access to transport and place of residence.
- Inspectors visited schools to observe teaching and learning in both a classroom and a support teaching setting. Evaluation schedules were completed during these visits.
- Interviews were conducted with principals, visiting teachers for Travellers, and resource teachers for Travellers. The themes for discussion included whole-school policy and practice, curriculum provision, assessment and achievement, the transfer of pupils from primary to post-primary schools, the level of supports provided by the Visiting Teachers for Travellers Service, and the integration of Traveller pupils in the life of the school.
- Ten group interviews with Traveller parents were convened. During these meetings the parents were invited to discuss their children's access to and participation in education, the quality of education provision they received, and the challenges their children experienced in benefiting from primary and post-primary education.
- The inspectors held discussions with five groups of Traveller pupils in primary schools. The purpose of these group discussions was to generate children's views on their experiences of school and their involvement in the life of the school.
- The inspectors examined whole-school planning documents and assessment policy and analysed information on pupils' achievement.

On the completion of the survey, a brief report was prepared and issued to each school.

## 2.5 National composite report

For the purpose of this report, the working group analysed the pupil data, questionnaires, evaluation schedules completed by inspectors during in-school visits, and data from the structured interviews and discussion groups. These four strands of the survey facilitated the compilation of a broad information base with regard to the profile of Traveller pupils and



education provision at the primary and post-primary levels. The survey captured the professional views of school personnel working directly with Travellers. The views of Traveller parents and children also inform the various sections of the report.

## 2.6 Limitations of the survey

The sample of schools selected for the survey was a convenience sample, based on location, size and type of school. It was stipulated that all such schools should have a resource teacher for Travellers. It was not a random sample of schools, and therefore the findings are not necessarily generalisable to all schools that have Traveller pupils enrolled. Schools with small numbers of Traveller pupils that do not have a resource teacher for Travellers were not included in the population of schools surveyed.

The sample of Traveller children in the primary schools surveyed is a relatively large sample (12 percent) of the total population of Traveller children in primary schools. Because it is not a random sample of Traveller population in primary schools, the confidence levels for obtained statistical estimates are unknown, and hence caution is urged in generalising findings to the population of Traveller children, or to schools with resource teachers for Travellers. However, given the size of the sample and its correspondence with the population of Traveller pupils in terms of demographics, the findings in relation to enrolment, attendance and achievement are likely to be an accurate reflection of trends in relation to enrolment, achievement and attendance for the whole population of Traveller children in primary schools.

## 2.6 Quantitative terms used in the report

A number of quantitative terms are used throughout the report. Table 2.1 provides a guide to the most common terms used.

**Table 2.1: Quantitative terms used in the report**

Quantitative term used	Approximate percentage of occurrence
almost all	more than 90%
most	75–90%
majority	50–74%
fewer than half	25–49%
a small number	16–24%
a few	up to 15%





### Chapter 3

# Traveller pupils in primary and post-primary schools

Profile of enrolment, attendance, and achievement



# 3 Traveller pupils in primary and post-primary schools

## *Profile of enrolment, attendance, and achievement*

This chapter provides a profile of Traveller pupils enrolled in thirty primary and six post-primary schools with regard to enrolment, school attendance, and achievement. Data were generated through questionnaires, a review of school records and documentation and structured interviews with teachers, principals, resource teachers, visiting teachers, parents, and pupils.

### 3.1 Enrolment

#### 3.1.1 Enrolment in primary schools

Twenty-nine primary schools surveyed provided data about the Traveller pupils enrolled although some schools were unable to give complete data for every pupil. School size varied from less than 100 to more than 700 pupils. Information was provided in relation to 683 Traveller pupils in these primary schools.

In the majority of the schools (15 of 25) fewer than 10 per cent of the pupils enrolled were Travellers. In some schools, however, the proportion of Traveller pupils was considerably higher, and in three schools, 25 per cent of the pupils were Travellers. Table 3.1 shows the proportion of the school population represented by Traveller pupils.

**Table 3.1: Travellers as a proportion of school population**

Travellers as a proportion of school population	Number of schools
Less than 5%	8
5–10%	7
More than 10%	10

The majority of Traveller parents and visiting teachers for Travellers expressed satisfaction with school enrolment policies. Some schools were described by visiting teachers for Travellers as having an “open-door” policy, where Travellers pupils were made welcome and “treated like all other children in the school.” The majority of Traveller parents were also satisfied with the schools’ enrolment procedures. For example, a parent stated:

*I had children in this school for several years and never had any problems enrolling them. They were always welcome.*

One visiting teacher for Travellers stated that excellent practice in relation to the enrolment of Traveller pupils was developing in many primary schools. In these schools, principals and teachers were liaising directly with Traveller parents with children of school-going age and facilitating the process of enrolment without direct involvement from the visiting teacher for Travellers. In many instances the resource teacher for Travellers or the home-school-community liaison teacher visited the Traveller homes to explain the enrolment process.

For example, a parent stated:

*There are no problems with enrolment in this town. Traveller children are welcome in all schools. The enrolment forms are easy to understand and if some families have problems with them, the teachers are very helpful*

Traveller parents stated that the role of the visiting teacher for Travellers had a positive impact in respect of home-school communication and in the provision of information regarding the various enrolment procedures that schools employed. For example, a parent stated:

*Enrolment is generally not a problem. The visiting teacher keeps us informed and with her advice the mothers enrol the children on time.*

### 3.1.2 Enrolment in post-primary schools

There were 112 Travellers enrolled in the six post-primary schools surveyed. The proportion of Travellers enrolled in each school is illustrated in Table 3.2.

**Table 3.2: Travellers as a proportion of post-primary school population**

Post Primary Schools	A	B	C	D	E	F
Total number of students	260	880	277	450	265	600
Number of Travellers	2	5	19	19	21	47
Traveller students as proportion of total school enrolment	<1%	<1%	7%	4%	8%	8%

In most instances, Traveller pupils transferred from primary to post-primary school without difficulty. Post-primary principals stated that staff members in primary schools and the visiting teacher for Travellers acted as important links between parents and post-primary schools. Many Traveller parents had attended "open nights" in post-primary schools for all potential first-years.

Traveller parents reported that they were welcomed in the post-primary schools they approached and encountered no major problems with enrolment. Many post-primary schools had established specific induction programmes for all first-years in order to explain new subjects and the general operation of the school. In respect of the Traveller enrolment, one post-primary principal reported:

*All Traveller students are welcome in this school. We have put in place several initiatives to facilitate Traveller enrolment. Our home-school-community liaison teacher speaks regularly with the visiting teachers for Travellers. Our guidance counsellor meets all students and has a particular interest in the needs of the Traveller students. Collaboration between staff seems to be good and information on students is shared. The school chaplain is a useful resource to the teaching staff and to the parents as he knows both the Traveller children and their parents.*

The principals interviewed commended the work of the visiting teacher for Travellers, the home-school-community liaison teacher and other members of the school staff in

facilitating enrolment. They suggested that the role of the visiting teacher for Travellers should be developed to ease the “settling in” period for Traveller students in post-primary schools.

A post-primary principal stated:

*The role of the visiting teacher for Travellers should be developed to have more impact on helping students settle in during the first term in post-primary schools. There is also a need for the visiting teacher for Travellers to work with staff to inform them about Traveller culture, appropriate behaviour management and dealing with poor literacy levels.*

Travellers who have a nomadic or a more transient life-style and who moved from one school to another were reported by visiting teachers for Travellers to experience the greatest difficulty in transferring to post-primary schools. The majority of post-primary schools place children on a waiting-list for enrolment at least one year before they complete primary school. This practice has presented problems for families who move frequently, as they miss the enrolment deadline and are consequently placed on waiting-lists.

*Travellers who have a nomadic or a more transient life-style and who moved from one school to another were reported by visiting teachers for Travellers to experience the greatest difficulty in transferring to post-primary schools*

In some of the post-primary schools visited, a number of nomadic pupils began their post-primary education in mid-year. Principals stated that this created particular problems, as the student had to be accommodated in established classes. School personnel had to arrange for the provision of any necessary extra learning support for these students within their existing provision. Post-primary principals and teachers considered that the practice of late enrolment hindered the progress of these students academically and socially.

A few visiting teachers for Travellers found that some schools refused to enrol Travellers, or placed Travellers at the end of long waiting-lists. For example, one visiting teacher stated:

*I have a number of section 29 appeals [under the Education Act (1998)] every year where schools are refusing to enrol Traveller children but things are gradually improving. Certain schools still try to make the enrolment of Traveller children difficult. They will sometimes delay things deliberately in the hope that the parents will give up and apply elsewhere or they will tell parents that their child would not do well in their particular school.*

### 3.1.3 Enrolment in schools in disadvantaged areas

Statistics from the Department of Education and Science show that in the school year 2002/03 almost half the Traveller population at primary level (48 per cent) was enrolled in designated disadvantaged schools, while in some areas, such as Dublin, almost all Travellers (95 per cent) were enrolled in disadvantaged schools. Two school principals commented:

*Traveller children are fully integrated into the life of our school and most of the Traveller pupils live in the school's catchment area. However, relatives who do not live locally are now requesting to attend as Travellers often prefer to go to school in extended family*

*groups. This identification as a "Traveller School" is causing some concern to management and staff. At present, the Travellers are a respected minority in the school population and are accepted well by other children. If the numbers became too great it could serve to stretch our school resources to the limit. We wonder if other schools are taking their share of minority groups.*

*This particular school has become known as the school that takes Traveller children. This lets other schools in the area "off the hook" as it were. Other schools refer Traveller parents to this school rather than enrolling those who come to their own door. Parents will enrol their children in those schools that are welcoming to them.*

Many principals and teachers stated that a higher proportion of Traveller children enrolled in a school increased the likelihood that children from the settled community would transfer to other schools. They felt that many settled parents believed that behaviour management problems and lower literacy and numeracy standards among Traveller children had a negative impact on the amount of teaching and learning time available to all children.

The visiting teachers for Traveller also reported that some post-primary schools discouraged the enrolment of Traveller students on academic grounds. For example, one visiting teacher stated:

*A number of schools in the city pride themselves on their academic standing and do not welcome applications from Travellers. They direct them to apply to the co-educational school instead. Because many Traveller parents in this area would like to be able to send their children to single-sex schools, co-educational schooling would not be their first choice. However, as they are discouraged from enrolling their children in the city's single-sex schools their choice is limited.*

### 3.1.4 Age at enrolment in primary school

In the primary schools selected for this survey the great majority (76 per cent) of Traveller pupils came from families that were housed, and most (68 per cent) had only ever been enrolled in one school. The data suggest that the majority of Traveller pupils in the schools surveyed should be experiencing stability in their education. Just over 62 per cent (277) of Traveller pupils for whom data were available were under five years of age on enrolment, and a further 21 per cent were aged between five and six. The remaining 17 per cent (71) were reported to be over the age of six on enrolment. Therefore, the enrolment age for more than 83 per cent of the housed Traveller children was quite similar to that of their settled counterparts, while the remaining 17 per cent were enrolled at a much older age than the norm.



### 3.1.5 Age at enrolment in post-primary school

Forty-five post-primary students were in first year when the survey was conducted. Schools provided information on the enrolment age of forty-two Traveller students, and Table 3.3 presents this information.

**Table 3.3: Enrolment age of Traveller students in post-primary schools surveyed compared with data from the general population**

	Age of enrolment of Traveller students in post-primary schools in the schools surveyed	Age of enrolment of the general population in post-primary schools
12 years	12%	39%
13 years	64%	56%
14 years	24%	5%

Table 3.3 shows that the age of enrolment for just over three-quarters (76 per cent) of Traveller students in post-primary school is similar to students generally on transfer from primary schools. However, almost a quarter of students were one year older than the general enrolment age of students at the post-primary level.

## 3.2 Age-appropriate placement in schools

Age-appropriate class placement is an integral element of DES policy on Traveller education: Traveller pupils should be placed in a class with pupils of their own age.

For the purposes of this survey, enrolment data for 200 Traveller pupils were examined to determine the suitability of the class in which they were enrolled. The sample of 200 pupils was selected randomly, with each of the thirty schools represented in the sample. The pupils were rated as follows:

- Pupils in a class appropriate to their age were rated as “suitable.”
- Pupils in a class where they were at least one year older than the average age for pupils in that class were categorised as “one year older.”
- Pupils who were older than this were rated as “more than one year older.”

Table 3.4 illustrates the results of the research.

**Table 3.4: Age suitability of pupils for classes in which they are placed**

Suitability for class level	Number of pupils
Suitable	169
One year older	24
More than one year older	7

Almost 85 per cent of Traveller pupils were suitably placed in classes with pupils of similar age. About 12 per cent were in classes where they were somewhat older than the great majority of pupils in those classes. However, 3 per cent were more than one year older than their settled peers.

A number of visiting teachers for Travellers noted that there was a tendency for some teachers and principals to encourage pupils to repeat a year because of lack of progress in core subjects, such as English and mathematics, which resulted in inappropriate age placement. This practice of retaining pupils is considered by the Department of Education and Science to have negative educational consequences for the pupils' socialisation process, self-esteem, and motivation. It also results in pupils transferring to post-primary school later than the majority of pupils, which in turn may result in many Travellers obtaining access to post-primary education for one or two years only before transferring to other educational initiatives, such as Youthreach, or dropping out of the education system altogether.

*... there was a tendency for some teachers and principals to encourage pupils to repeat a year because of lack of progress in core subjects, such as English and mathematics, which resulted in inappropriate age placement.*

### 3.3 School attendance

#### 3.3.1 Attendance and living accommodation of Traveller pupils in primary schools

The survey sought to establish whether a link exists between Travellers' accommodation and their school attendance patterns. Data revealed that the majority of Traveller pupils (76 per cent) in the schools surveyed were housed, almost 19 per cent lived in official halting sites, and just under 7 per cent were in unofficial accommodation sites.

Attendance data were provided for 312 of the 496 pupils (63 per cent) who lived in houses. The average attendance rate for these pupils was 81.6 per cent, and the range was between 35 and 100 per cent. The average attendance rate for Traveller pupils who were in official halting sites was somewhat lower, at 77.6 per cent, and considerably lower for pupils who were in unofficial halting sites. Table 3.5 provides details of pupils' attendance.

**Table 3.5: Accommodation type and school attendance rate**

Accommodation type	Total number of pupils enrolled (N = 656)	Attendance data provided (N = 387)	Average attendance rate
House	496	312	81.6%
Official halting site	116	63	77.6%
Unofficial halting site	44	12	68.7%

It was found that the average attendance rate for girls was 80.5 per cent, compared with 79.5 per cent for boys. No appreciable difference was found in the attendance rates for older and younger pupils.

The levels of absenteeism represented in the attendance data for Traveller pupils generally reveal that many Traveller children have a highly irregular experience of schooling, and for many their intermittent attendance has serious negative consequences for their educational achievement. For the children living in unofficial halting sites the attendance levels mean that, on average, they are absent from school for 57 days, or more than eleven weeks, in the school year. Even for children who are housed the absentee rates represent an average of 32 school days every year, or more than six weeks of schooling.

These levels of absenteeism suggest the need for urgent action by the schools, the Visiting Teachers for Travellers Service and the National Educational Welfare Board in this regard. In the first instance, parents of Traveller children need to be alerted to the long-term consequences of irregular school attendance, including increased alienation from peers and school life and educational failure.

### **3.3.2 Attendance of Traveller students in post-primary schools**

A pattern of poor attendance was recorded for many Traveller students in each post-primary school in the survey. In all the schools surveyed, no Traveller student had achieved full attendance. In the period January–December 2003 only 8 of the 112 students achieved more than 90 per cent attendance.

*A pattern of poor attendance was recorded for many Traveller students in each post-primary school in the survey.*

The attendance data for a full year were analysed for a sample of thirty-four first-year Traveller students. The average attendance for these students for 2003/04 was 79.3 days, or less than 50 per cent of the total number of days in the school year. Only three students had achieved an attendance rate of 90 per cent or more. Five had a 97 per cent absenteeism rate: in other words, they attended school for five days only.

### **3.3.3 Views on attendance**

#### **Traveller pupils' views on attendance**

During interviews, Traveller pupils stated that they liked going to school and that they felt they had good attendance rates. When asked about their absenteeism, some commented that they were generally absent from school only for important reasons. For example:

*I miss school because I am sick or for a special occasion like a wedding, christening, holy communions and confirmations or funeral.*

*I missed school to go to my sister's wedding, when my brother's hand was broken, sometimes when I just feel sick or when I am tired I stay at home.*

## Traveller parents' views on attendance

Many Traveller parents reported that their children attended school consistently. Some parents perceived that their children achieved satisfactory attendance when they went to school for two or three days each week. One parent stated:

*All the children in the particular halting site are now "touching school," they go a few days each week.*

Traveller parents also stated that consistent school attendance was difficult for many families who live in unsatisfactory conditions. The parents were anxious to stress the effort they had to make each day to get children ready for school buses without access to adequate washing and other amenities. They believed that the objective of attending school each day was hard to achieve regularly in such circumstances.

One mother said:

*I have ten children and seven are at school. I am lucky to be able to get five of them off in time and the older two boys decide for themselves whether to go or stay at home.*

Another mother stated:

*The children like to stay at home if there is anything more interesting going on and some children will do this on a regular basis. As we are now living in houses it is nicer than before to stay at home and play with the computer or watch television. Girls are more ready to go to school than boys as otherwise they have to do housework.*

Many of the parents stated that they find it difficult to adhere to a school timetable. The following transcript from an interview provides some insight into these difficulties:

*We have to work very hard to ensure that the children go to school, especially as I have fourteen children. I have to get them up in the morning, have uniforms ready, and then catch the school bus.*

Visiting teachers report that Travellers in the 13–16 age group are considered adults at home and are allowed to make many of their own decisions. For example, one parent discussed an older child's decision not to wear the school uniform:

*Older children really dislike having to wear the school uniform. The boys get jeered for being "babbies" when they wear it. Not wearing it causes them to get into trouble at school and to be sent home. It causes some of the older children to move to Youthreach, where there is no uniform needed.*

During interviews, Traveller parents expressed concern at the poor retention of their children in post-primary schools. In their opinion several factors contributed to early drop-out: there were inadequate supports for their children in post-primary schools, the quantity of homework assigned was not achievable, parents and children felt frustrated with the lack of attainment, and the curriculum did not meet their children's needs. One parent commented:

*The secondary school has a reputation for suspending the Traveller boys with the result that very few of them remain on in the school. This is a big concern for the Traveller families as once the boys are suspended it is extremely difficult to get them to return to school.*

Traveller parents suggested some solutions for the issue of poor attendance. Firstly, they considered that Traveller boys required a “more heavy hand,” and they proposed that male teachers should teach them. They felt that some Traveller boys resented being directed and censored by female teachers, and this resulted in situations of conflict and confrontation. Secondly, parents felt that a new education and training model should be devised whereby adolescent Traveller boys could spend shared time between the school and a training centre. That way they felt that useful skills could be acquired and the boys would be more likely to stay on to complete the Junior Certificate. Thirdly, parents suggested that schools should use continuous assessment methods to assess students’ work, so that individual effort would not be entirely dependent on examination success.

### Principals’ views on attendance

All primary school principals stated that Travellers’ attendance at school was one of the most significant challenges presented to the school community. One principal commented:

*If attendance isn't regular it leads to wastage of resources. We have a teacher appointed to help the Traveller pupils and when they do not present at school she has to be reassigned to other duties. This is also the case when pupils are late for school, as often she has to sit and wait for them to arrive. School attendance must be monitored from the beginning of junior infants and every effort made to ensure that very few days are missed so that valuable staffing resources are not wasted.*

Primary school principals welcomed the appointment of the educational welfare officers and hoped that the attendance of Traveller pupils would be a focus of their work.

Some primary schools had addressed the issue of attendance in an active manner. Two boards of management had appointed a school attendance secretary, with funding received through the department’s School Completion Programme, to monitor attendance and latecomers. This initiative applied to the entire school population, but principals reported that it also had a positive impact on Traveller pupils’ attendance and timekeeping. One principal stated:

*I would recommend that all schools participating in the School Completion Programme use some of the funding to employ an attendance secretary. Once the parents realise that there will be follow-up from the school in instances of absenteeism, then there is a greater effort to ensure the pupils are attending regularly.*

Each school principal reported instances where Traveller families had suddenly left the area to attend weddings, funerals or horse fairs during the school term. These events often meant that pupils missed a week or more of school, and they reported that this form of absenteeism occurred regularly throughout the year. While they stated that they understood the significance of these events in the Traveller culture, this did not make the issue any easier to deal with in the school. According to school principals, such extended and unexpected absenteeism meant that teaching programmes for the Traveller pupils were interrupted, and where there was a specific teacher for Travellers in the school, they had to be reallocated to other tasks for the period of absence.

In several instances, principals of primary schools referred to what they perceived to be a lack of interest on the part of many Traveller parents in education and to their negative attitude to schools and schooling. The following comment exemplifies some of the responses from principals:

*In my opinion the biggest challenge is to convince the Traveller parents of the value of education. Getting the Traveller parents involved in school life is essential and it must be done in a structured manner. Being in regular contact with parents and providing them with feedback on their children helps convince them of the value of school. Involving the pupils in extra-curricular activities helps bring the parents on board. For example in this school, the Traveller pupils are involved in after-school football, hurling, athletics, basketball and any of the fashion shows. There can be no let up in this effort. Unfortunately, in a small number of cases we are dealing with parents who quite rightly know all of their rights but are unwilling to accept some of the responsibilities that go with those rights. They don't seem to appreciate that our other pupils and staff have rights too.*

Post-primary principals and teachers referred to the difficulties in retaining Traveller pupils in school, especially after the Junior Certificate year. Specifically, they remarked that Traveller boys begin to adopt the roles and responsibilities of adulthood early in adolescence. Parents stated that the skills the boys required for these roles were not generally taught in schools; instead they found that many Traveller boys were choosing to transfer to FÁS Community Training Workshops, Youthreach or Senior Traveller Training Centres when they were about fifteen. Teachers felt that the provision of a weekly training allowance and basic practical skills training, in addition to the possibility of acquiring some formal qualifications, made these centres a more appealing option for a fifteen-year-old boy than remaining in mainstream schooling.

### **3.4 Achievement of Traveller pupils in primary schools**

The findings of this survey in respect of the achievement of Traveller pupils in primary schools should be interpreted with some caution. The measurements of achievement presented in this section are based on standardised tests administered by the schools themselves as part of their annual assessment process for all pupils.

The test results in English reading and mathematics for Traveller pupils were provided by the schools from the data they already had in their files for the entire school population. However, data were available for only 56 per cent of the Traveller pupils in reading and for about 50 per cent in mathematics. Approximately 21 per cent of the pupils were in infant classes, and many schools do not conduct standardised tests in these classes. No test results were available for almost a quarter of Traveller pupils in English reading and for almost 30 per cent in mathematics where the Traveller pupils were in classes other than Infant classes.

Comments such as "incomplete," "absent" and "unable to do" were returned by a number of schools as an explanation why pupils' results were not provided. These comments suggest that some of the Traveller pupils were considered unable to do the test that was

appropriate to their age and that others were absent on the day the tests were administered. Perhaps these reasons are indicative of the reason why the proportion of Traveller pupils for whom test results would be expected is lower than anticipated.

### 3.4.1 Achievement in English reading

Standardised test data were provided for 369 out of 683 pupils in reading. Analysis of the data shows that the mean achievement level of pupils was very low in comparison with the population generally. More than two-thirds of pupils achieved scores that were at or below the 20th percentile, with 47.5 per cent scoring below the 10th percentile. Fig. 3.1 provides details of the achievement in English reading by quintile.

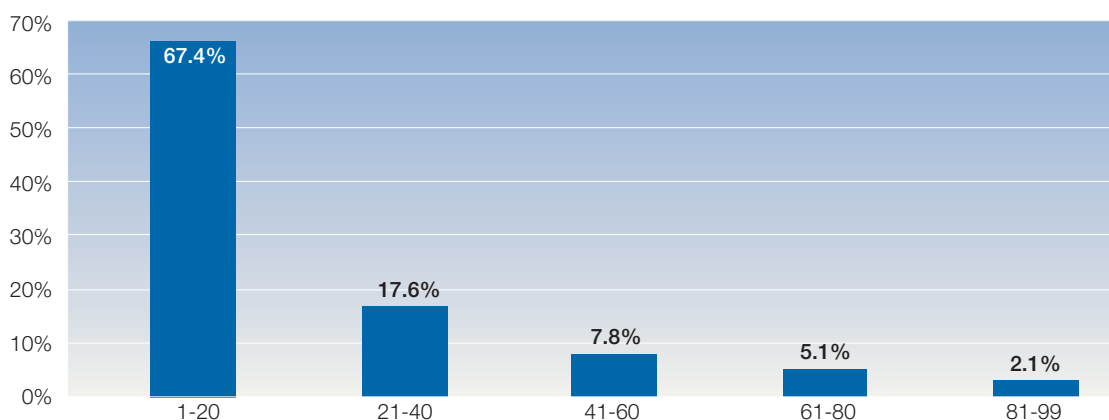
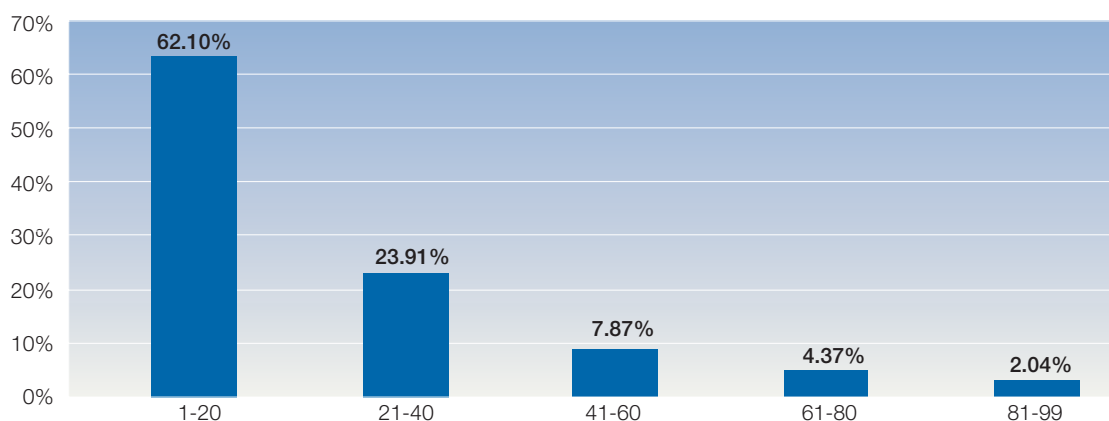


Fig 3.1: Achievement of Traveller pupils in English reading, by quintile

### 3.4.2 Achievement in mathematics

Standardised test data were provided for 343 out of 685 pupils in mathematics. Almost two-thirds of the pupils achieved scores that were at or below the 20th percentile, while only 14 per cent achieved scores above the 40th percentile. A notable difference was found in favour of girls in average achievement levels in mathematics. Girls (n = 166) achieved an average percentile score of 23.34, while boys (n = 177) achieved an average of only 16.89. This was reflected in a much higher proportion of boys in the lowest quintile: 54.3 per cent of girls achieved scores at or below the 20th percentile, while 68.3 per cent of boys were in the lowest achievement band. Fig. 3.2 illustrates the achievement levels in mathematics by quintile.



**Fig 3.2: Achievement of Traveller pupils in mathematics, by quintile**

The standardised test scores suggest that Traveller pupils are achieving slightly better in mathematics than they are in English reading.

#### 3.4.4 Principals' views on Traveller pupils' low achievement in English reading and mathematics

School principals listed several impediments to Traveller pupils' progress in literacy and numeracy, including poor attendance and a lack of parental interest in education. They stated that Traveller pupils often came to school without the oral language skills or competence crucial to the development of literacy skills and therefore were at a disadvantage from the start. Half the principals interviewed stated that some Traveller pupils in their schools had behavioural difficulties. They reported that aggressive behaviour was especially common among Traveller boys, and that misbehaviour had a negative impact on both teaching and learning. Principals also referred to poor literacy levels among Traveller parents. As a consequence, they felt that many Traveller pupils did not get sufficient support with homework assignments. Homework clubs were organised in several schools, and principals considered that these offered useful support. One principal stated:

*... Traveller pupils often came to school without the oral language skills or competence crucial to the development of literacy skills and therefore were at a disadvantage from the start.*

*Lack of literacy in the home presents a challenge for Traveller education. This problem is not exclusive to Travellers but it is certainly more evident. Children going home to a house where there is little or no literacy face added challenges.*

Principals suggested some ways to improve the low achievement levels of Traveller pupils. They felt that an individual education record should be maintained for nomadic pupils by each school in which the pupil enrolls. This record would be made available to each school on enrolment and would serve to enhance continuity in provision for the pupil and to provide important baseline information to each school, informing them of the programmes completed by the pupil and ensuring that teaching input could be maximised.



Principals also suggested that appropriate early childhood education was required to prepare Traveller children for school. One principal stated:

*Many Traveller children do not reach their appropriate stages of development in areas such as language, co-ordination and behaviour by the time they begin school. Much time is spent in the infant classes in an attempt to bridge this gap and consequently progress is delayed at each developmental stage thereafter.*

### 3.5 Traveller pupils assessed as having special educational needs

In the general population, the incidence of special educational needs is in the 4–6 per cent range, depending on the categories and the definitions used. However, it was found in this survey that just over 20 per cent (n = 140) of Traveller pupils were assessed by an educational psychologist or other clinician as having special educational needs. The proportion of Traveller boys assessed with a special educational need accounted for 62 per cent of this total. Based on this analysis, it could therefore be inferred that Traveller pupils are three times more likely to have special educational needs than the general population. Table 3.6 shows the proportion of Traveller pupils assessed as having special educational needs under the various disability categories.

**Table 3.6: Proportion of Traveller pupils with special educational needs**

Category	Number of pupils	Percentage of sample
General learning disability	104	15%
Specific learning disability	11	1.6%
Emotional behavioural disorder	11	1.6%
Multiple disabilities	8	1.2%
Other (visual, hearing, physical)	6	1.0%

Just over 15 per cent of Traveller pupils were assessed as having a special educational need in the general learning disability category. This proportion is approximately six to seven times greater than the expected occurrence of this disability in the whole population.

Some visiting teachers for Travellers expressed concern about the disproportionate number of Traveller pupils assessed as having a general learning disability and expressed doubts about the use of culturally inappropriate material in psychological tests. The most common tests currently used to measure intelligence are language-based. Many of the test items are verbal, while the remaining items are mediated through language. It is quite possible that the vocabulary used in these tests is unfamiliar to Traveller children. In some tests, responses are graded at different levels by quality or degree of precision or approximation to model responses. Furthermore, the tests are timed in seconds: a faster response means a higher score. The degree of precision required in responses may be too demanding for the Traveller children, or they may not be aware of the need for precision in responding.

Non-verbal or performance tests involve items of the perceptual-motor type, which may also be unfamiliar to Traveller children. Familiarity with jigsaw puzzles, picture sequencing, block designs and following patterns would be advantageous in such testing. As many Traveller children may have limited experience with such materials, or may not have had access to pre-school education, it is likely that they would be at a cultural disadvantage in having to deal with certain tasks under timed test conditions.

It is beyond the scope of this survey to investigate why the proportion of pupils assessed as having a general learning disability is so high, but the issue warrants further study. The incidence of other disabilities mentioned approximates reasonably well to the incidence of such disabilities in the general population.

### **3.6 Supplementary in-school support provided for Traveller pupils**

Three types of supplementary support were available in all the schools surveyed. All the schools had access to a resource teacher for Travellers and a learning support teacher, either full-time or shared. Resource teaching for pupils with special educational needs was also provided.

#### **3.6.1 Learning-support provision and Traveller pupils**

The Department of Education and Science provides schools with additional teachers to give supplementary support to pupils who have learning difficulties, to ensure that they achieve adequate levels of proficiency in literacy and numeracy before leaving primary school. This support, provided in accordance with the *Learning-Support Guidelines* (2000), is intended for pupils who are having difficulties in coping with the class curriculum.

The inspectors found that such support was often made available to Traveller pupils in addition to support provided by the class teacher and the resource teacher for Travellers. In some instances this learning support was provided for Traveller pupils whom the class teachers rated as having no difficulty in keeping up with their class level. For example, although class teachers rated 120 Traveller pupils as achieving at their grade level in both English reading and mathematics, 56 of these pupils (47 per cent) were receiving supplementary teaching for periods ranging from 1 to 7.5 hours per week. Of the three pupils rated by class teachers as achieving two years above their grade level in mathematics, two were receiving supplementary teaching.

#### **3.6.2 In-school support provided for Traveller pupil**

Pupils assessed as having special educational needs have automatic entitlement to supplementary teaching. Of the 140 Traveller pupils with special educational needs, resource teaching for special needs was provided for 138, and sanction was requested from the Department of Education and Science to provide support for the remaining two.

Most of the pupils were receiving 2.5 hours' supplementary teaching per week, though some were receiving additional support of 10 hours per week. In addition, a third of these Traveller pupils were also receiving supplementary teaching from either the resource teacher for Travellers or the learning-support teacher, in addition to that provided by the teacher for special educational needs. Typically, these pupils received a total of 5 hours of supplementary teaching per week, with some receiving more than 10 hours.

Fig. 3.3 illustrates the number of pupils who were receiving supplementary teaching from the resource teacher for Travellers. Almost all supplementary teaching was provided to pupils outside the mainstream classroom and a majority of pupils were withdrawn in Traveller only groups.

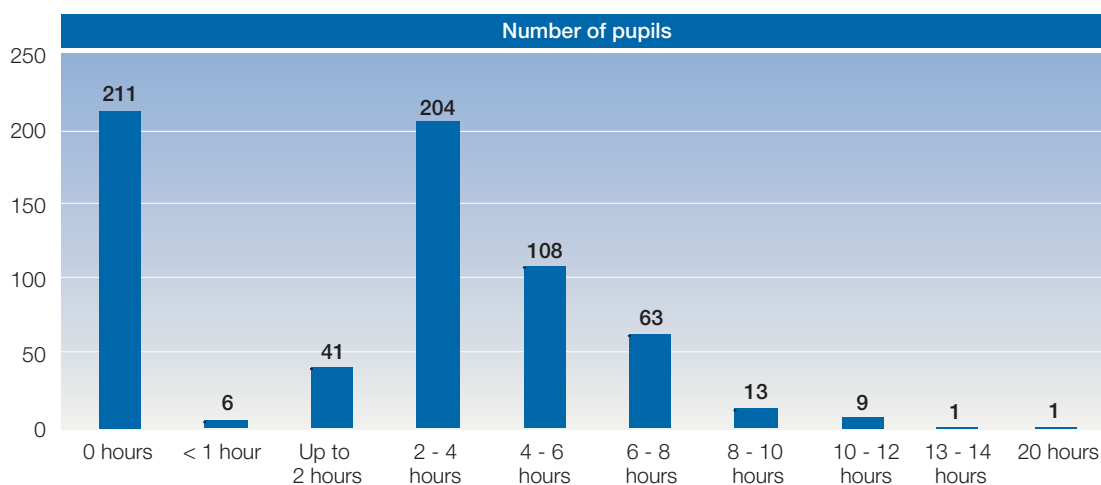


Fig 3.3: Amount of support received by Traveller pupils from the resource teacher for Travellers

### 3.7 Conclusions

There has been much progress with regard to Travellers' equality of access to education, particularly at primary level. Although pupils are transferring in greater numbers to post-primary schools, the enrolment of Traveller pupils is not being shared proportionately throughout many school communities. Age-appropriate placement is observed in the majority of schools. Many Traveller pupils in primary schools have high rates of absenteeism, and this is particularly evident among pupils who live in temporary accommodation. Many schools have difficulty in meeting the needs of nomadic children who enrol for short periods throughout the year. In post-primary schools, most Traveller pupils attend for less than half the school year. Although the number of Traveller students attending post-primary schools is increasing, many leave before completing the junior cycle.

*the enrolment of Traveller pupils is not being shared proportionately throughout many school communities*

The scale of low achievement in literacy and numeracy among pupils at primary level gives cause for serious concern. Many Traveller pupils are transferring to post-primary schools

with extremely poor skills in literacy and numeracy. The fact that many schools had not ascertained achievement levels for a significant number of their Traveller pupils is a matter of concern.

There was a high incidence of general learning disability among Traveller pupils in the schools surveyed. In general, Traveller pupils receive a significant amount of supplementary teaching in primary schools. In a few instances, pupils were withdrawn from their mainstream classroom by a number of different teachers. In a few instances, Traveller pupils were withdrawn for supplementary support based on identity rather than on any identified educational need. More than half the Traveller pupils were withdrawn for additional teaching supports in segregated groups.



## Chapter 4

# Traveller education provision in primary schools



# 4 Traveller education provision in primary schools

## 4.1 Introduction

Almost all Traveller pupils attend mainstream primary schools and are educated in classrooms with pupils from the settled community. The Department of Education and Science provides enhanced funding to schools to cater for Travellers' learning needs. In many schools a resource teacher for Travellers (RTT) is appointed to assist with the integration of Traveller pupils' in the education system and to provide additional support to the mainstream teacher and the Traveller pupils as required.

Circular 7/99, concerning applications for posts as resource teachers for children of the Travelling community, states:

*The Department's policy in relation to the education of Traveller children is that they should be taught in an integrated setting... The RTT post is allocated on the basis that the Traveller children are taught either within their classroom with the RTT working in partnership with their classroom teacher or withdrawn in groups for intensive tuition according to their ages and perceived needs by the RTT.*

Circular 7/99 also requires that schools receive Traveller parents' permission regarding the provision of additional teaching supports for their children by the resource teacher for Travellers. It requires resource teachers to liaise with parents continuously about their child's progress.

This chapter presents the findings of the survey in respect of the quality of Traveller education provision in primary schools and takes account of the various supports that are available to schools. It considers the planning process, classroom organisation and the management of pupils' behaviour, the learning environment and the quality of teaching and learning in the primary schools surveyed.

## 4.2 The planning process

### 4.2.1 Whole-school planning for Traveller education

The Education Act (1998) and the Education (Welfare) Act (2002) require a board of management to provide a school plan that caters for a diversity of social needs, values, beliefs, traditions, languages, and ways of life. The school planning process facilitates the formulation of policies in relation to day-to-day school organisation and management. This includes policies on enrolment and attendance, codes of behaviour and discipline, home-school partnership, and the organisation of pupils. The school's policy in relation to curriculum and assessment is intended to encompass all the learning experiences, both formal and informal, provided for its pupils, including Travellers, as they progress through the school.

## School enrolment and admissions policy

All schools in the survey were in the process of developing a school plan, and inspectors described these policies as good or very good. Most enrolment policies did not refer specifically to Traveller pupils, but the inspectors found that they were based on the principles of equality and inclusivity. Enrolment policies and procedures were communicated effectively to parents, and enrolment records were well maintained. Most of the primary schools surveyed maintained records of transfer for all pupils, including Travellers.

## Whole-school curriculum planning for Traveller education

In more than half the schools surveyed (53 per cent), whole-school plans included some reference to the specific needs of Traveller pupils. Two-fifths of whole-school curricular policies included clear aims and objectives for the teaching of Traveller pupils in all subject areas. These policies included a rationale for providing additional support for Traveller pupils with additional educational needs, and the aims and objectives of this support were carefully outlined. However, in more than two-fifths of schools the planning documents dealt with the entire school population rather than with the Traveller pupil in particular.

## Homework policy

Fifty-nine per cent of schools had a policy on homework, describing the rationale for its assignment and the appropriate time to be devoted to it. However, in the great majority of schools no specific procedures were mentioned in respect of the allocation of homework to Traveller pupils. In some schools the resource teacher for Travellers took general responsibility for both the allocation and the correction of homework, while in others the class teacher took responsibility.

### 4.2.2 Classroom planning for Traveller education

#### Classroom planning and mainstream class teachers

Teachers' planning was good or very good in 65 per cent of instances, and the inspectors reported that interesting curriculum activities and learning experiences were outlined for all pupils. Where effective planning was undertaken, long-term and short-term plans were prepared that included reference to the methodologies employed and the learning objectives for each curricular area. Effective planning also included provision for individual differences, and differentiated programmes for Traveller pupils in literacy and numeracy were devised.

*Effective planning also included provision for individual differences, and differentiated programmes for Traveller pupils in literacy and numeracy were devised.*

In a third of the classrooms the teacher's individual planning was found to have scope for development. Some teachers did not provide evidence of appropriate planning, and not enough emphasis was placed on planning for the differentiation of learning tasks. In half the



classrooms, despite the particular learning needs of the Traveller pupils, no specific objectives were outlined for them.

### Planning and resource teachers for Travellers

Sixty-nine per cent of resource teachers prepared an individual profile and learning programme (IPLP) for the Traveller pupils who were receiving supplementary teaching. These IPLPs included clear specific objectives for individual pupils in language, literacy, numeracy, and social, personal and health education. Good planning was found to include

- individual and group learning aims and objectives,
- a clear statement of expectation with regard to the attainment of individual Traveller pupils, based on assessment evidence,
- an outline of the teaching methodologies employed,
- evidence of purposeful co-ordination between the class teacher and the resource teacher for Travellers,
- clarity about the allocation and correction of homework, and
- the maintenance of records of progress and attainment.

Scope for development was identified in a third of the resource teachers' planning and preparation for teaching. There was much variation in practice, with some resource teachers setting learning objectives for a number of the pupils assigned to them but not for others. Some resource teachers planned for groups of pupils but not for individual pupils, although several pupils attended individually. Some had drawn up objectives for occasional aspects of learning, while others provided lists of topics to be covered. Details of teaching methodologies were provided in a minority of classrooms only. Fewer than half the resource teachers maintained records of pupils' progress and achievement. A small number of resource teachers had not completed any written planning.

*Fewer than half the resource teachers maintained records of pupils' progress and achievement. A small number of resource teachers had not completed any written planning.*

### Collaborative curriculum planning: class teachers and resource teachers for Travellers

More than half the class teachers (55 per cent) collaborated with the resource teacher for Travellers in planning and preparing the teaching and learning programme for Traveller pupils. Successful collaborative practice was found to involve good communication among staff members. Regular meetings were timetabled that facilitated discussion on the pupils' specific learning and behavioural needs and provided opportunities for formal planning. Teachers shared responsibility for implementing the learning programmes, and they were aware of the specific teaching objectives. The inspectors noted evidence of the resource

teacher reinforcing lesson material already taught by the class teacher or, alternatively, preparing pupils for mainstream lessons. In a small number of instances the inspectors found that the resource teachers were working in classrooms alongside their mainstream colleagues. The latter approach was found mainly in the more junior classes.

Where weak practice was found, the inspectors recommended that class teachers and resource teachers collaborate to provide a supplementary teaching programme based on the learning needs of the individual pupils, to monitor and record pupils' progress and achievement, and to devise timetables that would ensure the pupils' full access to the curriculum.

A significant minority of mainstream and resource teachers had very little contact with Traveller parents. In these instances the parents were not informed of the supplementary learning programmes planned for the pupils, and they were not involved in supporting their children's learning in the resource teaching settings.

## **4.3 The learning environment**

### **4.3.1 Classroom accommodation**

Accommodation in the majority of schools (89 per cent) was found to be good or very good. Classrooms were reported to be bright, spacious, and attractive, with various learning areas, such as a reading corner, an investigation table, a mathematics area, and a play corner.

In a small minority of classrooms (11 per cent) the physical environment of the classroom was poor. The inspectors recommended the replacement of old furniture, the provision of additional storage space, and the organisation of the classroom so that interactive teaching and learning methodologies could be facilitated.

### **4.3.2 Resource teaching accommodation**

The accommodation for resource teachers for Travellers was found to be good or very good in the majority of schools (70 per cent). The inspectors described the accommodation as pleasant and attractive, and classrooms were equipped with a wide range of teaching and learning resources.

In a few instances the accommodation allocated to the resource teacher for Travellers was not satisfactory because of its size or unappealing nature or because it was shared by a number of support teachers. A number of inspectors suggested that principals and boards of management should give further consideration to the classrooms allocated to the resource teacher for Travellers and should ensure that an attractive learning environment was created and that teaching and learning materials were provided.

One inspector commented:

*Additional teaching and learning resources should be acquired for this room so as to create a stimulating learning environment for the pupils and to provide further hands-on learning experiences for them. Although small in size, the room's potential has not been fully exploited.*

### 4.3.3 Resources for teaching and learning

In three-quarters of mainstream classrooms and resource teaching rooms a wide range of appropriate illustrative and manipulative teaching and learning resources was in evidence, and these were used purposefully. The provision of information and communications technology (ICT) equipment was found to be satisfactory in the majority of classrooms. In general, while the use of ICT in most classrooms was described as being either at an initial or an intermediate stage of development, it was found that all pupils, including Travellers, had access to the ICT available.

There was a limited supply of resources in a quarter of the schools. The inspectors noted that few resources were available to support the development of pupils' sight vocabulary or to enhance the development of literacy skills.

In more than half the schools, including schools that inspectors described as being well resourced, materials or learning resources that specifically related to the Traveller culture were not included in the lessons. For example, an inspector wrote:

*While the classroom is well ordered and offers a stimulating and print-rich environment to the pupils the appropriateness of the setting for Traveller pupils could be improved. Reference to or inclusion of some references to the Traveller culture in lesson presentation and in classroom display would be beneficial.*

The inclusion of Traveller culture as a specific aspect of the curriculum was discussed with parents and school principals. In interview, two Traveller parents' groups stated that they wanted greater recognition of Traveller culture in the school. A few parents stated that they had addressed staff meetings and had spoken to the pupils in the senior classes about Traveller culture. Some of the Traveller parents, on the other hand, expressed concern that the discussion of Traveller culture would lead to the segregation of children into Traveller children and settled children. They were concerned that settled or non-Traveller people, including teachers, had little understanding of Traveller culture, and these parents stated that they would prefer to pass on the Traveller culture to their children themselves. One group of Traveller parents stated:

*We are totally opposed to the segregation of Travellers in any way: e.g. national flag and national anthem for Travellers. The Department should look at a broad range of Traveller views. Don't let one group choose for all Travellers.*

Principals stated that they found trying to accommodate Traveller culture in the school curriculum difficult, as some parents wished their culture to be recognised while others, particularly those in settled accommodation, did not want their children to be identified as Travellers. One principal stated:

*Many Traveller parents in this school do not wish their children to be treated differently. They are settled Travellers and for the most part wish to be treated the same as the settled people. They don't want Traveller culture highlighted or their children singled out as Travellers.*

## 4.4 Classroom management and organisation of Traveller pupils

### 4.4.1 The mainstream classroom

In most classrooms (89 per cent) the teachers organised the teaching and learning environment and managed pupils' behaviour effectively. Traveller pupils were included in the full range of classroom activities and experiences, and the teachers fostered positive behaviour by the pupils.

In a minority of classrooms where pupils' behaviour was poor, the inspectors commented that classroom rules were unclear and inconsistently enforced and that there was a predominance of teacher-talk. Fewer behaviour problems were noted when pupils were actively engaged in the learning task. The inspectors remarked that where pupils were withdrawn for supplementary learning support they often appeared unsettled on their return to the classroom and unsure what their peers were doing in their absence.

Many principals and teachers stated that the majority of Traveller pupils behaved appropriately in the classroom. They found that most behaviour problems occurred in the school playground at break times, while pupils were waiting for the bus, or when the Traveller pupils assembled together as a group. More than 60 per cent of principals commented that schools should have greater access to the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) and that psychologists should support schools in devising behaviour modification programmes for disruptive pupils and in the provision of counselling modules for older pupils. Principals expressed concerns that the present psychological service was inadequate to deal with the needs of certain Traveller pupils.

*... schools should have greater access to the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) and that psychologists should support schools in devising behaviour modification programmes for disruptive pupils and in the provision of counselling modules for older pupils.*

Traveller parents were generally satisfied with the discipline and management of their children in schools. However, some expressed dissatisfaction that schools required constant parental intervention in order to enforce school behaviour standards.

For example, parents stated:

*The school needs to be stronger on discipline. They can't expect the parents to punish them at home for what is done in school.*

*We are called in to the school about some very small things. The school should punish the children at school.*

#### 4.4.2 The resource teaching classroom

Two-thirds of Traveller pupils received supplementary teaching from the resource teacher for Travellers. Inspectors found that the classroom management and organisation of Traveller pupils was handled in a competent manner in 70 per cent of resource teachers' classrooms. These teachers had created a positive and affirmative learning environment in which Traveller pupils were accepted, and they used a range of strategies to promote good behaviour. One inspector reported:

*The resource teacher has several strategies in place to promote positive behaviour. She has reward systems in place and positive behaviours are encouraged through the social, personal and health education (SPHE) programme. She demonstrates a good awareness of the issues involved in Traveller culture.*

The majority of principals stated that the management of behavioural problems in the case of some Traveller pupils posed a considerable challenge for the school. Several instances were reported of Traveller boys who were unable to conform to the routines and discipline of formal schooling, and some of these pupils were reported to respond negatively to any sanctions for inappropriate behaviour.

### 4.5 Quality of teaching and learning

#### 4.5.1 The mainstream classroom setting

The quality of teaching was good or very good in 60 per cent of classrooms. In these classrooms the pupils benefited from differentiated teaching and were encouraged and supported to participate in a range of school activities. The inspectors reported that most children (84 per cent) were motivated and participated in all classroom and group activities willingly with their classmates. In almost three-quarters of classrooms (72 per cent) the pupils experienced success in many areas of school life.

However, in a significant minority (40 per cent) of classrooms it was found that the quality of teaching could be improved. A lack of clear direction was identified in the learning programmes offered to Traveller pupils. There was little evidence of a planned, incremental learning programme, and some pupils were allocated tasks not matched to their ability. Often these tasks were unchallenging and did not facilitate significant new learning. The inspectors recommended that the curriculum should be differentiated to provide more effectively for the range of learning needs and abilities in the classroom, and that active learning methodologies should be used more extensively.

Principals commented on the difficulties associated with differentiating the curriculum for pupils who had an interrupted schooling or who had not enrolled at the same age as their peers. The following comment illustrates this point:

*Our Traveller children's erratic attendance is a major drawback to their success. A number of the children have learning difficulties and when this combines with irregular attendance it has a serious impact on progress. It is hard to plan work as poor attendance means that you have to go back again to the beginning as the child has forgotten what you were doing when they were last in school.*

#### 4.5.2 The resource classroom setting

Resource teaching for Travellers was effective in the majority (60 per cent) of instances. Resource teachers prepared individual plans based on the strengths and learning needs of the pupils in the development of literacy and numeracy skills in particular. In addition to literacy and numeracy, more than half the resource teachers (56 per cent) made suitable provision for social, personal and health education. Some teachers also provided opportunities for their pupils to complete activities in the visual arts. Many resource teachers also took responsibility for the allocation and correction of homework.

A significant number of resource teachers taught Traveller pupils in a one-to-one setting. However, individual profiles and learning programmes were not devised for almost a third (31 per cent) of the pupils in the survey. A lack of individualised planning for teaching and learning meant that the teaching programmes were not based on the individual needs of the pupils and that progression and continuity in teaching and learning were diminished as a consequence. The inspectors identified scope for development in relation to the pupils' learning in two-fifths of the resource teaching situations. It was also found that in several instances the results of pupils' assessment had not had an adequate influence on the teaching programme provided. For example:

*The pupils' learning would be greatly enhanced if assessment procedures were put in place to identify their current levels of performance with a view to devising individual profiles and learning programmes (in line with the Learning Support Guidelines) and to identify a wider range of appropriate teaching methodologies to enhance pupil engagement.*

A small number of Traveller pupils were selected for supplementary teaching without any prior assessment of their educational needs and were provided with literacy and numeracy support although their attainments were on a par with their mainstream peers. In addition, several inspectors reported an over-reliance on withdrawing pupils from mainstream activity to attend the resource teacher. They recommended that the resource teachers for Travellers and mainstream teachers should work collaboratively to plan specific learning programmes to meet the individual needs of the pupils. The

*A small number of Traveller pupils were selected for supplementary teaching without any prior assessment of their educational needs and were provided with literacy and numeracy support although their attainments were on a par with their mainstream peers.*

inspectors advised that, where possible, resource teachers should work in the classroom to support pupils' learning.

Fewer than half the resource teachers provided supplementary teaching for integrated groups consisting of pupils from the Traveller community and the settled community. Where integrated groups were selected it was found that the organisation of supplementary teaching was based on learning needs rather than on identity. More than half the resource teachers worked almost exclusively with groups of Traveller pupils. The need to adopt a team approach to the provision of supplementary support and the need to teach mixed groups of pupils was identified in a number of schools.

## **4.6 Quality of curriculum provision in primary schools**

In accordance with the Primary School Curriculum (1999), the majority of classrooms provided a broad curriculum in which all pupils, including Traveller pupils, participated. However, teachers, parents and inspectors expressed concern that an over-emphasis on withdrawing pupils for supplementary teaching limited pupils' access to the full range of curriculum activities. The inspectors recommended that a more flexible approach to the provision of supplementary teaching should be adopted: more collaborative planning between class teachers and resource teachers should be undertaken, and consideration should be given to the provision of in-class support rather than withdrawal. Careful timetabling of supplementary teaching was recommended so that Traveller pupils did not miss out on essential learning activities in the classroom.

### **4.6.1 Teaching and learning in Irish**

In more than three-fifths of classrooms (62 per cent) Traveller pupils had access to a broad programme in Irish. The inspectors noted that pupils' level of attainment was very poor in some classes, and they commended teachers who used differentiated questioning approaches and revised language content and structures so that the pupils could establish basic language skills. Teachers stated that erratic school attendance, difficulties in oral English skills and reading and the withdrawal of pupils by the resource teacher for Travellers meant that the mainstream programme offered to the pupils was limited.

Difficulties were evident in the curriculum provided for the pupils and in the learning achieved in Irish in almost two-fifths of classrooms. In a minority of classrooms Traveller pupils were withdrawn for supplementary teaching during formal Irish classes. In these instances the majority of teachers stated that they involved Traveller pupils in informal oral work and in weekly revision classes

#### 4.6.2 Teaching and learning in English

The class teacher, in collaboration with the resource teacher, provided a comprehensive English programme for three-quarters of Traveller pupils. For example, an inspector reported:

*The Traveller pupils, as with all other pupils in the classroom, are experiencing a broad and balanced curriculum in English. Traveller pupils take part in all classroom activities in the subject and the work tasks are differentiated appropriately for the weaker pupil.*

In a small number of classrooms there was a lack of collaborative planning between the class teacher and the resource teacher. This resulted in teachers replicating unnecessarily certain aspects of the programme rather than working collaboratively with each other. Consequently, pupils experienced gaps in skills and content development.

#### 4.6.3 Teaching and learning in mathematics

In three-quarters of classrooms the provision in mathematics for Traveller pupils was found to be good or very good. In general, Traveller pupils followed the same programme of work as other pupils in the classroom, with differentiated tasks provided for pupils with specific learning needs. In the small number of classrooms where provision was regarded as weak, Traveller pupils received the majority of their mathematics teaching from the resource teacher for Travellers during periods of withdrawal from the mainstream class. In some classrooms Traveller pupils were assigned additional activities by the resource teacher, which they completed while their peers attempted the activities assigned by the mainstream teacher in mathematics.

#### 4.6.4 Teaching and learning in social, environmental and scientific education

In almost all classrooms (90 per cent) Traveller pupils experienced a broad and balanced programme in history, geography, and science. In many instances the programme provided in senior classes was differentiated, as the class textbooks were too difficult for Traveller pupils who had literacy problems. Mainstream teachers stated that absenteeism meant that Traveller pupils often missed entire sections of the programme and therefore had significant gaps in concept and skill development when they returned to school. They also stated that it was often impossible to bridge this gap, as it was necessary to move ahead with the class programme to accommodate all the other pupils.

#### 4.6.5 Teaching and learning in the arts

In almost all instances (95 per cent) comprehensive programmes in visual arts and music were provided to Traveller pupils. As with all pupils, the work of the Traveller pupils in the visual arts was displayed and discussed, and the pupils were provided with opportunities



to experience the various strands of the curriculum. In music, all pupils in the mainstream classrooms participated in the same programme of work. Traveller pupils were generally not withdrawn for supplementary teaching support during music or visual arts.

#### 4.6.6 Teaching and learning in social, personal and health education (SPHE)

Curriculum provision in SPHE was found to be good or very good in 70 per cent of classrooms. Traveller pupils experienced a similar programme to other pupils in the classroom. In many instances the resource teacher for Travellers also allocated additional time to this subject area, particularly to such topics as friendship and self-esteem.

In the 30 per cent of instances where inspectors found that there was scope for development in the teaching and learning in SPHE some common weaknesses were evident. There was a lack of collaborative planning between the classroom teacher and the resource teacher for Travellers, so that certain aspects of SPHE were duplicated rather than developed, and Traveller pupils appeared to be uninterested in the topics chosen for discussion. In certain instances the Traveller pupils' poor expressive language skills made participation in the lesson difficult for them; for example:

*The Traveller pupils, though provided opportunity to participate, were not as enthusiastic about responding to questions in SPHE as they were in other subjects. They found it difficult to express their ideas in the "free discussion" sessions apparently lacking some of the vocabulary and knowledge that many of the non-Traveller pupils appeared to possess.*

#### 4.6.7 Teaching and learning in physical education

Provision in physical education was good in almost all classrooms (95 per cent). Traveller pupils participated in all physical education activities. In the majority of schools they had opportunities to become involved in extra-curricular sporting activity. In more than three-fifths of the schools the inspectors rated the involvement of Traveller pupils in extra-curricular activities as good or very good. Principals reported that many of the Traveller pupils participated in football and basketball especially, and that their involvement in after-school activities was positively encouraged and growing.

#### 4.6.8 Parents' views on the effectiveness of curriculum provision and the progress of their children

Traveller parents expressed satisfaction with the education provided for their children in primary school. They stated that they were "delighted with" and "welcomed" the opportunities their children had to engage in extra-curricular activities. They were pleased with the support their children received from the resource teachers especially. The parents believed that their children had access to a full curriculum, although one group of parents suggested that more "hands-on" activities should be provided. One group expressed

concern that their children missed Irish lessons regularly. Some parents referred to the difficulties their children had in completing homework, especially if their own literacy skills were poor and they could not offer any assistance. They suggested that after-school clubs should place additional emphasis on homework and less on other activities.

More than half the parents interviewed expressed concern about the attainment levels of their children, particularly in the area of literacy and numeracy. They felt disappointed that their children were falling behind the other pupils in the class. They were also concerned at the low level of literacy some of the pupils had on finishing sixth class. Traveller parents in two schools felt that some teachers did not have very high expectations for their children. For example:

*Some teachers do not take the education of Traveller pupils seriously enough and are patronising towards the parents. These teachers do not have high expectations. Other teachers take a serious interest in Traveller pupils and they have high expectations for them. Pupils do well with these teachers and we can see the difference.*

#### 4.6.9 Parents' involvement in curriculum planning

Teachers and principals reported that contact was increasing between teaching staff and Traveller parents. They stated that approximately half the Traveller parents visited the schools regularly and that they attended formal parent-teacher meetings and other meetings organised by teachers for groups of parents. The other proportion of Traveller parents did not attend meetings regularly but would attend if specifically requested to do so. Some teachers stated that many Traveller parents appeared to prefer more informal parent-teacher meetings and were more likely to attend those. A small number of resource teachers for Travellers and home-school-community liaison co-ordinators reported that they visited pupils' homes frequently and found this to be a useful way of engaging with parents.

#### Assessment and Traveller pupils

Many of the schools had drawn up a policy on assessment. In a few instances specific reference was made to Traveller pupils' progress in core areas, such as literacy and numeracy. In general, however, school policies on assessment did not specifically refer to Traveller pupils or make provision for their specific needs.

In most schools the results of standardised tests and teacher-designed tests were carefully maintained for all pupils, including Traveller pupils. However, in some schools the range of assessment approaches employed was limited. In a few schools, although assessment results were obtained they were not used as the basis for planning teaching and learning goals and for implementing individualised teaching and learning programmes. One inspector reported:

*The school needs to place a greater emphasis on using a range of assessment techniques to systematically monitor the individual pupil's progress, to collaboratively identify their learning needs and set clear learning targets for a pre-determined period of instruction.*

In most schools, both the mainstream class teacher and the resource teacher maintained some samples of Traveller pupils' work. These included work in copybooks or folders. In addition, the majority of class teachers maintained records of Traveller pupils' work, including lists of test results in different curriculum areas and the titles of books the children had read. These records and samples of work generally showed the teaching of a broad programme in the majority of classrooms. The inspectors noted that the majority of resource teachers for Travellers maintained records of standardised test results only and had not completed progress records for each Traveller pupil receiving supplementary teaching.

#### 4.7 Integration of Traveller pupils in the life of the school

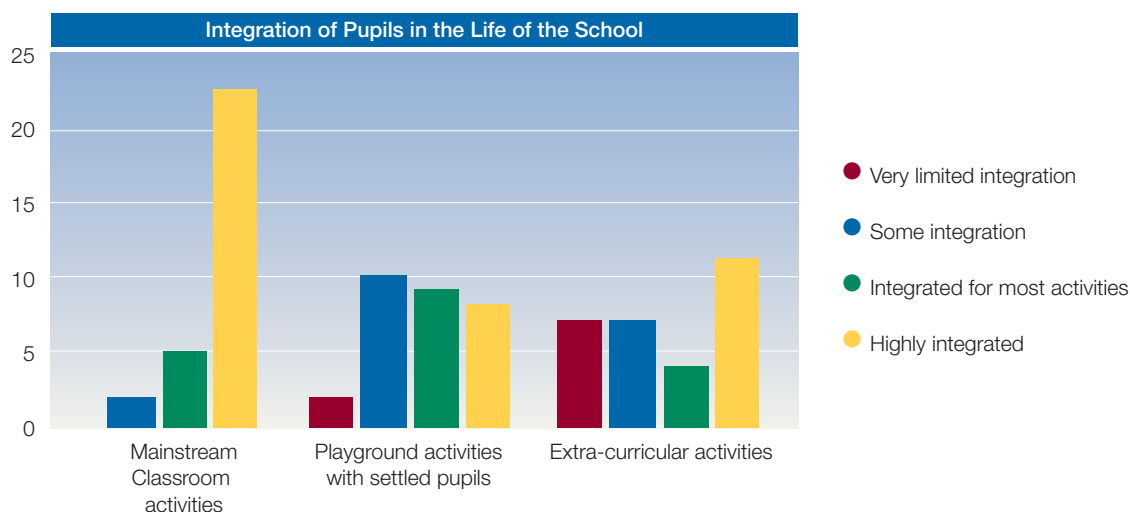
Principals, teachers and parents were asked to give their views on the extent to which Traveller pupils were integrated in the life of the school.

More than 80 per cent of principals and teachers reported that Traveller pupils were fully integrated in the life of the school, stating that they participated in mainstream classroom and all other school activities. For example, one principal explained the initiatives her school had undertaken to enhance Traveller pupils' participation in all school activities:

*The home school liaison teacher and the visiting teacher for Travellers have worked hard to ensure meaningful Traveller participation in all school activities. We are constantly aware of the importance of promoting the principles espoused in our Vision Statement. Real participation and inclusion is achieved in religious ceremonies, Christmas concerts, Arts Week and Seachtain na Gaeilge activities, environmental activity for the Green Schools Project, school teams and sporting events.*

More than half the principals reported that Travellers were integrated or were highly integrated for most extra-curricular activities. They considered that participation by Traveller pupils was a positive step and reported that Traveller pupils attended sports activities, dance and homework clubs most frequently. They also stated that school transport arrangements meant that pupils who travelled to school by bus, and this included Traveller pupils, could not participate in after-school activities, as they were collected immediately after school. Teachers and principals commented positively on activities that were organised under the School Completion Programme.

While both principals and teachers reported that Travellers were integrated and included in all mainstream activities, some expressed concern about the limited integration of Travellers during recreational periods. Fig. 4.1 illustrates principals' perceptions of how well Traveller pupils were integrating in school life in three areas: mainstream classroom activity, playground activity with the general school population, and extra-curricular activities.



**Fig 4.1: Integration of Traveller pupils in the life of the school**

In more than a third of schools the principal reported that there was limited integration of Traveller pupils with non-Travellers during recreational periods. One principal explained that the lack of integration arose because of the pupils' different interests and life experience. A quarter of the principals interviewed reported that some of the Traveller pupils showed behavioural difficulties in the playground. They remarked that Traveller pupils' preference for socialising as a group during recreational periods posed discipline difficulties, particularly when family disagreements spilled over into the school yard.

In general, parents felt satisfied with the way in which their children were integrated in school life. They were pleased that their children had the opportunity to participate in after-school activities.

*Traveller children are now involved in all school activities. They are on school teams and go swimming. They go on trips and take part in plays, choirs, breakfast clubs, after-school clubs and activities organised by the School Completion Programme.*

#### **4.8 Supporting Traveller education: the role of the Visiting Teachers for Travellers Service**

The level of collaboration between the school's resource teacher for Travellers and the visiting teachers for Travellers varied considerably. Some teachers stated that they received regular supportive visits from the visiting teacher. Others commented that they rarely met the VTT. In just over half the schools the resource teachers for Travellers stated that they had established a close working relationship with the VTT, and they reported collaboration on such matters as programme planning for pupils, review of pupils' progress, managing behavioural issues, promoting attendance strategies, and the filling of parental consent forms. In a small number of instances the resource teachers for Travellers and VTTs had made joint visits to the home of Traveller pupils.

The importance of the support provided by the Visiting Teachers for Travellers Service received a mixed response from principals. Almost all principals acknowledged that the service made a significant contribution to enrolment and attendance in the last decade. Forty per cent considered the support provided by visiting teachers very important. However, 12 per cent considered the support to be unimportant in their schools.

Principals had different perceptions of the visiting teachers' role. They expressed a need for further clarification about how visiting teachers could best support their schools. Clarification of roles was also requested by most visiting teachers interviewed. A few principals stated that they experienced significant policy and personality differences with some visiting teachers.

## **4.9 Conclusions**

Accommodation was generally good or very good in the schools surveyed. In three-quarters of the schools, resources for teaching and learning were appropriate. Many schools were uncertain how to incorporate Traveller culture in the school curriculum and environment. They reported that Traveller parents expressed conflicting views in respect of presenting Traveller culture in the school setting.

In general, the quality of whole-school planning was good in more than half the schools. However, school plans did not refer specifically to the education provision for Traveller pupils. Schools had devised good enrolment policies, and enrolment procedures were communicated effectively to parents. Most schools maintained records of post-primary transfer for all pupils.

Teachers' personal planning was good in two-thirds of instances. However, specific objectives for teaching and learning were not outlined for Traveller pupils with learning difficulties in half the classrooms. Two-thirds of resource teachers for Travellers prepared good individual learning programmes for their pupils. Scope for development or significant weaknesses were found in a third of resource teachers' practice, and in these instances the teachers did not prepare appropriately for the individual pupils' learning needs. Furthermore, more than half the resource teachers did not maintain records of pupils' progress and achievement. Just over half the mainstream teachers collaborated with resource teachers in preparing the teaching and learning programme for the pupils in their care. This shows that 45 per cent of resource teachers provided supplementary teaching programmes in isolation from mainstream curriculum provision.

The quality of teaching was good or very good in 60 per cent of mainstream and resource teaching classrooms. Where it was found that there was scope for development in the quality of teaching, little evidence of a planned incremental programme was evident, and pupils were often assigned tasks that did not facilitate significant new learning. Providing a differentiated curriculum for nomadic pupils presented considerable challenges for schools.

The majority of classrooms provided a broad curriculum in which all Traveller pupils participated. However, teachers, parents and inspectors expressed concern regarding the over-reliance on withdrawing pupils from mainstream classrooms for supplementary teaching and its potential effect in limiting access to a broad and balanced curriculum.

Traveller parents and school principals agreed that tackling literacy and numeracy should be given priority in schools. Principals' suggestions for improved provision included the availability of pre-schooling that concentrated on oral language development and on appropriate competence in pre-school literacy and numeracy, the enhanced involvement of Traveller parents in the education system, and increased levels of financial and staffing support for schools with larger numbers of Traveller pupils.

A majority of principals stated that managing the behavioural problems presented by some Traveller pupils posed a considerable challenge. A minority of Traveller pupils responded negatively to sanctions for inappropriate behaviour. Principals were concerned about the limited integration of Traveller pupils in playground activities.

Principals acknowledged the significant contribution of the Visiting Teachers for Travellers Service to enrolment and attendance in the last decade. However, the present role of the visiting teacher for Travellers was unclear to many principals; they expressed a need for further clarification about how visiting teachers could best support their schools.



## Chapter 5

# Traveller education provision in post-primary schools





# 5 Traveller education provision in post-primary schools

## 5.1 Introduction

The number of Traveller students transferring to second level has increased significantly in the last five years. The majority of these students are enrolling at an appropriate age in post-primary schools. This chapter explores the whole-school planning and curriculum provision available to students. It deals with the inclusion of Travellers in the life of the school, and it reflects on some of the challenges experienced by students. During the survey, the inspectors evaluated a small number of lessons taught in mainstream classes, and inspectors' observations on the quality of teaching and learning are provided. This chapter draws on principals', teachers' and parents' views on the current education provision for Traveller students in the schools surveyed.

## 5.2 Whole-school policy on enrolment and attendance

While all schools had whole-school policies on enrolment and attendance, no school had devised a specific policy document on the enrolment of Traveller students. The inspectors reported that most policy statements were based on the principles of inclusivity. All schools had policies on attendance, and some referred specifically to encouraging the attendance of minority groups within the school community. All schools had a policy of tracking the absenteeism of Traveller students. School personnel contacted Traveller parents to make them aware of the necessity of regular school attendance. Homes had been visited, and the guidance counsellors, the home-school-community liaison co-ordinators, Traveller liaison teachers, chaplains, Educational Welfare Board officers, gardai (dealing with attendance) and visiting teachers for Travellers had also assisted in supporting the schools' attempts to improve regular attendance.

*All schools had policies on attendance, and some referred specifically to encouraging the attendance of minority groups within the school community.*

## 5.3 Curriculum access for Traveller students

Traveller students availed of a full curriculum in a few schools surveyed. The education provision available in one school was described by a reporting inspector as follows:

*The school offers a holistic education to all students to prepare them for adult life. Sports, recreational activities and other opportunities are heavily promoted as well as academic achievement. Students are encouraged to realise their full potential and are encouraged, through a range of supports, to take an active part in school life. Members of staff outreach to parents, mentor students and liaise with outside agencies. Travellers and members of other minority communities are fully integrated in all aspects of the school.*

However, in most schools Travellers accessed a limited curriculum consisting of three or four subjects. Post-primary school personnel reported that many Traveller students required extensive support teaching to enable them to access the curriculum. The time required each week to provide extra individual learning support tended to limit the number and range of subjects that students were offered and sometimes resulted in their withdrawal from subjects they found particularly interesting.

*in most schools Travellers accessed a limited curriculum consisting of three or four subjects*

Most Travellers were accommodated in mainstream classes, with only a small number receiving education in a "special unit." These special units were established to cater for the particular needs of students with "emotional, social and behavioural difficulties." Extra resource-teaching support was provided to Traveller students in all schools. The schools surveyed stated that their aim was to provide education to suit the needs of each individual student.

Many Traveller students enrolling in first year were found to have a very low level of competence in literacy, in numeracy, and in general communication skills, both oral and written. In the schools visited, Traveller boys were reported to experience greater challenges than girls in taking on a number of new academic subjects in first year because of low achievement in literacy and numeracy. One inspector noted:

*Travellers have full access to the curriculum. However, many Traveller children are non-readers when they come to the school. This limits the progress they can make in post-primary.*

In the schools surveyed, many Traveller students studied a number of subjects at ordinary or at foundation level only for Junior Certificate. The study of a number of subjects at foundation level for the Junior Certificate is not deemed sufficient to provide a good basis for students wishing to engage meaningfully in Leaving Certificate programmes and to progress on to higher or further education.

Principals and teachers reported that many Traveller students, because of their poor literacy skills, do not complete homework assignments, and this limits their participation and success in certain subjects. School personnel reported that attempts to encourage Traveller students to join homework clubs had been largely unsuccessful. Girls were required to help in the home after school, and Traveller boys did not choose to attend these clubs.

### 5.3.1 Certificate programmes

**Table 5.1: Number of Traveller students accessing Junior and Leaving Certificate programmes**

Junior Certificate	JCSP	Leaving Certificate & Leaving Certificate Applied
58	41	13

The majority of Traveller students in the schools surveyed were studying the Junior Certificate programme. More than two-fifths of the students in the 12–15 age group were following the Junior Certificate Schools Programme (JCSP) in the schools with this programme option. Inspectors commented that the JCSP offered an excellent structured and programmed approach to the study of subjects in junior cycle. After completing the junior cycle, some Traveller students were successfully transferring to the Leaving Certificate Applied. This programme equips students with the skills and the necessary qualifications to progress to a range of further education and training courses. Not all schools, however, offered this version of the Leaving Certificate and progression route for Travellers.

A number of the Traveller parents interviewed stated that they were unhappy with the range of subjects offered by schools. They wanted their children to have access to more experiential learning processes and approaches. One parent commented:

*They hate sitting all day having to listen and all that writing . . . I'd like them to have things to do and learn that way.*

In particular, Traveller parents stated that boys should be offered access to both of the subjects Technology Metal and Technology Wood for the Junior Certificate. Many Traveller parents had ambitions for their sons to go on to gain trade apprenticeships or traineeships in order to be self-employed in the future. Most Travellers were not sure how access to this further training could be obtained, or how to network effectively with employers to find work placements or sponsorship. The desirability of students being offered access to business subjects was also suggested as an area that would be of particular interest to Travellers, who may wish to be self-employed in the future.

*Many Traveller parents had ambitions for their sons to go on to gain trade apprenticeships or traineeships in order to be self-employed in the future*

Some of the parents interviewed had older children who had attended second-level education and who were now unemployed. The parents would like these young people assisted to gain training or employment, as this, they felt, would encourage younger siblings to stay in school and to gain meaningful qualifications. Traveller parents stated that they would also like their children to participate in work-experience programmes while still at school. Unfortunately, many Traveller students leave school before the introduction of these opportunities in Transition Year or in senior cycle. Both parents and schools stressed the need for the urgent creation of positive role models in education and employment

among Travellers. Parents were also anxious to have more access themselves to lifelong learning opportunities and stated that they would welcome help to achieve meaningful educational qualifications.

### 5.3.2 The School Completion Programme

The School Completion Programme, which is available in a number of schools, aims to develop improved attendance and participation patterns. It has been introduced to identify all students who are considered to be at risk of early school-leaving and allows schools to organise and fund out-of-school activities and a range of in-school and after-school supports.

In two of the schools included in the survey the School Completion Programme had worked to benefit Traveller students by providing training in horseriding and in equestrian care skills for those who were interested. The students involved in these community projects could go on to acquire recognised qualifications in this area. They could continue to access to the programme during the summer and at weekends. Participation by individuals in the projects could be sustained only where the students attended school regularly. Other schools had developed other initiatives to encourage Traveller students to seek worthwhile interests and suitable cultural and sports activities. In some instances the visiting teacher for Travellers had been involved in encouraging students to take part in these events and in organising some specific outings.

## 5.4 Progression of Traveller students to senior cycle and further education

A small but increasing number of young, mainly female Travellers are progressing to the senior cycle. Principals, teachers and visiting teachers for Travellers stated that they were promoting this option with students and parents. They noted that Traveller parents required specific information and guidance on how participation in the senior cycle could benefit their children's future.

*A small but increasing number of young, mainly female Travellers are progressing to the senior cycle*

Where Traveller students had progressed to the senior cycle, guidance counsellors, year heads and programme co-ordinators had a role in motivating and assisting Travellers to identify viable career paths. The inspectors reported that the schools surveyed were very keen to facilitate this development. Principals and teachers commented that only a very small number of students had progressed after the Leaving Certificate to take up places in further education or training. Without such role models, schools were finding it difficult to encourage Traveller students to consider such options. One principal stated:

*Currently, there are two Traveller students in the school who will complete the junior cycle this year. We are encouraging these students to progress into the senior cycle. It is important that a cohort of Traveller students would complete the Leaving Certificate and become role models for other students and also convince Traveller parents that staying in full-time education is a good idea.*

Some visiting teachers for Travellers acted positively to assist the transfer of young Travellers to further training centres. However, the inspectors recommended that a more co-ordinated approach to transferring students to these educational centres should be undertaken by visiting teachers with the school staff. School personnel, visiting teachers and inspectors commented on the importance for schools, parents and Traveller students themselves to set high expectations for progression and participation in higher and further education and training. Principals, teachers and visiting teachers commented that many Traveller parents, based on their own lack of experience in education, have quite low educational expectations for their children. They noted that there was little awareness of the opportunities that education can offer and suggested that parents' expectations for their children should be raised.

One visiting teacher for Travellers commented on the different values and life-styles of Travellers and the impact these have on encouraging the retention of students in school in the senior cycle:

*Traveller parents do not see the immediate results of education. Travellers aged 14 or 15 years old want to go to the Training Workshops and do things that are relevant to them. Parents value courses or activities that will give their sons a trade or provide them with an income.*

## 5.5 Quality of learning and teaching

In a few schools visited, Traveller students were fully integrated in mainstream classes, and the quality of teaching observed in these classrooms was good. The quality of pupils' learning was closely linked to their attendance and their ability to engage in the learning activities planned. In two schools, Traveller students were being educated in a special unit or a special class. All were receiving extra learning support, as required. Poor attendance had prevented some Traveller students from making progress in some subjects and from attempting higher-level papers in State examinations.

### Learning support and resource teaching contexts

A number of Traveller students required a moderate to high degree of extra learning support. The time required each week to provide extra individual learning support tended to limit the number and range of subjects that students were offered and sometimes resulted in the students withdrawal from subjects they found particularly interesting. The quality of teaching in the learning-support or resource classes was considered very good. One inspector commented:

*The quality of the teaching is very high. The materials for class are well chosen. The students have a range of learning needs and are progressing at different levels. They are very demanding of time and attention from the teacher. A high level of mutual respect is displayed. The atmosphere is businesslike and no time is wasted. A lot of individual help is given to students.*

The inspectors reported that teachers had prepared individual programmes for their students that were based on their individual needs. Students were reported to be motivated and participated well in the activities. Some students had made significant progress in literacy and numeracy and had disengaged from supplementary teaching.

*The teacher is very expert at teaching literacy and the students display a good understanding of language structure and syntax. They are happy and relaxed and help each other in a patient way. The ICT input is a good device to keep them interested and to learn through "doing." The aim of the class is to give students the skills to be able to succeed in all subjects and to gain an essential life skill.*

Traveller parents reported that some teachers were more skilled than others in raising the educational and career expectations of Traveller students and in developing good relations with parents. Active involvement in learning was considered by Traveller parents a necessary feature of the education provision for Travellers, and many would like more regular access to practical and skill-based learning opportunities. One visiting teacher for Travellers commented:

*Traveller students have wonderful skills that are not being tapped, not nourished or exploited or developed. Students need to be provided with workshops in subjects and modules that are relevant to their lives e.g. business and practical subjects.*

Teachers commented that students who had been well integrated in primary school made the most successful transition to second level. The interest these students had developed early in their school career was sustained at second level when they encountered teachers who were keen to meet their needs.

## 5.6 Communicating with school personnel at second level

A number of Traveller parents were interviewed during the survey to elicit their views on school provision for their children and to gain insights into their concerns. Many parents reported that they had missed out on opportunities to partake in education themselves, due to their nomadic lifestyle. Some had not experienced any schooling in their childhood, or had attended school only for very short periods. Therefore, many stated that they had problems with literacy and numeracy. This lack of basic competence, they felt, had created barriers to their own advancement and to their ability to play a full role in society. It had also hampered their entry to the work-force.

All the parents were anxious that their children should benefit from a good education. In particular, they hoped that their children would learn to read and write effectively, achieve good grades in the State examinations, and go on to gain meaningful and sustainable employment. However,

*All the parents interviewed expressed the wish to gain more information on ways to support their children in achieving their full potential.*

most parents stated that they had little knowledge of how second-level schools operated or of the demands this system placed upon them and their children. All the parents interviewed expressed the wish to gain more information on ways to support their children in achieving their full potential.

Most parents stated that they found dealing with primary schools to be quite straightforward, as making contact with the school principal answered most of their concerns. However, many parents were unhappy about how post-primary schools communicated information to them. Many Travellers stated that they had poor literacy skills and therefore could not read school brochures, notes, and other written materials issued to them. Few Traveller families had a phone connection, and so they were dependent on mobile phones as their only form of communication with the school. Parents expressed a preference for schools to adopt a more direct approach to communication and they wanted schools to phone or visit them when a problem arose about their children. They stated that this approach would be more aligned with their own culture and would keep them informed about what was happening at school. Even when parents felt they had insufficient information about a school event or an issue of concern or interest they stated that they were reticent in initiating contact with the school. One Traveller parent commented:

*If we don't know what is happening the kids can make fools of us and tell us anything.  
I don't like ringing up the school .*

## **5.7 Facilitating communication with Traveller parents: examples of good practice**

At second level, schools are large organisations, and the education provided is multifaceted and difficult for all parents to understand. Parents were required by some schools to establish contact with a wide range of staff members: principal, deputy principal, year tutors, form tutors, guidance counsellors, home-school-community liaison co-ordinators, learning-support teachers, and subject teachers. Traveller parents described this task as daunting, as it required a lot of confidence on the part of parents to seek out these individual teachers. Some of the schools appointed a liaison person or teacher for Travellers in the school, who had a particular responsibility for arranging contact with parents and for supporting and mentoring Traveller students. This person became well acquainted with each Traveller student and their parents and acted as a go-between to assist Travellers in engaging more fully in education. In other schools the home-school-community liaison co-ordinator also liaised with Traveller families. In one school a Traveller liaison teacher was central to the provision of an integrated communication service for Traveller parents and students.

*The school has appointed a teacher as a Traveller Liaison Person who co-ordinates all Traveller education and social activities, works with parents, visits sites (where necessary), liaises with the Visiting Teacher for Travellers, the learning-support teacher and meets with the students each day. She is the spokesperson for Travellers in the school and can advise teachers on any problems that arise. The close working relationship between all personnel operates to provide an integrated service for Traveller students.*

Principals reported that establishing links with Traveller families was at first very time-consuming for the school but was found in most instances to be beneficial in developing good relations with parents.

## 5.8 Attainment

Some Traveller students achieve academically on a par with peers, integrate fully in school life, and experience no great difficulties. One resource teacher commented:

*Neither of the students enrolled in the school need to be withdrawn for additional help. The school monitors the progress of all the students. These students are progressing well and quite able to keep up in class. The students can come to the resource teacher or the Principal if they wish to discuss any problem.*

However, the low rates of achievement of many Traveller students was a cause for concern in almost all the schools surveyed. Many of the students had been educationally assessed using the normal assessment tests and instruments applied to all first-year students, with no adjustment for the cultural factors that pertain to this minority group. Not all second-level schools applied the same instruments, and so results cannot be compared accurately. The majority of first-year Traveller students achieved low scores on standardised tests. Attainment in mathematics was also reported to be low in most instances. A number of students had been more formally assessed for special education needs, and a few had then been assigned to special classes or units. The majority of Traveller students were integrated in mainstream classes, and some were reported to achieve in the normal range or above.

## 5.9 Traveller students' inclusion in the life of the school

Girls from the Traveller community were reported by principals, teachers and parents to have settled well into school, to have integrated in mainstream classes, and to be taking an active part in many school activities. School personnel and visiting teachers for Travellers noted that this trend reflects the norms of Traveller culture. Teenage girls are expected to conform to rules both at home and at

*Girls from the Traveller community were reported by principals, teachers and parents to have settled well into school, to have integrated in mainstream classes, and to be taking an active part in many school activities*

school, to stay at home at night (where homework can be completed), and to accept more supervision and correction than boys.

Visiting teachers and Traveller parents reported that boys were given more freedom in their own community to make their own choices from an early age, and to make the decision whether or not to attend school or to leave school early. In some instances, Traveller girls were sometimes kept at home during the day to fulfil household duties.

The majority of Travellers completing the Junior Certificate were girls, and a small number of Travellers progressed to the senior cycle, though few managed to stay on for the full two



years to complete the Leaving Certificate. Traditionally, Traveller girls are expected to prepare for marriage at an early age and to acquire the skills to prepare them for the role of wife and mother.

Traveller parents recognised and reported that boys sometimes did not establish good relations with members of the school staff and became disenchanted with school soon after entering first year. Some schools have begun to address this issue and have been particularly successful in involving young Travellers in extra-curricular activities, such as sports. Principals reported that Traveller students, both boys and girls, regularly line out as part of school teams in field games, indoor sports, and boxing. They observed that the involvement of Travellers in sport can improve attendance rates, can assist in the integration of students, and can serve to make school more interesting and relevant for individuals.

### **5.10 Traveller culture**

In two schools, particular activities, such as horse-riding and equine skills, were provided specifically for Travellers as part of the School Completion Programme. In half the schools the teachers and principals made provision for Traveller culture and identity to be recognised and celebrated. In some schools many different minority groups were represented among the students, and different cultures were celebrated through an “Intercultural Education Day.” The inspectors noted that schools appeared to prosper where a diverse and inclusive approach was developed for all students.

In some schools the principal and teachers identified obstacles to the recognition of Traveller culture and traditions. This was particularly so in areas where there were tensions between Travellers and the settled community. Principals reported that some Travellers enrolled in school did not wish to be identified as Travellers and complained when they were “labelled” or “singled out” as Travellers. When the issue of Traveller culture was raised with the focus groups of parents, contrasting opinions emerged. Some parents stated that they did not want schools to actively celebrate Traveller culture or to include their children in this practice, while others were of the opinion that schools were not doing enough to promote Traveller culture.

### **5.11 The role of visiting teachers for Travellers**

School principals and teachers acknowledged that the visiting teachers for Travellers had played a vital role in encouraging the transfer of Traveller students with their settled peers from primary to post-primary school. In some schools the visiting teacher for Travellers had an important role in supporting parents, students, and schools. The inspectors noted that schools were gradually developing strategies for reaching out to parents and encouraging their participation in supporting their children.

However, the role of VTTs in second-level schools had not yet been clearly determined. In the schools surveyed, the VTTs reported that they met only one or two members of the staff, usually the principal, and were involved primarily in arranging the enrolment of students. Some schools that enrol Traveller students from a wide catchment area reported that they had to deal with a number of VTTs and were not sure what to expect from this service. In two of the schools visited the VTT regularly attended meetings of the school "Care Team," a group of staff members that co-ordinated the supports to students experiencing difficulty. The inspectors suggested that the role of the VTT needs to be redefined and that their functions should be further clarified. The establishment of new guidelines and protocols which would contribute to supporting Travellers as part of the learning community in second-level schools was recommended.

*The inspectors suggested that the role of the VTT needs to be redefined and that their functions should be further clarified. The establishment of new guidelines and protocols which would contribute to supporting Travellers as part of the learning community in second-level schools was recommended.*

## 5.12 Conclusions

The majority of Traveller students are absent from school for up to 50 per cent of the school year and consequently have an interrupted experience of school life. While schools had undertaken various initiatives to improve attendance rates, most Traveller students, particularly boys, leave school before completing the junior cycle.

Traveller students' limited skills in literacy and numeracy on entry to post-primary school restricted their access to the curriculum, and many students pursued subjects at foundation level only. Additional supports were provided for students with learning difficulties. Schools offering the JCSP and LCA provided more choice to Travellers. Students responded more positively to learning activities that were actively participative and experiential. Principals, teachers and visiting teachers commented that many Traveller parents had low expectations for their children and of education.

School personnel reported that Travellers with a nomadic life-style find it more difficult to integrate fully in education. Traveller girls adapted to post-primary education more positively than their male counterparts. Visiting teachers for Travellers and parents reported that some Traveller boys require alternative or additional curriculum provision that provides practical and skill-based learning opportunities matched to their needs, interests, and employment prospects.

Traveller parents wished to establish clear modes of communication with school personnel at post-primary level. They identified a need to have more information about post-primary education and the various programmes available.

The student population of a small number of schools comprised various minority groups. In these schools intercultural education was included in the curriculum provided. However, the promotion of Traveller culture specifically in post-primary schools raised conflicting views. Where there were tensions between Travellers and the settled

community, some post-primary schools found it difficult to foster and promote Traveller culture. Some Traveller parents stated that they did not want schools to actively celebrate Traveller culture or to include their children in this practice; others were of the opinion that schools were not doing enough to promote Traveller culture.





Chapter 6

# Conclusions and recommendations



# 6 Conclusions and recommendations

This chapter presents the main findings and recommendations of the survey of education provision for Travellers in primary and post-primary schools.

## 6.1 Enrolment and attendance

In the schools evaluated, the majority of Traveller parents and visiting teachers for Travellers expressed their satisfaction with enrolment policies and procedures.

Evidence reviewed in this survey showed that the enrolment of Traveller students is concentrated in a relatively small number of schools. Anecdotal evidence suggests that some schools either discourage or obstruct the enrolment of Traveller children. In fact many principals and visiting teachers for Travellers claimed that certain schools in their locality did not facilitate the enrolment of Travellers, and, as a result, disproportionate numbers of Traveller students were attending those schools where Travellers were made to feel welcome. Some principals felt that this not only over-stretched the resources of schools but also limited the Traveller parents' choice of schools.

While the number of Traveller students who transferred to post-primary school was increasing, the subsequent drop-out rates were extremely high. Most Traveller students left school before completing the junior cycle. Traveller girls were reported to settle more readily into post-primary school than their male counterparts, and the majority of Travellers who completed the Junior Certificate were female. A very small number of Traveller students had progressed to the senior cycle of post-primary education.

The survey found that Traveller students were absent from primary school, on average, for at least 20 per cent of the school year. Absenteeism increased in post-primary schools, where students were absent, on average, for 50 per cent of the school year. The significant level of absenteeism has a negative impact on Traveller children's achievement and on their prospects of a successful education. While many Traveller parents are anxious to ensure that their children progress at school, it appears that a considerable number do not fully value schooling and are not aware that good educational achievement requires regular attendance at school.

### Parental involvement

All the schools appreciated the importance of fostering involvement by parents. Many schools had established initiatives to link with parents, and some schools reported that they had a specific teacher who liaised with the Traveller parents. Resource teachers for Travellers, the home-school-community liaison co-ordinator and the visiting teacher for Travellers were involved in promoting greater involvement by parents. Principals reported improved attendance of Traveller parents at parent-teacher meetings and other school meetings, such as preparatory meetings for their children's receipt of religious sacraments.

In general, Traveller parents were not involved in whole-school planning, and they were not generally involved in the schools' intervention programmes for supplementary support for individual Traveller students.

Traveller parents stated that they found the structure of post-primary education difficult to understand and that they experienced difficulties in establishing communication with post-primary schools.

### Access to the curriculum

A broad curriculum was provided in the majority of primary classrooms. However, teachers and parents expressed concern about the overuse of withdrawal as the chief means of providing supplementary teaching support to those Traveller students who were having difficulty with literacy and numeracy. The inspectors reported that this practice had a negative impact on pupils' access to a broad and balanced curriculum.

Low achievement levels by Traveller students in literacy and numeracy at entry to the first year of post-primary school restricted their subject choice. In general, Traveller students pursued subjects at foundation level and were in the lowest bands or streams in the post-primary school. The necessity to provide Traveller students with supplementary teaching restricted subject choices even further, and sometimes resulted in their withdrawal from subjects that they found particularly interesting. Many post-primary school personnel were reported to have limited expectations of Travellers and offered these students a narrow curriculum.

### Challenging behaviour

In most classrooms the teachers organised the teaching and learning environment and managed students' behaviour effectively. The teachers reported that the majority of Traveller students behaved appropriately in the classroom. However, the majority of principals stated that the management of behavioural problems presented by a small number of Traveller students posed a considerable challenge. Many such incidents of misbehaviour occurred in the school yard or where groups of Traveller students congregated. A minority of Traveller students responded negatively to sanctions for inappropriate behaviour.

Although parents were generally satisfied with the manner in which schools managed discipline issues, some felt that schools should take a firmer and more consistent approach to discipline, rather than depending on the parents' intervention to resolve issues. Principals identified the need for specialist intervention for some students whose behavioural needs were beyond the scope of the regular behavioural management strategies used by schools.



## 6.2 Integration of Travellers in the schools

In general, principals, teachers and parents were satisfied with the manner in which Traveller children were integrated in the classroom and in school activities. However, some principals were concerned about the limited integration of Travellers in playground activities. They reported that Travellers chose to socialise together rather than with non-Travellers.

Many schools were uncertain about how to incorporate Traveller culture in the school curriculum and environment. They reported that Traveller parents expressed conflicting views about presenting Traveller culture in the school setting.

In primary schools, principals reported an increase in the involvement of Traveller pupils in after-school activities. Although the range of after-school activities was varied, participation was particularly evident in sports activities. Traveller parents were pleased with the opportunities afforded to their children in this regard.

## 6.3 Planning

The quality of whole-school planning was good in more than half the schools. Where planning was good, whole-school plans included some reference to the specific needs of Traveller pupils. In these schools policies included a rationale for providing additional support for Traveller pupils with special educational needs, and the aims and objectives of this support were carefully outlined.

Teachers' planning was good or very good in 65 per cent of instances, and the inspectors reported that interesting curriculum activities and learning experiences were outlined for all pupils. Although many Traveller pupils were found to have learning needs in literacy and numeracy, systematic planning for teaching and learning was not available in a third of classrooms. In many instances pupils' achievement was not regularly measured or monitored, and specific learning targets were not identified.

Two-thirds of resource teachers prepared an individual planning and learning programme (IPLP) for the Traveller pupils who were receiving supplementary teaching. They included clear, specific objectives for individual pupils in language, literacy, numeracy, and SPHE. There was much variation in practice, with some resource teachers setting learning objectives for a number of the pupils assigned to them but not for others. Details of teaching methodologies were provided in a minority of classrooms only. Fewer than half the resource teachers maintained records of pupils' progress and achievement. A small number of resource teachers had not completed any written planning.

## 6.4 Quality of teaching and learning

In a small number of primary schools the inspectors found that the resource teachers were working in classrooms alongside their mainstream colleagues. This approach was found

mainly in the junior classes. However, most resource teachers withdrew Traveller pupils for supplementary teaching. Slightly more than half the class teachers and resource teachers shared responsibility for the planning of pupils' programmes and evaluation of their progress.

In primary schools the quality of teaching was good or very good in 60 per cent of mainstream and resource-teaching classrooms. Teachers had developed good relations with the pupils and devised interesting activities. Where it was found that there was scope for development in the quality of teaching, there was little evidence of a planned incremental programme, and pupils were often assigned tasks that did not facilitate significant new learning. Providing a differentiated curriculum for nomadic pupils presented a considerable challenge for schools.

In post-primary schools the quality of teaching was good or very good in the small number of classrooms reviewed. The teachers had devised appropriate learning activities and, where necessary, had differentiated their programmes to cater for the significant learning needs of their pupils.

## 6.5 Achievement and assessment

A high proportion of Traveller pupils performed in the bottom quintile on standardised tests of literacy and numeracy in each of the primary schools surveyed. Assessment data were not available for almost 25 per cent of pupils in reading and 30 per cent of pupils in mathematics. Many were reported to be unable to undertake the test, or were absent during testing. These findings should be of concern to policy-makers, school managements and teachers in view of the importance of literacy and numeracy as springboards for access to other curricular areas. It is also a cause of concern that serious learning difficulties persist, even though two-thirds of Traveller pupils have access to supplementary teaching from resource teachers, learning-support teachers, and teachers for children with special educational needs.

In the general population the incidence of special educational needs is in the 4–6 per cent range, depending on the categories and the definitions used. However, it was found in this survey that just over 20 per cent of Traveller pupils were assessed by an educational psychologist or other clinician as having special educational needs.

Members of both primary and post-primary teaching staff referred to the low expectations that Traveller parents have of education. Conversely, Traveller parents felt that some teachers had low expectations for the children. School principals stated that literacy and numeracy should be a priority for Traveller pupils. They made various suggestions for improved provision, including the availability of appropriate pre-schooling, the enhanced involvement of parents in the education system, and increased levels of financial and staffing support for schools with larger numbers of Traveller pupils.

Most schools had written policies on assessment. In many instances these did not specifically refer to the particular needs of Travellers. Some schools employed a limited

range of assessment approaches, and there was confusion in a number of schools regarding which tests to use and how to develop teaching and learning programmes once assessment results were ascertained.

## 6.6 Selection of pupils for supplementary teaching

In the majority of schools Traveller pupils were selected for supplementary teaching in accordance with the recommendations given in the Learning Support Guidelines. However, in some instances the schools had not ascertained the level of need of the pupils. Occasionally, Traveller pupils were withdrawn for additional literacy and numeracy support where there was no obvious educational reason for doing so. More than half the resource teachers for Travellers withdrew Traveller pupils in segregated groups for supplementary teaching.

## 6.7 The role of the visiting teacher for Travellers

Principals and parents acknowledged the achievement of the visiting teachers for Travellers in encouraging the up-take of primary education for Traveller pupils. Through their intervention, Traveller children were starting primary school at a more appropriate age, and an increasing number of pupils were transferring to post-primary school. Many Travellers were integrating successfully in mainstream classes and receiving extra support, where required.

Many principals and visiting teachers were of the view that the role of the visiting teacher for Travellers requires clarification. They suggested that a refocusing of the role is required in the light of the establishment of the National Educational Welfare Board and the appointment of NEWB personnel. Principals and visiting teachers both felt that their emphasis should now be on pre-school and post-primary provision and on raising the attainment levels of all Traveller children

## 6.8 Recommendations

### The Department of Education and Science – Regional Office

- Additional information should be provided and disseminated to all parents, including Traveller parents, of their right of appeal to the Secretary General of the Department of Education and Science, under section 29 of the Education Act 1998, against board of management decisions regarding exclusion, suspension (if it is over 20 days in the course of a school year) or refusal to enrol. In the first instance, schools should notify parents of the right of appeal and its associated timeframe.

### National Educational Welfare Board

- The National Educational Welfare Board (NEWB) should pay particular attention to Travellers who do not transfer to post-primary school and to students who 'drop out' of post-primary school before the completion of the junior cycle.
- The National Educational Welfare Board should collaborate with boards of management, principals and teachers in the development of effective responses to the serious levels of absenteeism that affect some schools. Parents should be made aware of their rights and responsibilities and in particular of the requirement to send their children to school daily. In this regard, the Home School Community Liaison Scheme and the School Completion Programme have important roles to play in supporting schools in the development and implementation of effective school attendance strategies and in promoting the development of a culture of attendance.

### Boards of management and schools

- Schools should notify parents of their enrolment procedures and provide parents with a written enrolment policy. Schools should also inform parents of their right of appeal Board of Management's decisions regarding exclusion, suspension (if it is over 20 days in the course of a school year) or refusal to enrol and the associated timeframe to appeal.
- The information provided by schools on their policies and procedures should be available in accessible formats and the needs of a small number of parents, from diverse backgrounds, who may have limited literacy skills should be considered.
- All school enrolment policies should outline specific actions to promote attendance and an inclusive ethos.
- Schools should urgently address the development of focused attendance strategies, as required under section 22 of the Education (Welfare) Act (2000). Schools should systematically monitor and report children's attendance, devise strategies that identify, at an early stage, children who are at risk of absenteeism, and establish closer contacts with the families concerned.
- The practice of requiring pupils to repeat class levels must only be exercised in exceptional circumstances and in compliance with the terms of Circular 11/01 (DES). The Circular stipulates that in those exceptional circumstances, schools must prepare documentation to substantiate their decision to retain a pupil for an additional year and they must outline a specific programme of work for the pupil. The documentation should be retained carefully and inspectors from the Department of Education and Science should examine such documentation on their visits to schools.
- All schools should, in compliance with the Education Act 1998, have a school plan. Section 21(2) of the Act states that the school plan must outline its objectives relating

to equality and the measures it will take to achieve those objectives. Whole-school policies should reflect a commitment to celebrate diversity, promote interculturalism and be sensitive to the needs of Traveller parents and pupils. The school plan and policy documents should be ratified by the board of management and be made available to all parents in a variety of media. The implementation of these plans should be reviewed regularly and amended as deemed necessary.

- Many Traveller children experience difficulties in completing homework. There is a great need to expand the provision of homework clubs and other support structures in schools that facilitate pupils completing assigned work. The involvement of adult Travellers in homework support groups is recommended
- Boards of management should put in place measures to ensure that Traveller parents have the opportunities to meet the principal and teachers and discuss the educational progress of their children and other pertinent issues. Such access should be facilitated by the VTT and the in-school personnel.

### The principal and teachers

- The scale of low achievement in literacy and numeracy among Traveller pupils at primary level requires urgent attention. All schools should have high expectations of children's academic achievement and should convey these to the Traveller pupils and parents. Schools should prepare programmes for pupils who are experiencing literacy and numeracy problems and these programmes must include appropriate targets, learning outcomes and timescales for incremental improvement in attainment.
- Resource teachers for Travellers should devise individual learning plans in respect of every child availing of additional teaching support and their parents should be consulted in this process. Class teachers, resource teachers, learning support teachers, the home-school-community liaison co-ordinator, the visiting teacher for Travellers and others should ensure that teaching and learning programmes that meet the educational needs of all children, including Traveller children are implemented. School principals should co-ordinate and oversee this process and review the effectiveness of the learning plans and the progress made by pupils.
- Principals and teachers should ascertain the achievement levels of all their pupils including their Traveller pupils. The effective assessment of children's learning and of teaching methodologies should be viewed as a key professional skill for teachers. Where pupils are absent on the day of an assessment, other in-school arrangements should be made to assess the pupil on their return to school.
- The practice of withdrawing Traveller pupils for supplementary support needs to be re-examined in primary schools. Pupils should be taught in their own class setting and only withdrawn in exceptional circumstances for periods of limited duration. Where possible, resource teachers for Travellers should work alongside the class

teacher in the mainstream classroom. Both class teachers and resource teachers for Travellers should be provided with the support and training necessary in order to optimise the benefits of working in this integrated manner.

- In exceptional circumstances, where the principal teacher in consultation with the class teacher and the resource teacher deems the withdrawal of pupils necessary, Traveller pupils should be withdrawn in integrated groups and prior parental approval should be obtained.
- In exceptional circumstances, where the withdrawal of pupils is necessary for intensive periods of supplementary support, it is recommended that the pupil is withdrawn from their mainstream classroom by only one support teacher and not by a number of different teachers. This facilitates collaboration and planning between the class teacher and the supporting teacher and also between the teachers and the parents. Traveller pupils should not be withdrawn for supplementary support based on identity but only if there is an identified educational need.
- Concerns were expressed during the survey that some Travellers in primary and post-primary schools do not access the full curriculum. Schools should be sensitive to the fact that children, if they must be withdrawn from class for learning support, should not have any particular area of the curriculum neglected. Team-teaching approaches, which are a feature of the work of a number of schools at present, need to be further developed to ensure that all Traveller children access the full curriculum.
- Schools should provide Traveller students with learning activities that involve experiential learning and that link with 'real-life' contexts. Guidance counsellors should work with students in post-primary schools to support them through the initial period of their second-level education and to assist students to make appropriate subject choices and to develop good study habits.
- Traveller culture should be an integral part of the intercultural curriculum and be represented positively in each school.

### Traveller parents

- Traveller parents must recognise the importance of education to enable their children to reach their full educational potential and for personal, social and economic reasons. Traveller parents should understand their responsibilities in ensuring that their children access and participate in education. Further, Traveller parents must acknowledge that they have a responsibility to ensure that their children attend school regularly.
- Traveller parents should recognise the important role they have to play in supporting teachers and schools in providing a broadly-based education for their children. Parents should have high expectations for their children and motivate them to develop their range of intelligences and skills. They should liaise with guidance counsellors, home school community liaison co-ordinators and the staff employed by

the School Completion Programme to ensure that their children are accessing the range of academic and non-academic supports that are available in many schools.

### National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA)

- The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment should provide guidance to schools in respect of the assessment procedures that would be most effective in ascertaining the attainment levels of Traveller pupils. The various support services, including the Primary Curriculum Support Programme and the School Development Planning Initiative together with relevant agencies should assist schools in implementing assessment for learning strategies.
- The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment should be requested to devise alternative programmes to meet the needs of students who have difficulties participating in full-time mainstream education. This could include varied pathways to ensure that all students access a curriculum appropriate to their needs. Consideration should be given to staged approaches to skill development, the provision of foundation courses presented in modular format with significant elements of experiential learning and part-time attendance at school and FAS training programmes.
- Innovative ways of delivering curricular programmes through distance learning and one-to-one tuition should be considered by the NCCA for nomadic students. Information and communication technologies should be used to provide nomadic students with opportunities to study and to continue their formal education.
- The recent publication of *Intercultural Education in the Primary School* (NCCA, 2005) is a positive development in assisting primary schools to promote an inclusive school culture. The NCCA should prioritise the publication of guidelines on intercultural education for post-primary schools.

### National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS)

- The disproportionate number of Traveller pupils assessed as having a general learning disability should be investigated. The National Educational Psychological Service should advise on the appropriateness of psychological tests as the basis for identifying Traveller children with special educational needs, and whether a cultural bias in such tests may be a factor in the high proportion of Traveller pupils identified as having special educational needs. Where appropriate assessment tools are not available, the NEPS should commission the creation of new tests to facilitate the psychological assessment of Travellers.
- NEPS should provide schools with additional supports in areas such as classroom-based assessment, the interpretation of standardised test results and the identification of learning difficulties.

- Schools with a significant number of Traveller pupils enrolled should have increased access to the psychological and counselling services for Traveller pupils whose behaviour is particularly inappropriate.
- Psychologists should work with principals, teachers, visiting teachers, students and parents in devising and implementing initiatives that would contribute to the building of Traveller students' self-esteem, confidence, social skills and a sense of belonging in the school community. School personnel, supported by psychologists, together with parents and students should devise and implement initiatives that would facilitate the full integration of Traveller and non-Traveller students in recreational and social activities.

### School Completion Programme

- Procedures need to be established in schools to minimise early school leaving. These procedures would involve personnel from different DES support services and co-ordinated by the School Completion Programme in consultation with the Visiting Teacher for Travellers Service and NEPS. These support personnel should work collaboratively with in-school teams including the principal, pastoral care team, the guidance counsellors, school chaplains and year heads to plan preventative programmes so that the necessary supports are provided to ensure that students at risk are retained in school.

### Health Service Executive

- Schools with numbers of Traveller pupils enrolled should have increased access to the psychological and speech therapy services and access to counselling services for Traveller pupils and for those whose behaviour is particularly inappropriate. These resources should be provided by the Health Service Executive.

### Visiting Teacher Service

- The role of the visiting teachers for Travellers should deal specifically with facilitating the involvement of Traveller parents in education. Practical measures to promote the involvement of parents as partners in education should be explored.
- Information about post-primary education generally and local post-primary education options should be provided to Traveller parents by the visiting teachers, schools, DES regional offices, and education centres. The needs of parents with limited literacy skills should be considered, and information should be provided in accessible formats.
- It is recommended that the Visiting Teacher Service should develop a record of learning for nomadic children. Each school the pupil attends should maintain the



record and it should be made available on enrolment to new schools. This would facilitate continuity in provision for the child and alert schools to any additional learning needs that the child may have.

- The Visiting Teacher Service should work with principals, teachers and parents in devising and implementing initiatives that will facilitate the full-integration of Traveller pupils and non-Traveller pupils in recreational activities.
- The role of the Visiting Teachers for Travellers Service should be reviewed and clarified. It is recommended that the visiting teachers should concentrate their resources on working with schools to
  - improve pupils' achievement,
  - improve pupils' regular attendance,
  - ensure the transfer of all pupils to post-primary schools,
  - support principal teachers and teachers in assisting pupils to settle into post-primary schools,
  - encourage students to remain in second-level education,
  - support schools in devising learning programmes and in managing pupils' behaviour,
  - involve parents as partners in education, and
  - ensure that young children have access to pre-school education.

### Professional development support

Principals, post of responsibility holders, teachers and other personnel in schools will require professional development support to enable them to provide for Traveller students and to optimise the supplementary resources available to them.

- Schools need support and training in relation to intercultural education. The recent publication of *Intercultural Education in the Primary School* (NCCA, 2005) will be helpful to schools in this regard. However, continuing professional development of teachers is needed to address this issue. This will complement the very comprehensive Guidelines on *Traveller Education in Primary Schools and Guidelines on Traveller Education in Second-Level Schools* which were published in 2002.
- Additional support is required to assist teachers to develop their pedagogical skills including teaching methodologies and practices, assessment strategies, attainment related target-setting, promoting learner engagement and motivation and collaborative working. (DEIS, 2005, p.61)

## **6.10 Conclusion**

The report acknowledges the significant progress that schools, the support services, the Department of Education and Science and parents have achieved in respect of the increased participation of Traveller children in the education system and the improved transfer rates of children from primary to post-primary schools. Many schools are providing good supports for children including homework clubs, after-school activities, counselling services, and a proactive approach to improving school attendance.

The survey indicates that there remains significant scope for improvement in the educational provision for Travellers in primary and post-primary schools. The data generated by this survey indicates that absenteeism rates remain a major problem for Traveller pupils in primary and post-primary schools. In addition, the majority of Traveller pupils have very low attainment levels in literacy and numeracy. Travellers' participation in post-primary education is limited by this low attainment and many are alienated from the education system and leave school early. Some Traveller parents are reported to have low expectations of schools and of their own children's ability to benefit from the education system. Some schools have not addressed how best to include Traveller children and their culture in the life of the school.

High levels of learning difficulties and special educational needs were identified among the Traveller children surveyed and there is evidence that Traveller children receive supplementary teaching through a system of withdrawal from the mainstream classroom. While teachers recognise the benefit accruing from the provision of supplementary teaching within the classroom, there is a need to support teachers through additional training and inservice to improve practice in this regard.

This survey illustrates the many challenges that persist in the provision of appropriate education for Traveller children in schools. These challenges must now be addressed through a co-ordinated strategy that is spearheaded by the Department of Education and Science and supported by Traveller parents, schools and the support services. The education system must now focus not only on equality of access for the Traveller child but also on increased attainment and fuller participation in the life of the school.

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