



Submission to the Joint Committee on Education and Skills regarding the progression by Member of the Traveller Community to second-level and third-level education.

25 February 2019

About The Yellow Flag Programme

The Irish Traveller Movement (ITM) is a national network of organisations and individuals working to seek full equality for Travellers in Irish society. The Yellow Flag Programme is an innovative whole school initiative which supports schools to celebrate diversity, promote inclusion and challenge racism. Whilst the Yellow Flag was pioneered by the ITM as an intercultural innovative solution to addressing poor educational experiences and outcomes for Travellers and other ethnic minorities in the education system, ITM recognised that similar exclusion or marginalised could be faced by other ethnic minorities and developed a programme that promotes the inclusion of all children from both majority and minorities backgrounds, as well as Traveller children.

The vision of the Yellow Flag is to create a world where all children learn to celebrate and value difference. It does this by supporting whole school communities through a comprehensive 8 step programme towards achieving a physical flag in recognition of their work in promoting diversity and inclusion.

Since its establishment the Irish Traveller Movement has been keenly aware of the importance of supporting inclusion and diversity within Irish schools. In the absence of any other similar initiative, it sought to develop a practical schools-based programme aimed at:

- 1) Supporting children to develop a sense of pride in their own culture and identity and learn about other children's culture
- 2) Supporting schools in the development of an environment in which all children thrive and where unfair discrimination and racism is challenged
- 3) Encouraging and promoting active partnership, engagement and effective communication between teachers, students, parents and community.

The Yellow Flag Programme – a unique model

It is important to note that there are no other programmes like Yellow Flag currently operating in Ireland, it has increased its reach, and to date, has worked with 88 schools across 13 counties, reaching over 30,000 students and in excess of 2,500 teachers. It was also piloted in a College of Education, Froebel College in Blackrock in 2012 and a number of third level institutions have looked to

work in partnership with the Yellow Flag – however to date, funding has not been achieved to carry out this work.

Positive Impacts of Yellow Flag Programme

Positive reception by schools, students and teachers

Schools are very positive about their experience with the Yellow Flag – students, teachers and parents really and articulate differences in the schools as a consequence. Schools are asked to renew their Yellow Flag after 3 years and are externally reviewed again – schools show that they continue to work to improve their intercultural practice and deepen their understanding of cultural dynamics and what they can do to continue to build inclusion.

Connections built between schools and Traveller and migrant organisations in the community

One of the key benefits to emerge from the programme is the building of relationships and connections between schools and local Traveller and migrant organisations in the community. These links endure after the schools have completed their Yellow Flag

How Yellow Flag Programme works

The Yellow Flag Programme is a whole-school initiative which operates through an interactive and cooperative approach of students, staff, management, parents and wider community groups so that issues of diversity and equality are not merely seen as “school subjects” but can be understood and taken outside the school setting into everyone’s personal lives, creating an environment for inclusion with a long term impact on wider society.

The eight step programme is based on a similar model to the Green Schools environmental programme - a practical step-based programme with an award incentive. Schools apply the steps to the day to day running of the school. Following completion of the 8 steps and external assessment, the school is awarded a Yellow Flag in recognition of its work in promoting diversity & inclusion.

The 8 practical steps of the programme are:

1. Getting Started and Keeping Track
2. Diversity Committee
3. Equality and Diversity Training
4. The Intercultural Review
5. The Action Plan
6. Going Beyond the School Walls
7. Classroom Work
8. Diversity Code and Policy Review

The programme is led by the Diversity Committee with the support of designated link teachers and the school is supported through the programme by ITM’s Yellow Flag Team. Schools apply to the Yellow Flag Programme annually and are accepted if they meet certain criteria for the programme **and** if funding can be raised to support their participation – usually through local authorities and/or local development companies.

Yellow Flag and Travellers

Yellow Flag impacts all members of the school community, including ethnic minority students and their families. As an ITM initiative and programme, the Yellow Flag benefits from ITM’s knowledge

and insight into the realities of Travellers lives (documented and anecdotal) and the particular prejudice they experience. Appended to this document are some stark statistics about Travellers experience within the education system; including low retention and progression rates and high levels of reporting of experiencing racism at school (40%). Yellow Flag was devised as a response to ITM members reporting of these experiences and the clear need for a programme that would address the very negative experience of Travellers within the education system.

Factors such as conscious and unconscious bias, exclusion on the basis of identity, historical prejudice, absence of Travellers in teaching and school management, institutional racism and poor awareness or knowledge of Traveller culture have a highly detrimental effect on young people's education and learning but also on their sense of identity and self-belief. **The Yellow Flag was developed on the premise that a consideration within school communities of the attitudes, policies and practices of schools and how they influence daily school life is essential to building positive inclusive educational environments, in addition to the adoption of national intercultural/anti-racism policies and regulation.** This informed the comprehensive, whole school and practical approach adopted by the Yellow Flag programme.

In addition, the Yellow Flag team includes Traveller and other ethnic minorities as part of the staff team the panel of intercultural Yellow Flag trainers that visit schools. The Yellow Flag encourages the participation of students and parents from minority and majority communities in the schools Yellow Flag process and Traveller parents often come forward as parent representatives on the Diversity Committee, which creates an important and positive learning dynamic.

Challenges to programme and Recommendations

Traveller students continue to face discrimination in schools

Reports of discrimination in education settings – which range from name-calling, to physical assault, to social exclusion and institutional practices which reduce Traveller student timetables or segregate them from other students are frequently reported to Yellow Flag. ITM is very conscious of the need to expand the Yellow Flag and to strengthen the impact it can have on the education system in Ireland.

Combating Traveller “identity” based bullying

YF recommend that future research and surveys on anti-racism/anti-bullying etc. include an ethnic identifier for Travellers. This will provide segregated data on the impact of bullying on particular ‘at risk’ groups including Travellers and identify gaps in information, i.e. if no Travellers or non-Irish national groups participated in a survey (which was the case in the consultation on the Anti Bullying Policy of the DES) it will identify the need to look at other mechanisms to ensure their views and experiences get included.

Terms and descriptions

A key concern for Yellow Flag is the crisis of identity being experienced by young Travellers, manifesting in many hiding their identity/changing their accent in school, and or never mentioning their Traveller background, for fear of being treated less favourably by teaching staff and their fellow students and or experience bullying, racism and discrimination.

The misuse of the term ‘Settled Traveller’ in particular has been evidenced through feedback with Primary and Secondary schools via the Yellow Flag programme. **For example:** School personnel in response to a question as to number, if any, of Travellers within their school state

initially “No” followed by “*but we do have a few settled Travellers*”. This term and narrative denies Travellers their identity, when they reside in a home, which is not a trailer / halting site., affecting young Travelers self-esteem. This consolidates a reality where Traveller students interact within an education system which does not acknowledge their culture, history or way of life- so the life they identify with – is invisible to them in school.

An anti-bullying education programme, not just guidelines, could be introduced in every school.

Students could be issued with annual questionnaires; by administering annual/bi-annual questionnaires to young people in the Schools the level of bullying within the School can be monitored. This approach will also give a School an indication whether its long term strategy to combat bullying and the anti-bullying policy are effective.

Tackling racism and discrimination

‘Anti-racism education is not an end in itself but rather the beginning of a new approach to thinking, acting and feeling’. Anti-Racism and Interculturalism Awareness Training should form part of initial teacher education and colleges of education should adapt their current modules to include this and the DES should provide regular and comprehensive training at in-service level on intercultural and diversity issues.

Restricted Resources

The Yellow Flag has been able to secure grants from a number of statutory and non-statutory sources but as of yet, it does not have a mainstream or multi-annual source of funding and an associated scale and growth strategy. Consequently, our ability to achieve a vision to support every school in the country to fly a yellow flag is curtailed. There is currently a backlog of approximately 80 schools who have applied to the Yellow Flag Programme but we are unable to take on.

Lack of concrete connection with Department of Education and Skills

As has been stated, the Yellow Flag is a practical programme which complements a number of policy objectives of the Department of Education and Skills in relation to interculturalism and Traveller education and participation in education. However, there is no clear link between the Department and the Yellow Flag, in spite of its successes over 10 years and in spite of efforts to establish links.

Bias and discrimination amongst Teachers and school management

Even with all of the resources the Yellow Flag can offer, it can be hard to challenge amongst teachers and school managers, which can be either conscious and sometimes unconscious or hidden bias. Mandatory anti-racist/intercultural training or continuous professional development for teaching staff has been proposed in a number of statutory policies but is not available in practice.

Model could be developed for pre-school and third level settings

To really impact Traveller participation, retention and progression in the education system, it would be valuable to introduce a Yellow Flag model for pre-school and third level settings. Again, funding restrictions and lack of access to a scalability model has impeded this to date

National Policy and Complementarity of Yellow Flag Programme

The Yellow Flag is an initiative which provides a practical complement to a number of national policies in relation to education:

- **National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy (NTRIS) 2017-2021**

NTRIS sets out 5 themes and objectives and 23 actions in relation to its stated key developments and initiatives to *“investment by the State in community-based support mechanisms to ensure greater retention of Traveller and Roma children and youths in the education system”*;

- **Department of Education Intercultural Education Strategy (2010-2015)**

Yellow Flag Linked to 10 components and 5 key goals in meeting its aims:

1. *All students experience an education that “respects the diversity of values, beliefs, languages and traditions in Irish society and is conducted in a spirit of partnership” (Education Act, 1988)*
2. *All education providers are assisted with ensuring that inclusion and integration within an intercultural learning environment become the norm.*

- **Better Outcomes Brighter Futures (2014-2020)**

Yellow Flag Programme puts into practice many of the principles promoted by the strategy particular in relation to national outcomes *achieving full potential in all areas of learning and development* and being *connected, respected & contributing to their world.*

- **Department of Education & Skills Action Plan on Bullying, 2013**

In its work with schools, the Yellow Flag supports the implementation of the DES Action Plan on Bullying and provides expertise on specific forms of identity based bullying to include anti-Traveller bullying and encourages schools to review and improve their ‘mandatory’ school anti-bullying policy

- **Report and Recommendations for a Traveller Education Strategy published 2006**

Although neither a strategy nor a review of the report and recommendations were published, the Yellow Flag has been active programme which supports virtually every proposed plan of action contained in the report.

Appendix A

Relevant facts and Figures in relation to Travellers in education

Census Ireland found in 2016

- Out of a population of 30,987 Travellers living in Ireland, 58.1% are under the age of 25, compared with 33.4% in the general population
- Just 13.3% of female Travellers were educated to upper secondary level or above, compared with almost 7 in 10 (69.1%) of the general population.
- (57.2%) Of male Travellers were educated only to primary level.
- Only 167 Travellers (0.5%) have a third-level qualification.
- 4 Out of 10 Travellers said they were bullied in school (National Traveller Survey 2017)

The Department of Education POD system- Primary Online Database - became effective from Sept 2016. Information related to Travellers is collected as one of two optional fields of data as these are considered sensitive personal information under the Data Protection Acts, they can only be recorded

on POD with the explicit written consent of the pupil's parent(s) or guardian(s). **Irish Travellers recorded in Primary 2016/2017**

Mainstream schools: Female 3,828, Mainstream Male 3,974, = Total: **7,802**

In primary Special education schools, Female 73, Male 105 =Total: **178**

In 2017 the Department of Justice and Equality commissioned an ERSI report 'A Social Portrait of Travellers' which found

- Travellers are over 50 times more likely to leave school without the Leaving Certificate in comparison to the non-Traveller population.
- Only 8% of working-age Travellers compared to 73% of non-Travellers have reached leaving certificate and only (9%) of Travellers aged 25-34 have completed second level education compared with 86% nationally.
- 40% of Travellers indicated they or their children had been bullied at school based on their identity