

PRESS RELEASE – ROMA SUPPORT GROUP

OFSTED REPORT ON ROMA PUPILS IN ENGLISH SCHOOLS (publication date, 16 December 2014)

In 2012, the Coalition government proposed 28 “measures” which it suggested would “...help mainstream services work better with Gypsies and Travellers.” These measures spanned the work of the Dept for Education, the Home Office, the Dept for Work and Pensions, the Dept for Communities and Local Government, the Ministry of Justice and the Dept of Health. Roma featured only in the six education-related measures. One of these measures recommended publicising the best examples of schools with successful practice for involving and supporting Gypsy, Roma, Traveller children and families. It said:

The Department for Education has approached some of the higher performing primary and secondary schools for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils to find out from them what lies behind their success. The Department for Education will collect and publish brief case studies from each of these schools to be shared with schools, local authorities and education professionals around the country.

This might have been expected to have been a thorough exercise. It published the “case studies” this September¹; it consists of very short synopses of four primary schools – in Gloucestershire, Cambridgeshire and Kent. Only one of these schools has a presence of migrant Roma pupils. See the extracts from these four primary schools latest Ofsted reports (attached, appendix 1).

We are pleased that Ofsted indicated their interest earlier this spring in exploring best practice for Roma pupil inclusion. Roma Support Group, and other national agencies like NATT+, supported the collection of evidence and spent time talking to the Ofsted inspector/researcher. We were told that an initial draft would be produced in May 2014, with a final publication date of July 2014. In September, it was awaiting final clearance for publication and the (revised) publication date of September was subject to slippage.

At a DfE stakeholder meeting last month, the Ofsted inspector/researcher said,

...Ofsted is carrying out two surveys, one good practice survey about schools that have made positive differences to their GRT pupils; and the other looking specifically at Roma migration in Derby, Sheffield and Manchester.

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/case-studies/gypsy-roma-and-traveller-pupils-supporting-access-to-education>

However, this proposed publication coincides with a new Government offensive aimed at further restricting the rights of EU migrant workers. The Prime Minister made his long expected speech on immigration on 28 November. During the speech he made the following familiar tropes:

There are secondary schools where the turnover of pupils can be as high as one third of the entire school in a year. There are primary schools where dozens of languages are spoken with only a small minority speaking English as their first language.

The Roma Support Group and friends are extremely worried that a worthwhile Ofsted report on Roma pupils' experience of the UK educational system will be used as a stick to beat poor EU migrant children and their families. For this reason, with the Traveller Movement, ACERT², and a former lead HMI for Gypsy and Traveller pupils, we urged Sir Michael Wilshaw to reconsider Ofsted's approach to this report.

The letter concluded by saying:

It is our belief that it would be far more preferable for this valuable material to be re-incorporated with the rest of HMI's evidence and for a non-discriminatory Ofsted report to be published that would focus on good practice for all Gypsy, Roma and Traveller groups. We would also ask for Ofsted to be mindful of the impact publication of this report might have on these communities and to do everything in its power to reduce any risks to the safety and wellbeing of Roma children and their families.

Roma Support Group is aware that all the participating schools and local authorities have been briefed about the contents of the report last week. However, no member of the DfE's consultative stakeholder group on Gypsy, Roma, Traveller education have seen even a draft of this report.

We are pleased that the report acknowledges;

- that Roma pupils who have been to schools in the UK for some time "made good progress in their learning";
- that schools are welcoming to all new students and are committed to improving the achievement of Roma pupils;
- and that the presence of Roma pupils "has...no adverse effect on the achievement of other pupils..." All of us become stronger through differences in school.

We note that the report says;

² Advisory Council for the Education of Romany and other Travellers

- the effectiveness of schools is limited by “...struggling to find the necessary resources to fully meet Roma pupils’ needs”, and
- the relative absence of experienced teaching staff dedicated to the needs of Roma pupils learning English, and
- the decline of specialist educational support services to support newly arriving migrant and minority communities, like the European migrant Roma

Finally, we note that the report does refer to an issue the Prime Minister raised re students’ mobility, but correctly identified that the solution to this problem lies in helping schools access the resources required to respond to pupils and families experiencing mobility, in large part due to the poverty faced by families. We also note that the report does not draw any negative conclusion about the Roma presence in school, including Roma pupils who might have a first language in Romanes, Czech or Slovak.

We will be making no further comment on 18 December, but will happily provide commentary early in the New Year.

ends

Appendix 1

Extracts from latest Ofsted reports on the four “case study” primary schools, recently profiled by the DfE.

Kingsholm Primary

Ofsted: May 2013

The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic heritages and Travellers is well above average.

However, some lengthy periods of absence disrupt the education of the well above average proportion of Traveller pupils in the school and this has a negative effect on their overall progress. In addition, the effect of some extended visits abroad by families from minority ethnic heritages has restricted the overall attainment of both these groups of pupils.

However, the school caters extremely well for these pupils, including those whose first language is not English, and for Traveller families and ensures that when they are in school they make good progress. Parents and carers are very appreciative of the support their children receive.

The school is extremely well led by the head teacher who is ably supported by the deputy head teacher and senior leaders. Leadership is successfully shared across many levels. All staff enthusiastically work together to secure improvements. The school is very popular with parents and carers, including those from Traveller families who feel supported by the leaders and staff.

There has been a sharp increase in the number of pupils attending the school since the last inspection and it is now a three-form entry school.

Shirley Primary

Ofsted: Jan 2014

Summary – key findings:

Pupils from traveller families are well supported by committed staff and make good progress.

About half the school’s pupils are White British. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups is much higher than found nationally.

One-fifth of the pupils are from the traveller community

Traveller pupils make good progress. This is because the school has good arrangements for their continuing education when travelling and for supporting them on their return. When

they are not travelling, their regular attendance sustains their good progress. Pupils from minority ethnic groups and those whose first language is other than English make similar rates of progress to other pupils.

Attendance for the non-traveller pupils is broadly average. The attendance of travellers has increased significantly over the last four years. Pupils enjoy school and see the advantages of regular education. One said, 'Teachers give us a chance.'

The governor overseeing the achievements of traveller pupils gives important messages to the traveller community about the value of attending school regularly, with positive results.

Wisbech St Mary's primary

Ofsted: May 2012

This is a smaller-than-average-sized primary school. Most pupils are of White British origin but a small proportion are from ethnic minority groups, including a small number from Traveller families.

Pupils' backgrounds are valued. A good example is the Traveller Heritage Week with a range of activities where pupils find out about wagons, traditional flower making and listen to Romany stories.

Parkside primary Kent

Most pupils are from White British backgrounds and a much higher proportion than found nationally is of Romany or Gypsy heritage. The proportion who speaks English as an additional language is below the national average.

The vast majority of parents and carers say their children make good progress. Pupils' achievement, including for those supported by the pupil premium and those of Romany or Gypsy heritage, is good and improving across the school. However, too few pupils are attaining the higher levels in the key stage tests for achievement to be outstanding.