

Additional Educational Needs Team
Department of Education
Rathgael House
43 Balloo Road
Bangor
BT19 7PR

Re: The Traveller Child in Education – Action Framework Consultation

FAO: AEN Team

The principal aim of the NI Commissioner for Children and Young People as set up under ‘The Commissioner for Children and Young People (Northern Ireland) Order’ (2003) is to safeguard and promote the rights and best interests of children and young people. To achieve this the Order provides my office with a range of duties and powers. Under articles 7(2)(3) of this legislation, NICCY has a mandate to keep under review the adequacy and effectiveness of law, practice and services relating to those in respect of children and young people by relevant authorities. Article 7(4)(b) the Order also enables me to provide advice on such occasions as appropriate / necessary.

NICCY welcomes the Action Framework setting out the 18 recommendations in response to those in the Task Force report and also the 22 Actions as set out in the framework document itself and supports the Ministerial intent ‘to ensure that Traveller children have the opportunity to benefit from the educational opportunities on offer, and to give them the best possible start in life’

Given acknowledgement that ‘for generations (Traveller Children and Young People) suffered educational disadvantage and left school with either low level or no qualifications’¹, it is encouraging to read of the Minister’s ‘determin(ation) that progress will be made on this journey towards full inclusion and equality’ and the importance of ensuring ‘the actions we are taking to encourage and support Traveller education are the right ones.’ Having highlighted issues in education for Traveller Children and Young people over recent years I concur with and support such focus.

¹ Traveller pupils continue to have exceptionally poor educational outcomes with only 11 school leavers over the six year period 2003/04 to 2009/10 achieving at least 5 A*-C GCSEs. Data also shows that attendance continues to be poor and many children of Traveller families leave school early. In 2010/11 only 37 Traveller pupils were enrolled in Year 12 compared with 86 in Year 1 and the average attendance of those 37 pupils was less than 51%. [Consultation Document on ‘The Traveller Child in Education – Action Framework’].

NICCY Work on Education Issues for Travellers

As stated I have previously highlighted issues in education for Traveller Children and Young People over a number of years including:

- NICCY's Children's Rights Review – see section on the Education of Traveller children (January 2009)
<http://www.niccy.org/article.aspx?menuid=3402>
- Response to DE on the Draft School Circular on the Education of Children and Young People from the Traveller Community (December 2009) -http://www.niccy.org/uploaded_docs/DE%20Response.pdf
- The research report jointly commissioned by NICCY/ECNI published in 2007 – Hamilton et al (2007) 'Adequacy and Effectiveness of Educational Provision for Traveller Children and Young People in Northern Ireland'.
<http://www.niccy.org/article.aspx?menuid=650>
- Submission to ECNI Draft strategy for the promotion of Traveller issues (July 2007)
http://www.niccy.org/uploaded_docs/Consultation%20Responses/Response%20to%20ECNI%20promotion%20of%20traveller%20issues.pdf
- Response to ECNI consultation on 'Mainstreaming Equality of Opportunity for Travellers in Education: Towards a Strategy' (June 2006)http://www.niccy.org/uploaded_docs/Consultation%20Responses/2007/Microsoft%20Word%20%20Mainstreaming%20Equality%20of%20Opportunities%20in%20Education%20for%20Travellers%20_ECNI_.pdf
- Ongoing meetings with DE Officials and Stakeholders.

In relation to this latest consultation NICCY wishes to highlight the following concerns / issues to the Department:

➤ **UNCRC Standards**

NICCY understands the Department is tasked with responsibility to uphold the rights of Traveller Children and Young People and welcomes the inclusion and reference to articles within the UNCRC but also believes the department should revisit the Convention standards as articles additional to those mentioned are relevant. We would also refer the department to the Concluding Observations made by the Committee on the Rights of the Child since last UK State reporting period in 2008.

I would appreciate clarification on the involvement of Children and Young people in this consultation process - I understand ELBs were to facilitate their engagement and participation. As you know I am keen to ensure the 'voice' of Children and Young People is heard in matters affecting them / their lives in line with Article 12 of the UNCRC.

➤ **Education Policy Context**

The document states ‘this Action Framework sits within the overall context of improving educational outcomes and contributes towards the delivery of ESaGS’. However, Specific reference to the ‘Traveller Child in Education’ and how the issues facing Travellers are addressed to meet the aims of this Framework appear to be absent from those policies mentioned as important/relevant in achieving same including:

- ESAGS;
- Extended Schools;
- CRED; and
- PfY.

NICCY would appreciate clarification on same.

➤ **The Role of DE and ESA**

The role of DE and ESA will obviously be very important to the ‘roll out’ of this strategy and associated action plans. There appears to be a lack of indication as to where responsibility for implementation will ‘sit’ under ESA. NICCY believes it necessary to integrate this work with that of the established Inclusion & Diversity Service and wider ethnic minority services.

➤ **The Role of the Inclusion & Diversity Service (IDS)**

NICCY understands the IDS have done significant work on developing models for teachers and schools in the wider ethnic minority context and therefore would appear to be ‘natural partners’. One would be concerned that duplication is avoided and good practice is incorporated during implementation of the action plan.

In relation to the pilot on professional development of Teachers in September 2013 - following the pilot conducted September – December 2012, I would be interested in the outcome of its evaluation.

The Role of Parents

Similarly I am aware of the need to support parents through flexible and culturally responsive approaches. Homework e.g. has been identified as a potential problem area, not only because, I am informed, it can often be inappropriate to the individual child's level of understanding, but because the worry, distress and even conflict caused in the home by uncompleted homework can exacerbate the child's or parent's attitude towards school and teachers because they know the child may be chastised in school for what is/is not happening out of school.

➤ **Teacher Training**

I am aware - having spoken to stakeholders working in this sector - of the need for anti-racism training for Teachers – as part of their initial training, early and

continuing professional development. I would stress the importance of school leadership in terms of proactively creating an inclusive and 'diversity respectful' ethos and environment which cannot be underestimated.

➤ **Equality Impact Assessment**

NICCY is concerned that no EQIA is to be carried out as 'no equality issues have been identified' as stated. It is crucial to acknowledge racism as experienced by Travellers which does not appear to be addressed in any significant way in the document. I would appreciate further details and clarification on same.

➤ **Traveller Education Support Service (TESS)**

While we appreciate the detailed outworking of this framework will be within a developing regional TESS and Action Plan as stated in the consultation document – NICCY understands some work has already been done by ELBs (e.g. SELB) yet the 'Action Plan' has very little detail. Reference is made to a further upcoming consultation on the 'detail' of this (i.e. the TESS plan) possibly in spring 2013? Concern remains that the regional service is only in development itself and its capacity and resources to deliver on the work are as yet unclear.

➤ **Resourcing**

Overall there appears to be a clear statement that additional financial resources are not being deployed by the Department in realizing of this Strategy and its aims. I would appreciate further detail on this.

Should you require further details please do not hesitate to contact my office. I look forward to hearing from you.

Patricia Lewsley-Mooney
NI Commissioner for Children & Young People