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Adequacy and Effectiveness of Educational Provision for Traveller Children and Young People in Northern Ireland

Commissioned by :

NICCY
northern ireland commissioner
for children and young people

Equality Commission

FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

The Adequacy and Effectiveness of Educational Provision for Traveller Children and Young People in Northern Ireland

**A Report for the
Northern Ireland Commissioner for
Children and Young People
and
Equality Commission for Northern Ireland**

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The views expressed herein are those of the authors

Executive Summary

Irish Travellers are recognised as a racial group specifically in Northern Ireland under Article 3 (a) of the Race Relations (NI) Order 1997. The Racial Equality Strategy published by the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister in 2005 states that the long term, high level vision of the society that we are working to achieve is:

“A society in which racial diversity is supported, understood, valued and respected, where racism in any of its forms is not tolerated and where we live together as a society and enjoy equality of opportunity and equal protection” (2005:5).

The Equality Commission’s Racial Equality in Education, A Good Practice Guide, 2001 sets out that the aim of all those responsible for the provision of education in Northern Ireland should be *“to eliminate unlawful racial discrimination and promote equality of opportunity and good relations between different racial groups”*.

The issues facing Travellers are often linked to social exclusion, widespread disadvantage and discrimination (Reynolds et al., 2003). The Office of Standards in Education in Britain (OFSTED, 1999) referred to ‘Gypsy Traveller’ pupils as *“the most at risk in the education system”*.

The aim of this research was to assess the adequacy and effectiveness of educational provision for Traveller children and young people in Northern Ireland. The approach was primarily qualitative and provided an overview of the experiences of education for Traveller children through discussions and interviews with children, parents and key figures within the statutory and voluntary sectors.

The statistics reveal that the uptake of pre-school places among Traveller children is limited when compared to the numbers who enter Year One of primary education. However, the interviews indicated that this was improving as a result of initiatives, mainly from the voluntary sector, such as those by Toybox and Barnardos. A notable decrease in the number entering secondary education compared to those leaving primary education was also apparent. Performance at Key Stage 3 indicated lower grades for Travellers compared to the average especially with English results. These statistics were substantiated in the interviews carried out.

The young people and children were asked what they thought of school and as expected views and opinions varied from very positive to very negative. In many of the interviews the relevance of education was questioned and some believed that once children had learnt the basics of reading and writing there was no longer a need for them to attend school. However, others felt that *"you need education for jobs"* and indeed some mothers fully supported their children's decisions to remain in education.

It was also noted that many interviewees, both Travellers and non-Travellers, were aware that there were often low expectations about what Traveller children would actually achieve from within the education system. It was suggested that this was in part due to the culture or tradition among Travellers, failing to see the relevance of education, and also due to the discrimination faced by young Travellers when they seek employment. Perhaps more importantly to note, the findings from this research indicate that the low expectations were due to the curriculum and the education system as a whole failing to meet the needs of Traveller children. Attendance was also commented upon with many stating that this could be erratic especially at post primary level. In addition some parents highlighted that they worried about their children attending school due to the risk of them being introduced to

drugs, promiscuity and compromising their values and beliefs, whilst others commented that fear of discrimination and bullying were factors.

Segregated education for Traveller children was discussed and inevitably St. Mary's Primary School in Belfast, which although open to all children has only Traveller pupils enrolled, was the focus of the discussion. Many within the voluntary sector and indeed some in the statutory sector felt that this school should be phased out. In the interviews with Traveller parents from St. Mary's the subject of phasing the school out was broached, but this was not popular among many of them. Interviews with the Education Training Inspectorate indicated that the school was providing a good education for the pupils. However, it must be noted that no comparison in performance levels between the pupils at St. Mary's and Traveller pupils at other schools has been carried out. This means it is not possible to assess if pupils at St. Mary's are doing better or worse than their Traveller or non-Traveller peers in mainstream education. The prevailing attitude among Traveller parents was that St. Mary's was a safe place to send their children, rather than a better educational environment. Should these parents have greater confidence as to their children's welfare in other schools, attitudes may change.

In addition, in conducting the fieldwork for the current research we encountered a range of responses from reluctance, to a deep resistance from mainstream schools to participate in the project. This resulted in severe limitations on the comparative analysis between schools and led to a prominence of St. Mary's Primary School in the research.

This report highlights how education provision for Traveller children and young people in Northern Ireland varies not only in terms of Education and Library Board area but also in terms of school and indeed family. The children and young people who took part in this study shared many of their experiences; for some these were very positive whilst for others they were negative. It was also

noted that parental support helped determine a child's experience in that this encouraged attendance and enabled better progression within school.

The following recommendations are based on the findings of this research, and if implemented would in the view of the researchers help to bring about improvements in the adequacy and effectiveness of Traveller education in Northern Ireland:

1. There is a need for more sharing of good practice and mainstreaming such practice throughout the Education and Library Boards and each individual school. It was apparent that budgetary constraints do not enable Traveller Support Teachers to meet and share ideas. **We recommend that Education and Library Boards consult more with Traveller Support Teachers as to the needs of those providing support and put in place measures to share good practice to ensure a more equitable service for Traveller children.**
2. The current Department of Education circular on Traveller education dates from 1993, thus it predates both the 1997 Race Relations Order, which identified Travellers as a racial group, and the 1998 Northern Ireland Act which established a statutory duty. There are currently motions to update this policy but at the time of field research (November 2006) this had not been finalised. The significant delays in updating and implementing effective policies are unacceptable and potentially place the Department of Education in breach of its statutory obligations. **We recommend that the Department of Education update this circular immediately and continually ensure it is updated in line with their statutory obligations.**
3. The research revealed that the Department of Education gathers limited data on the educational performance of Traveller children. The absence of relevant data that might inform policy development in light of departmental statutory obligations to promote equality on the basis of race is of serious concern. Data collection must be more systematic to enable more detailed

analysis when required. **We recommend that the Department of Education review the data that is currently collected and identify the gaps that exist to limit comparisons between Traveller pupils and all pupils. Systems should then be put in place to collect and monitor the data.**

4. Similarly there is insufficient data to enable a comparison between the performance of Traveller pupils in mainstream schools and those attending St. Mary's Primary School. **We recommend that the Department of Education consider such a study to be conducted as part of a wider Northern Ireland study on Traveller pupils' performance compared to mainstream pupils.**
5. **In considering the future of St. Mary's Primary School extensive consultation needs to be undertaken with the Traveller community and a strategy and action plan, involving all stakeholders, but endorsed by the Traveller community should be developed.**
6. There is currently no formal interagency approach including key statutory and voluntary sector bodies to monitor and address the needs of Traveller children in education. **We recommend that the statutory sector work with the voluntary sector and make it a priority to ensure that interagency work is developed and mainstreamed. We also recommend that the terms of reference and membership of the Traveller Thematic sub-group of the Race Equality Forum be revisited as it is the researchers' understanding that this group meets in an *ad hoc* manner.**
7. Service provision, for matters such as free transport for Travellers outside the usual home to school transport rules, differs within Education and Library Board areas. It would be beneficial to all if service provision was consistent between Education and Library Boards to ensure equity for Travellers and to prevent confusion as to the levels of service available. **We recommend that Education and Library Boards work collectively to review such policies and adopt a more co-ordinated approach. This**

process could be developed within the new Education and Skills Authority (ESA).

8. The research indicated that support for Traveller parents and pupils at pre and primary school level is better than that at post-primary level, however improvements are still required. **We recommend that the Department of Education look at the approaches adopted by the voluntary sector, for example Toybox, on the transition from pre-school to primary school and develop this into a more co-ordinated approach among all sectors to ensure the education experience is positive from start to finish.**
9. The Education Reform (NI) Order states that compulsory school age is 16 but the research findings indicate that many Traveller children leave school before this age. We found little evidence to indicate that either Education and Library Boards or schools were adequately addressing this problem. **We recommend that the Department of Education investigates and seeks to develop appropriate initiatives to remedy this issue urgently.**
10. Parents indicated a desire to be able to support their children more effectively with their homework. More support for parents must be offered by schools and Education and Library Boards to help them in turn offer support and help to their children. The negative experiences of some parents have to be reversed by offering support and encouragement to them and their children. **We recommend that Education and Library Boards undertake an assessment of the needs of Traveller parents and devise an action plan to address these needs.** The various Traveller Support Groups must be involved and engaged in this process.
11. The research pointed towards a weakness in curriculum provision pertaining to the extent to which the school curriculum is reflective of the cultural and racial diversity of society and in particular the experiences of the Traveller community. **We recommend that the Department of Education assess the curriculum and make it relevant to, and**

- reflect the experiences and traditions of the Traveller community (including schools where no Travellers attend).**
12. **We recommend that the potential and scope for using mainstream programmes to increase opportunities for Travellers to access more vocationally orientated education should be explored by the Department of Education and implemented where appropriate.**
 13. **We recommend that the pernicious view that Travellers do not want to be educated due to their cultural traditions must be challenged at all levels of the education system through anti-racist initiatives and specifically in relation to Section 75 (2). The responsibility of this lies with the Department of Education.**
 14. Anecdotal evidence that there is some resistance within the Traveller community to continued education needs to be investigated in order to ensure that Traveller culture is not used as an excuse for the continued exclusion and marginalisation of Traveller children. **We recommend that research should be carried out with the Traveller community to explore the factors that lead to early departure of Traveller children from the education system.**
 15. **We recommend that Traveller education at all levels is reviewed by the Department of Education to ensure that adequate provisions are being made to meet the needs of both Traveller parents and pupils and that these are consistent at all educational levels. A specific strategy by the Department of Education (updating PSI recommendations) dedicated to Travellers' education would also be advisable.**
 16. **We recommend that the Department of Education review the resources put into education for Traveller children in Northern Ireland and the outcomes achieved followed by a comparison between Northern Ireland and other jurisdictions.**
 17. The issue of bullying for Traveller children needs to be addressed. Within the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry (Macpherson, 1999) Education

Authorities were recommended to monitor racist incidents within schools.

We recommend that the Department of Education take forward plans to record and monitor bullying and anti-bullying policies and practice within schools to determine reasons for bullying against Traveller children, ensure protection of Traveller children from bullying and ensure that bullying is not a barrier to Traveller children accessing education.

18. **We recommend that the Department of Education ensure the development of diversity training for all teachers, both during pre-qualification training and as part of professional development.**
19. **NICCY should raise awareness of the children's rights under the UNCRC to children and adults in the Traveller community; and awareness of Traveller Children's Rights under the CRC to appropriate authorities.**
20. **ECNI should raise awareness of race relations, in particular the issues relating to Travellers.**

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1. Background to the Research

This research was commissioned by the Office of the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People (NICCY) and the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland (ECNI) to assess the adequacy and effectiveness of educational provision for Traveller children and young people in Northern Ireland. The objectives of the research, as set out in the tender document, were to:

1. Produce a comprehensive literature review;
2. Determine the demographics of Traveller children and young people in Northern Ireland;
3. Produce a comprehensive overview and evaluation of existing educational arrangements for Traveller children and young people;
4. Obtain the views of settled Traveller and Traveller children and young people of their experiences of education in Northern Ireland;
5. Obtain the views of settled Traveller and Traveller parents/carers in accessing education, the quality of the education offered, barriers to education and positive experiences;
6. Obtain the views of professionals working in the field of education and children's rights, both within the Statutory and Voluntary sector; and
7. Make evidence-based recommendations for the future development of both policy and practice.

The Institute for Conflict Research (ICR) in partnership with Trademark and An Munia Tober (AMT) were commissioned to undertake the research, which was carried out between May and December 2006. This report addresses the objectives highlighted and recommendations have been developed to improve policy and practice in terms of education for Traveller children and young people in Northern Ireland.

Previous research in Northern Ireland has indicated that there is a lack of effective mechanisms for collecting and monitoring data in Northern Ireland on Traveller education, particularly relating to four key areas; selection, suspension and exclusion, attendance and achievement. The PSI (Promoting Social Inclusion) report (2001) made a series of recommendations to improve education for Travellers. Most have been accepted by the Department of Education, except the recommendation to phase out St. Mary's Primary School. This issue will be further discussed in this report.

Other research has highlighted a variety of key issues. Murray, Smith and Birthistle (1997) found that Travellers tend not to avail of pre-school educational facilities, while according to Barnardos in 2004/2005, only 18 percent of Traveller children were involved in pre-school compared to 56 percent of the Northern Ireland population as a whole. Research for NICCY (Kilkelly et al., 2004) highlighted that significant numbers of Traveller children do not continue into secondary school, or if they complete the transfer procedure, drop out usually within the first two years. Reynolds et al. (2003) recognised the extent of this issue, and reported that "*non-attendance at school is a major problem among the Travelling community in Northern Ireland and for those children attending secondary school, the majority do not stay on after the age of 16*". Reasons for lack of attendance vary but the literature suggests that bullying can be a common cause (Jordan, 2001) Kilkelly et al. (2004) also found that Travellers in Northern Ireland experience racially motivated bullying and social isolation.

The issue of integration has been a key issue and there has been a preference for the integration of Travellers into mainstream schooling since 1997. However, in Belfast many Travellers at primary level attend St. Mary's Primary School, which has become a *de facto* Traveller only school. The issues pertaining to integration and segregation will be addressed further in the report.

The Equality Commission (2005) outlined several key issues that need to be addressed in terms of Traveller education in Northern Ireland, these included access to education, greater flexibility in school transport, and the provision of a more relevant curriculum to reflect Traveller culture. The report further states that resources need to be mainstreamed until disadvantage, with respect to access and attainment, is eradicated. Save the Children (2001) suggest that in Northern Ireland Travellers have been *“more central to anti-racist drives”* but nevertheless throughout the UK *“the actual disadvantaged experiences of school and education systems by Gypsy and Traveller children and young people are very similar”* (p. 276).

The existing research has thus continued to state that the current educational provision for Traveller children and young people is unsatisfactory in a number of areas and needs to be improved and made more appropriate to the needs to young Travellers. This research provides an update on the current state of educational provision for Traveller children and young people in Northern Ireland.

The report comprises six other sections. Section 2 is a literature review documenting issues pertaining to Traveller education in Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland, United Kingdom and Europe. The third section of the report documents the methods adopted in the research. The fourth and fifth sections highlight the findings from the statistical information and the qualitative research respectively. The sixth section summarises examples of good practice and the gaps that exist in service provision whilst the final section draws together the conclusions and presents a series of recommendations to improve policy and practice.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

Fraser (1992) has acknowledged that the generic term 'Traveller' encompasses many different sub-groups, all with a long history within European societies.

Jordan (2001) refers to the term Traveller as a "*supposedly non-pejorative appellation, adopted by the European parliament*" as signalling the groups' "*historic roots of a lifestyle of itinerancy, or mobility*".

In 1989, the European Parliament recognised two main sub-groups of Travellers:

- **Occupational Travellers** (Resolution No.89/C 153/01), who according to the Scottish Traveller Education Programme (STEP), make no claim to invoke ethnic minority status. This group includes show and fairground Travellers, circus and bargee families.
- **Gypsy Travellers** (Resolution No.89/C 153/02) are recognised as having a distinctive culture, lifestyle and language. Irish Travellers' own language is commonly known as Shelta, but more generally referred to by Travellers as Gammon or Cant (Lloyd et al., 1999). Gypsy Travellers are recognised as an ethnic minority in England and Wales under the Race Relations Act of 1976, and more recently under the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000.

Irish Travellers fall within this latter group, and are recognised as a racial group in Northern Ireland under Article 3 (a) of the Race Relations (NI) Order 1997, which defined them as "*the community of people commonly so-called who are identified (both by themselves and by others) as people with a shared history, culture and traditions including historically, a nomadic way of life on the island of Ireland*".

However, even within this broad specification it should be noted that there are various sub-groups, such as those more commonly referred to as Romani who are ethnically distinct from Irish Travellers, and who can be split into numerous smaller groups. The European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC) referred to the term Roma as an endonym, "*which refers to persons describing themselves as Roma, Gypsies, Manouches, Kalderash, Machavaya, Lovari Churari, Romanicahl, Gitanoes, Kalo, Sinti, Rudari, Boyash, Ungaritz, Luri, Bashalde, Romungro, Yenish, Xoraxai, and other groups perceived as 'Gypsies'*" (EUMC, 2006).

Legislation and Policies

A number of recent legislative and policy initiatives have a direct relevance to the needs and rights of Travellers. The Racial Equality Strategy published by the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) in 2005 establishes a framework which is designed to:

- Tackle racial inequalities in Northern Ireland and to open up opportunity for all;
- Eradicate racism and hate crime; and, together with A Shared Future, to
- Initiate actions to promote good race relations.

The Racial Equality Strategy states that the long term, high level vision of the society that we are working to achieve is:

"A society in which racial diversity is supported, understood, valued and respected, where racism in any of its forms is not tolerated and where we live together as a society and enjoy equality of opportunity and equal protection" (2005:5).

Under section 75 (1) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 there is a statutory obligation for a public authority to promote equality of opportunity, "*between persons of different religious belief, political opinion, racial group, age, marital*

status or sexual orientation". Section 75 (2) states that, "...a public authority shall in carrying out its functions in relation to Northern Ireland, have regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group". Individual schools are not bound by section 75, although the Department of Education and Education and Library Boards who finance and govern schools are. Currently the Equality Commission is looking at whether schools might be included within the provision of section 75 and have commissioned research from the National Foundation for Educational Research at Queen's University.

The Race Relations (Northern Ireland) Order 1997 made it unlawful to discriminate on racial grounds in five areas: employment and training; education; provision of goods and services, facilities or services; disposal and management of premises and advertisements. The Order defined 'racial groups' as "*a group of persons defined by reference to colour, race, nationality or ethnic or national origins*". The Race Relations Order was updated under the Race Regulations Order (Amendment) (Northern Ireland) 2003. Together this legislation requires public authorities to identify and meet the needs of minority ethnic groups (including Travellers) in Northern Ireland.

On 17 June 1997 the Treaty of the European Community at Amsterdam was revised by the fifteen Member States. Article 13 of the Treaty provides a legal base for community action to combat discrimination on the grounds of racial or ethnic origin and includes a Directive implementing the principle of equal treatment between persons irrespective of racial or ethnic origin. The Race Directive is similar to the Race Relations (Northern Ireland) Order 1997 but makes some important changes in relation to discrimination and harassment on the grounds of race, ethnic or national origins. The Directive will "*help to ensure that Northern Ireland meets minimum standards of legal protections from racial discrimination across Europe*"¹. The regulations apply to Irish Travellers.

¹ OFMDFM (2003) Race Directive. A Note on Implementation in Northern Ireland.

Internationally Travellers also have protection under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Articles 2, 12, 28 and 29 of the UNCRC recognise that all children have rights (Article 2) including the right to express views freely (Article 12) and to education without discrimination and on the basis of equal opportunity (Article 28). Article 29 also highlights that the education of the child should be directed by *“the development of respect for the child’s parents, his or her own cultural identity...”*. In addition the Concluding Observations for the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in 2002 highlights in Section 47 ‘concern at the still high rate of temporary and permanent exclusion from school affecting mainly children from specific groups’ with Irish Travellers being named specifically. The Committee put forward nine recommendations (Section 48) to the State party including to:

- a) Ensure that legislation throughout the State party reflects article 12 and respects children’s rights to express their views and have them given due weight in all matters concerning their education, including school discipline;
- b) Take appropriate measures to reduce temporary or permanent exclusion, ensure that children throughout the State party have the right to be heard before exclusion and to appeal against temporary and permanent exclusion, and to ensure that children who are excluded do continue to have access to full-time education; and
- c) Take all necessary measures to eliminate the inequalities in educational achievement and in exclusion rates between children from different groups and to guarantee all children an appropriate equality education.

The final key international document is the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD) which, under Articles 5 and 7, urges states to adopt measures against racial discrimination, particularly in education and teaching.

In terms of local specific educational legislation, the Education Reform Act (NI) Order 1989 states that all pupils of compulsory school age (sixteen) in grant aided schools should have access to a balanced and broadly based curriculum. In addition it also states that their progress should be regulated, assessed and reported to their parents. This applies to all children including Travellers. Further under the Education and Libraries (NI) Order 1986 it is the duty of a parent to ensure the regular attendance of their children at school.

There are a number of key policy documents relevant to Traveller education provision. The Department of Education's Policy and Guidelines for the Education of Children from Traveller Families (Circular Number 1993/37) came in direct response to the Council of Europe resolution 153/01-02 on school provision for Gypsy and Traveller children. However, this was developed before the Race Relations Order and the Northern Ireland Act and has not been revised. This policy needs to be updated.

The Equality Commission's Racial Equality in Education, A Good Practice Guide (2001) states that the aim of all those responsible for the provision of education in Northern Ireland should be *"to eliminate unlawful racial discrimination and promote equality of opportunity and good relations between different racial groups"*. While the Promoting Social Inclusion Working Group on Travellers states that, *"improving the educational attainment of Travellers represents a significant element of any strategy to reduce existing inequalities and to encourage their full inclusion within society"*.

Finally the Northern Ireland Ten Year Strategy for Children and Young People (OFMDFM, 2006) aims to ensure that 'by 2016 all our children and young people are fulfilling their potential'. One of its key outcomes is that all children and young people will live in a society 'which respects their rights' and one of its core values is that all children and young people are entitled to educational opportunities. The Strategy also states that the revised school curriculum will

provide schools with *“greater flexibility to tailor provision to the needs of young people with an emphasis on core skills including: communication and numeracy; the use of ICT (Information, Communication and Technology); and learning for life and work”*. This type of curriculum may meet the needs of Traveller children more adequately who throughout this research raised the issue of the relevance of the current curriculum.

2.2 Demographics

Research has consistently indicated that it is extremely difficult to obtain accurate statistics for the number of Travellers and Romani in the UK, Ireland and EU (Jordan, 2000). The EUMC (2006) stated that this lack of accurate statistical evidence is in part due to the absence of systematic data collection. According to the EUMC, *“in the United Kingdom, Gypsy and Travellers are not included in the ethnic monitoring categories of the Census covering Britain (England, Wales and Scotland), and formal statistics mainly derive from a mix of caravan, household, and pitch counts”*, with the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) likewise referring to *“the absence of reliable national data on the size of the Gypsy and Traveller population”* (EUMC, 2006). This leads to any statistical data under-representing Traveller numbers, particularly as the statistics tend not to include Travellers who have adopted a sedentary lifestyle.

In both Northern Ireland (from 2001) and in the Republic of Ireland (from 2002) Irish Travellers are now included as a specific ethnic category on the census. Save the Children (2001) state that *“this at least allows Travellers to identify themselves as such in the context of ethnic status”* and argues that *“the Census Office Northern Ireland has been sensitive to the issues of enumerating a nomadic population”*. The organisation claims that this gives Travellers a respect that the situation in England and Wales fails to do.

The EUMC also highlighted that another key factor in the lack of accurate statistical data was that many Travellers do not wish to reveal their ethnicity for fear of racial prejudice and harassment. Padfield and Jordan (2004) conducted a study in Scottish schools and found that the decision by a number of Travellers not to identify themselves led to difficulty in schools retaining accurate information on the enrolment of Traveller children. The PSI Working Group on Travellers report (PSI, 2001) and research conducted for NICCY (Kilkelly et al., 2004) both outlined the lack of effective mechanisms for collecting and monitoring data in Northern Ireland on Traveller education, particularly relating to four key areas; selection, suspension and exclusion, attendance and achievement.

The 2001 Census in Northern Ireland revealed a Traveller population of 1,710, a 53 percent increase from the 1993 figure of 1,115 (Department of Environment, 1993), with 37 percent of the Traveller population under the age of 18 (2001 Census). The 2002 Census in the Republic of Ireland indicated that there were 23,681 Travellers, the vast majority of whom are Irish Travellers, with an estimated additional 1,700 Travellers of Romani origin (EUMC, 2006). Traveller support groups have indicated that movements by families from the Republic of Ireland to Northern Ireland can double the numbers of Travellers in a given area, as was the experience in Belfast in 2005 (comments by AMT, 2006).

2.3 Issues facing Travellers

The issues facing Travellers are often linked to social exclusion, widespread disadvantage and discrimination (Reynolds et al., 2003). Power (2004) raised serious concerns about the *“very high levels of poverty and disadvantage experienced by this community”* and *“underlined deep concerns around very poor health profiles, mortality rates, lack of suitable accommodation, social exclusion, and lack of provision and access to appropriate education, welfare,*

and support services". These views were echoed by Connolly (2002) in his review of the evidence pertaining to race and racism in Northern Ireland. In the Northern Ireland context, the OFMDFM report on the PSI working group for Travellers made thirty-three recommendations outlining several key indicators of the social exclusion of Travellers (OFMDFM, 2001). The report highlighted that long-term unemployment is very high among the Travelling community, with only 11 percent of Travellers in paid employment of one form or another. This figure has steadily decreased over the years as the traditional Traveller economy has been affected by mechanisation and economic developments. The report outlined that Traveller life expectancy is 20 percent lower than the rest of the population, with only 10 percent of Travellers over forty years of age and 1 percent of Travellers over sixty-five years old.

The 2001 Census in Northern Ireland highlighted that 32 percent of Travellers were under the age of sixteen and therefore of school age, compared to 24 percent for the non-Traveller population.

In research conducted in the Republic of Ireland, 17 percent of Travellers interviewed had difficulty registering with GPs and 35 percent reported experiencing discrimination from the health service (Centre for Health Promotion Studies, 1995). Despite a "*Hand Health Record Initiative*" in place in Scotland to attempt to tackle these difficulties linked with poor GP registration, numerous obstacles still remain. A 2001 Scottish Parliament Inquiry stated that institutional discrimination was identified in health service provision in Scotland and it found GPs often refusing to register Gypsy Travellers (Lloyd and Stead, 1999). The poor health standards facing Travellers and particularly Traveller children are highlighted by the fact that Traveller children up to the age of ten years old are ten times more likely to die than their settled counterparts (Connolly, 2002).

Traveller Children and Education

Undoubtedly, all of these factors contribute to making Traveller children one of the most vulnerable groups in society. In 1968 the Plowden Report described young Gypsies and Travellers as *"probably the most severely deprived children in the country"*. Many years later the situation does not seem to have improved with research suggesting that *"the impact of racism, exclusion and discrimination against Traveller children cuts across all areas of their lives and there are concerns that their rights are being regularly violated in the areas of education, poverty, healthcare, housing and family support"* (Kilkelly et al., 2004).

The Traveller Education Strategy 2006-2010 in the Republic of Ireland (Educational Resource Centre, 2004) stresses that these issues concerning health, accommodation, economic conditions and other indicators of social exclusion, are inextricably linked to the educational difficulties which often face Traveller pupils, and contend that the *"physical needs cannot be divorced from cognitive, emotional and social needs"*.

The difficulties facing Travellers with regard to formal education were recognised by the European Parliament through two resolutions in 1989, which stated that Gypsy Travellers and Occupational Travellers are the most socially excluded from school education and with the highest levels of illiteracy (Jordan, 2000). In the Northern Irish context, the OFMDFM acknowledged there is now a legal requirement under the Race Relations (NI) Order of 1997 to end discrimination against Travellers and other racial and minority groups, while additionally section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act (1998) makes it a statutory duty on all public authorities *"to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity and to the desirability of promoting good relations between different racial groups"* (OFMDFM, 2001).

Despite legislative and policy initiatives, Travellers still remain on the margins of society, particularly in terms of education, with the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED, 1999) referring to Gypsy Traveller pupils as *“the most at risk in the education system. Although some make a reasonably promising start in the primary school, by the time they reach secondary level their generally low attainment is a matter of serious concern”*. In February 2002 the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child raised particular concerns about unlawful discrimination that still exists against Roma Gypsy and Irish Traveller children, recommending *“a comprehensive and constructive plan of action to effectively target the obstacles in the enjoyment of rights by these groups”* (Commission for Racial Equality, 2004).

In Northern Ireland the Department of Education’s Policy and Guidelines for the Education of Children from Traveller Families (Circular 1993/37) states that the:

“Education for the children of Traveller families can only be effectively provided in a non-discriminatory environment which:

- *is understanding of and sympathetic to the way of life of Traveller families;*
- *respects and values the uniqueness of the Traveller culture; and*
- *positively welcomes Traveller children, not only for the contribution each child brings but as an opportunity for all pupils to develop and share their experiences for their common benefit”*.

The Denied a Future Report (2001) stated that the guidelines were in the process of review (p. 231). However, it must unfortunately be noted that some five to six years later they still are apparently in the process of review. When we contacted the Department of Education no updated guidelines were available.

2.4 Educational Provision

"It is in the best long term interests of both Traveller children and settled children that they should be educated together" (Department of Education (Northern Ireland) Circular 1993/37).

This section reviews the key issues that Traveller children face in receiving an education in Northern Ireland and the contentious issue of integrated versus segregated schooling for Travellers.

Pre-school

The Report of the Task Force on the Travelling Community in the Republic of Ireland (1995) draws particular attention to the importance of early intervention for children of the Travelling community. The Irish Traveller Movement has also stated that *"attendance at pre-school gives the young children a valuable educational experience and prepares them for primary education"*, with the EUMC (2006) similarly suggesting that *"pre-school education is a key to improving school attendance, attainment and performance"*. The relevance of pre-school provision for Travellers is particularly evident given that the last official 'census' of Travellers in Northern Ireland in 1993 by the Department of the Environment (DoE) revealed that 18 percent of Travellers were less than four years of age compared to 8 percent of the population as a whole. However, it must be borne in mind that this census did not include Travellers living in settled accommodation thus the figures are likely to be even higher.

According to Barnardos in 2004-2005, only 18 percent of Traveller children were involved in pre-school education compared to 56 percent of the Northern Ireland population as a whole (Barnardos, 2005). Murray, Smith and Birthistle (1997) found that Travellers tend not to avail of pre-school educational facilities. Similarly, OFSTED (2003) found that only 29 percent of pre-school

age Gypsy and Traveller children in one English Local Education Authority received some form of pre-school education during the year.

Barnardos 2004-2005 Annual Report on Travellers pre-school service discussed the Tuar Ceatha (Rainbow) Traveller pre-school facility in Belfast run by Barnardos. This facility consists of four separate services grouped together under a single project management structure. The project has developed relationships with two primary schools, St. Mary's and St. Luke's, which both have Traveller children in attendance. Negotiations have taken place with parents to ensure they have choices into which service their child will attend and at what age. The report highlights that seventeen of the eligible children had been supported into mainstream education at four different primary schools in Northern Ireland. The positive attendance rates were seen to be a testament to the increased awareness of Traveller parents of the value of pre-school education for their children. Traveller parents indicated that they had seen improvements in speech, behaviour, confidence and social skills among their children. The provision of transport to and from the facility was seen as a valuable service often not provided for in mainstream education. The report did however suggest that there was a lack of provision for parental involvement. This has subsequently been addressed with the provision of a Sure Start programme within the project.

The PSI report on Travellers also recommended a drive to increase enrolment of Travellers in pre-school facilities. The research found no evidence of such a dedicated initiative although the Secretary of State allocated £100,000 to Traveller pre-school activities in 2006.

There are approximately forty-five pre-schools and forty Early Start schools for Travellers in the Republic of Ireland. However, despite the number of facilities, the Irish Traveller Movement has identified several difficulties with pre-school provision in Ireland at present. This includes a concern that inadequate funding

invariably leads to unsuitable premises, and secondly, the fact that there is no standardisation in qualifications held by pre-school staff. However, there appears to be relative consensus that pre-school provision can play a key role, particularly for Traveller pupils who often begin primary school playing “catch-up” with settled pupils in terms of basic literacy and numeracy.

Issues related to ‘Traveller only’ provision also prevail in the pre-school area. The Traveller Education Strategy (2006) in the Republic has recommended that Traveller-only pre school provision be phased out with integration to mainstream being the preferred strategy.

Primary Education

In the Republic of Ireland in recent years there has been a sustained growth in the numbers of Traveller children attending primary school education, with a very significant increase in enrolment, from 114 Traveller pupils attending in 1963 to 4,000 in the early 1990’s (Murray, Smith and Birthistle, 1997). More recently, the National Traveller Education Officer estimated that in 2002-2003 some 5,500 Traveller children were at primary school, while the Department of Education and Science (DES) estimated that there were almost 6,000 Traveller children enrolled in primary schools in the Republic of Ireland in the academic year 2004-2005, almost 100 percent enrolment. The INTO Working Group developing policy on Traveller Education (2003) reported that primary enrolment among Travellers was now approaching a similar level to that of the settled community.

In Northern Ireland, from 1997 there has likewise been a preference for the integration of Travellers into mainstream schooling, (Reynolds et al., 2003), with the Education Other Than at School Report by the Education and Training Inspectorate (2000) documenting that there were 677 Traveller pupils at schools across the five Education and Library Boards, 454 of whom were at primary school. In the late 1990s it was estimated that in Northern Ireland

approximately one-third of the Travelling population were in the Greater Belfast area (Murray, Smith and Birthistle, 1997) with the majority attending St. Mary's. However, no comparative figures exist to indicate the percentage of Travellers of school age who are either attending or not attending school.

St. Mary's Primary Belfast

St. Mary's was established in 2000 after St. Paul's School for Traveller children was closed. St. Mary's is open to all children although at present it only has Traveller pupils enrolled (DENI, 2004, 2006; Connolly and Keenan, 2000). In spite of attempts by the school it has been unsuccessful in encouraging settled children to attend and thus has become a Traveller school *de facto*. The school prospectus states: *"St. Mary's is primarily a school for Travelling children. However, we welcome children from the settled community and believe that this diversity can assist in promoting mutual understanding between the two cultures"*. The first sentence of this statement appears to substantiate the views that the school is a Traveller school and was set up to replace St. Paul's. However, an updated leaflet from January 2005 does not mention that the school is primarily for Travellers. This study indicates that the school is open to all and the current principal is keen to see settled children enrolled to fulfil the second part of the statement in the prospectus. The Department of Education also officially regard the school as open to all and not just for Traveller pupils.

A report by the ETI (2005) stated that in 2004 attendance rates at the school were 65 percent taking into account nomadic Traveller pupils, while Barnardos (2004) stated that for the majority of Traveller children the average attendance was 95 percent. The Council for Catholic Maintained Schools position paper on primary education for Traveller children in Belfast highlighted that since St. Mary's was established formally in May 2000, the enrolment rates had steadily increased from just eleven pupils in 2001 to eighty at the time of writing (CCMS, 2005). The school's enrolment during 2006 varied between one hundred and one hundred and ten Traveller pupils. However, in spite of the

steady increase in enrolment many calls have been made for the school to be phased out and Traveller education to be mainstreamed entirely (PSI, 2001), which is the case in other areas of Northern Ireland.

The DES report in the Republic of Ireland (2005) highlighted the effect that Traveller Education Services, including Resource Travelling Teachers, Visiting Teacher Services, the National Education Officer for Travellers, pre-schools and training for primary school teachers, can have on increasing the level of Traveller participation in primary education. Padfield and Jordan (2004) found high enrolment rates of Travellers in primary schools compared to secondary schools. They found in Scotland that primary schools were generally praised for their caring treatment of children, in contrast to the dominance of bullying in the experience of secondary school aged Traveller pupils. Similarly, research conducted by the Scottish Traveller Education Programme has suggested that primary schools appear more amenable to Travellers, with primary staff being more aware of the arrangements for accessing support for learning. The report also found that more primary than secondary schools had a designated person with responsibility for ensuring that Gypsy and Traveller families are knowledgeable about social events in the school life, which led to an easier integration into school life (STEP, 2006).

Research has also suggested that there may be other reasons to explain the relatively high enrolment of Traveller pupils at primary level compared to secondary level. Padfield and Jordan (2004) found that one of the reasons Traveller children were sent to primary school was to gain the literacy skills to ensure that a family did not have to rely on literate 'outsiders' such as the Traveller teacher, and for a basic level of numeracy and literacy to further future employment opportunities, often within the Traveller economy. Padfield and Jordan (2004) also found that Traveller parents and secondary aged Traveller pupils perceived the skills acquired in primary school to be a sufficient and necessary basic preparation for adult life. They believed that the

secondary curriculum did not offer the subjects they needed to meet current and future employment opportunities.

One issue that was found to be similar at primary and secondary level was the belief among some Traveller pupils and parents that the mainstream curriculum in its current format was not relevant to them, particularly at secondary level. In their two year study of primary schools in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, Kenny and McLaughlin (2004) found an absence of any mention of Traveller culture on the curriculum. An added difficulty in the Northern Irish primary schools was found to be that often the teachers focused on the nature of the conflict in Northern Ireland, while in the Republic teachers mentioned ethnic diversity, which was scarcely mentioned in Northern Irish schools and not addressed as a relevant issue.

Secondary Education

The National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion in the Republic of Ireland has set key targets for the retention of Traveller students to complete the post-primary cycle. Derrington (2005) argued that Gypsy Traveller students are less likely to complete secondary education than any other minority ethnic group, and Jordan (2001) contended that the transition into secondary school was traumatic for all children, but even more so for Traveller children who have a *“less well developed home base in terms of linguistic and scholastic preparation”*. This was echoed by the 1998 Irish Traveller Movement report *‘Travellers and Post-Primary Education’* which noted the difficulties Traveller pupils had in regards to homework, being placed in a class alongside younger pupils, transport issues and peer pressure.

The transfer rate for Travellers to post-primary level in the Republic of Ireland was 85 percent in 2003, and there were approximately 1,850 Traveller students out of 4,000 young Travellers in post-primary education (Irish Traveller Movement), an increase of 13 percent in Traveller pupil numbers from the

previous year. It is estimated that 46 percent of all Travellers of post-primary school age were attending post-primary education in 2003. In Northern Ireland in 2000 there were thought to be 162 post-primary Traveller pupils enrolled at secondary schools throughout the region (ETI, 2000). The DoE 1993 census estimated Traveller uptake of secondary education in Northern Ireland to be around 43 percent. The report also found regional variations with a difference between Travellers based in rural and urban areas. The Department of Education for Northern Ireland (DENI) have suggested that since 1995 only a small number of Traveller pupils have transferred to grammar schools (DENI, 2002).

Despite the numbers of Traveller pupils transferring initially to secondary school in the Republic, the DES (2005) found that at secondary level most Traveller pupils drop out after one or two years, with the 1995 Report of the Task Force on the Travelling community finding that "*the majority of Traveller children who attend second level schools leave within the first two years*". Barnardos research (2004-2005) also highlighted concerns among Traveller parents with the high dropout rates of Traveller pupils, particularly due to difficulties concerning Irish as a core subject. This is borne out by statistics in the Republic of Ireland, which despite indicating a slight increase in recent years, show that in 2002 only sixty-two Traveller pupils attended sixth year post-primary education, compared to much higher numbers of Traveller pupils who had attended the first two years of secondary school. The situation in Northern Ireland is discussed in more detail in Section 4.

Jordan (2001) argued that the nature of Gypsy Traveller mobility led to long absences from school and an "*interrupted learning*" experience. This invariably resulted in Gypsy Traveller pupils falling behind their peers due to the introduction of continuous assessment portfolios to replace conventional examinations (Jordan, 2000). By the age of fourteen or fifteen Jordan highlights that this can lead to a de-motivation among Gypsy Traveller pupils,

with the inevitable consequence of high drop out numbers. Jordan had previously stated that *“discontinuity in the school experience must be considered as a factor in contributing to Traveller pupils under achievements and exclusion from school, particularly their significant period of absences”* (Jordan, 1996). According to Dobson et al. (2000), many interrupted learners vote with their feet and drop out of school, and the Central Statistics Office (CSO) in the Republic of Ireland have highlighted that in 2002 almost two-thirds of Travellers left before the then statutory minimum age of fifteen years, compared with 15 percent for the population as a whole.

In Northern Ireland research has highlighted that there are significant numbers of Traveller children who do not continue into secondary school, or if they initially complete the transfer procedure, drop out usually within the first two years. Knipe, Montgomery and Reynolds (2005) state that only half of the pupils they interviewed indicated their intention to stay on at school until Year 12, i.e. until the age of sixteen. In the Republic of Ireland, the Department of Education and Science (DES, 2005) found that Traveller pupils become increasingly alienated from the education system as they get older. Research in Northern Ireland also identifies bullying as one of the main reasons for this sense of alienation, resulting in significant numbers of Traveller children dropping out of school, often prior to starting secondary school. Reynolds et al. (2003) recognised the extent of this issue, and reported that *“non-attendance at school is a major problem among the Travelling community in Northern Ireland and for those children attending secondary school, the majority do not stay on after the age of sixteen”*.

Jordan’s 1999 study highlighted an almost complete lack of Gypsy Travellers in secondary education in Scotland, while a later report (Jordan, 2000) appeared to be in line with DES research (2005), and found a reduction in Gypsy Traveller pupil numbers with age. This was in stark contrast to Occupational Travellers who showed similar levels of enrolment at primary and secondary

level. Gypsy Traveller children were found to drop out of school much younger than their settled peers, often between the ages of nine and eleven.

The educational attainment of Traveller pupils at secondary level is also an issue, with the National Retention rate of Travellers to Junior Cert in the Republic of Ireland only 51 percent compared to a national rate of 94 percent (National Traveller Education Officer, 2002-2003). The serious issues facing Traveller pupils in secondary education often lead to very few Travellers proceeding to Further or Higher Education, and only twenty Travellers were estimated to be in third level education in the Republic of Ireland in 2002 (Barnardos, 2005). In Northern Ireland, the 2001 census showed that 59 percent of Travellers in the sixteen to twenty four age range leave school with no qualifications, compared with 17 percent of sixteen to twenty four year olds within the population as a whole, while the PSI Report (2001) also highlighted the poor educational attainment of many Travellers, with 92 percent of Travellers failing to attain any GCSE's.

Research suggests that there are other specific difficulties faced by Travellers when attempting to send their children to mainstream schools. These include the fact that admissions criteria for entry to secondary level can be based on school attendance (Lundy, 2001), which results in some Traveller children being denied access to education. There also may be a perception among some schools that the extra funding they receive for Traveller pupils is not sufficient to deal with the extra educational difficulties Traveller children may face (Kilkelly et al., 2004).

Both the primary and post-primary school experiences of Traveller pupils are often characterised by educational underachievement, yet it would appear to be the transition into secondary education that proves to be most problematic for Traveller pupils. These difficulties often involve a complex combination of factors, which may or may not involve the nature of Traveller culture leading to

difficulties maintaining regular attendance, and other factors relating to bullying, exclusion and a loss of motivation leading to the high drop out rates at secondary level.

2.5 Parental Concerns²

The Irish Traveller Movement in the Republic has highlighted the Visiting Teacher Service of the DES as instrumental in empowering parents to access education for their children. However, despite the progress made in recent years and the increase in Traveller pupil numbers in primary education, the Irish Traveller Movement outlined two key concerns with regards to primary education for Travellers. Firstly, Traveller parents appear to be very concerned with the low levels of educational attainment of their children at primary level despite the high enrolment numbers. The Chief Inspector's Report 2001-2004, (DES, 2005) showed that:

"The levels of achievement of Traveller pupils were not on a par with their non-Traveller peers. An analysis of standardised test results showed that the measured achievement levels of approximately half the group surveyed were below the 10th percentile in English and Mathematics. It was found that the Traveller parents expected their children to acquire a mastery of literacy and numeracy skills in primary school. Some Traveller parents expressed their deep concerns about the low attainment of their children, particularly in relation to reading standards".

The second main concern was the withdrawal of Traveller children for learning support to a Resource Teacher for Travellers (RTT). There are currently 540 RTT's employed by DES in the Republic of Ireland. However, the Irish Traveller Movement were concerned that parental consent for their child's withdrawal from the mainstream class and placement with the RTT was not often sought.

² The lack of research in Northern Ireland on this area has meant that the experiences of other jurisdictions are discussed in this section.

There is a belief that Traveller children are withdrawn from mainstream classes *"purely on the basis of ethnic identity and not on perceived educational need"*. There is a concern that Traveller children assigned to an RTT are usually assigned 'low-level tasks' such as drawing and colouring, with the Chief Inspector's Report 2001-2004 observing that:

"Traveller pupils were frequently assigned low-level tasks that did not challenge and extend them sufficiently. Many pupils did not engage in whole-class activities especially in such areas as History, Geography or Science".

Roma in Europe have faced similar difficulties, with the European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC) outlining that in some countries over 50 percent of the Romani population are sent to schools for the mentally disabled, while further research suggested that Roma pupils are fifteen times more likely to be placed in special schools than non-Roma pupils (ERRC, 1999). A survey in Hungary in 1998 found that over 90 percent of children in special schools are Romani, while the High Commissioner for National Minorities for the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) stated, *"perhaps no legally sanctioned practice affecting Roma is more pernicious than the phenomenon of channelling Romani children to 'special schools', schools for the mentally disabled"* (OSCE, 2000). In Ireland it has been estimated that almost half of Traveller pupils in primary education are either in special remedial classes, or special schools (Murray, Smith and Birthistle, 1997). It may be the case therefore that both Irish Traveller and Roma children are regularly placed in remedial or 'special' classes based on their ethnic identity rather than on the basis of educational need. The Aiming High Report (DES, 2003) outlined the difference between learning delay due to an interrupted education resulting from sporadic attendance as a result of a cultural lifestyle of nomadism, and learning difficulties due to special educational needs. However, it would appear that these two are often confused which can have a detrimental effect on the educational development of many Traveller pupils.

While there is no direct evidence of streaming Traveller children for special classes based on their ethnicity, Traveller Support Groups are concerned that this policy could occur on an *ad hoc* basis in Northern Ireland. Some also believe that St. Mary's is also *de facto* a 'special school' for Travellers.

2.6 Barriers to Education

Traveller Culture?

It is often the prevailing view that the withdrawal of Traveller children from the educational system is due to an inherent tension with Traveller culture, and that Travellers themselves do not see the relevance of education to their lifestyles (Kenny, 1997). Knaepkens (1987, 1988) found that Occupational Travellers underachieved and rejected formal schooling, identifying the lack of ready access to and uptake of schools, due to the Travellers' mobility, high absenteeism and the low relevance of academic qualifications to their businesses. However, Acton and Kerrick (1985) suggest that the situation is more complex and there is more to high levels of absenteeism from formal education than cultural incompatibility alone would imply. They found that schools themselves were racially prejudiced against Travellers. Similarly, Jordan (2001) has argued that Knaepkens has not taken into account such factors as racism and bullying which may discourage many Traveller pupils from continuing their studies, or lead to many being excluded due to fights resulting from a degree of provocation from their settled peers.

Jordan (2001) found that there was more pressure on young Travellers, particularly males, to become economically active and have a role in the Travelling community. Levinson and Sparkes (2001) found in their three-year study that in general males placed more emphasis on the acquisition of status within their own group as opposed to educational experience. Traveller work patterns also appeared to be a factor in some Travellers dropping out of

school, with some Travellers making a useful contribution to the family's earning capacity by the age of ten (Jordan, 2000). Evidence suggests that *"once this role was established, the cycle of disruption was difficult to break"* (Jordan, 2001). The Aiming High report (DES, 2003) suggested that there is often a sense among Traveller parents that education undermines traditional values and there can be a fear that the educational system is a tool for assimilation into a "settled" way of life.

Educational difficulties seem to be more acute with teenage Traveller boys, as girls seem to adapt more easily to the mainstream school system (Andereck, 1992; Crozier and Anstiss, 1995; Forray and Hegedus, 1989; Levinson, 2001; Lloyd, 1992; Willoughby, 1996). Padfield and Jordan (2004) found in their study that girls were more likely to form peer relationships than boys. This is significant, as previous research has shown (Derrington, 2005) that having friends from the settled community in school can ease the often traumatic transition from primary to secondary school for Traveller children. However, Jordan (2001) found that Traveller perceptions of education were much more positive than had generally been assumed (as did Reynolds et al., 2003), and that *"in the majority of cases, parents and young people expressed a positive outlook on the benefits of participation in the education system"*.

Therefore, despite Traveller parents outlining some difficulties in balancing their nomadic way of life with mainstream education, there appeared to be some recognition of the need for education for their children. Jordan and Padfield (2004) found evidence of *"changing perceptions among both Gypsy and Traveller mothers and fathers of a need for their children to achieve formal qualifications"*, particularly in light of developments in recent years and the relative decline of the traditional Traveller economy. This is in line with recent thinking which suggests that there needs to be a raising of awareness among Traveller parents of the importance of education, with the aim of achieving *"an aspiration for academic achievement coming from within the group"* (Jordan,

2001), which would appear to increasingly be the case. In Northern Ireland, the Equality Commission found evidence of a wish among Traveller parents to engage with the education system (ECNI, 2006), with Knipe, Reynolds and Montgomery (2005) arguing for a promotion of an awareness of the importance of academic qualifications among Traveller children's parents in Northern Ireland.

Traveller Parents' Negative Experiences

As well as fears among some Traveller parents that Traveller culture will be undermined, research also suggests that in some cases the opposition of Traveller parents to schooling, particularly at secondary level, has derived from their own negative experiences at school (Lloyd and Stead, 1999). The fear that their child will be bullied in mainstream education seems to be well founded for many Traveller parents, as research has highlighted bullying experienced by many Traveller pupils. The Swann Report (1985) stated that *the "degree of hostility towards Gypsies and other Traveller children if they do enter school is quite remarkable even when set alongside the racism encountered by children from other ethnic minority groups"*.

Connolly and Keenan's (2000) survey of the racial attitudes of 1,300 people in Northern Ireland revealed significant racial prejudice against Travellers, with 57 percent of respondents saying that they would not want a Traveller as a neighbour, and an even higher number (66 percent) stated that they would not want a Traveller as a work colleague. A further 40 percent of respondents believed that the nomadic Travelling way of life was not valid and should not be supported by Government. A recent survey of 1,200 people in Northern Ireland highlighted significant racial prejudice against Travellers, with 60 percent of respondents indicating that they would not want a Traveller as a neighbour, 35 percent stating that they would not want a Traveller as a work colleague and 53 percent unwilling to accept a Traveller as a close friend (Northern Ireland Young Life and Times, 2005).

This more general society-wide hostility towards Travellers appears to also be encountered by many Traveller pupils in the school environment, often on a daily basis. Derrington's (2005) study of Traveller children found that 80 percent had encountered at least some form of racial abuse, particularly during their first year of secondary school. Jordan and Padfield (2004) found that bullying and or racism was one of the main reasons for Travellers' self-exclusion from school. The ERRC stated that "*Romani children who are subject to racist attitudes lose motivation to attend school and often prefer to join the special schools where among other Romani children they will feel more comfortable*" (ERRC, 2003). Similarly, Jordan's (2001) report on Travellers in state schools identified bullying as one of the main issues facing Traveller pupils. Knipe, Montgomery and Reynolds (2005) found that in Northern Ireland, half of the forty four Traveller pupils they interviewed had been bullied at school, other research also found that Travellers experienced racist bullying and social isolation in mainstream exclusion (McVeigh, 1998; Mongan, 2002).

Exclusion of Travellers in Mainstream Education

Power's (2004) study of Irish Travellers in England involving 140 participants found that bullying and verbal abuse were among the main issues facing Traveller pupils. This can often lead to Traveller pupils "*fighting back*" and using violence which can then lead to temporary or permanent exclusion. Derrington (2005) found that the most common reasons cited for the exclusion of Traveller children were physical aggression towards peers and verbal abuse towards staff, and the research found that often the breakdown in relationships was due to a lack of trust between teachers and Gypsy Traveller pupils. Lloyd, Stead and Jordan's research (1999) illustrated a clear relationship between disciplinary issues, including exclusion and bullying in schools, highlighting that Traveller pupils were often reacting to provocation from their settled peers, a fact not often recognised by teachers, whom the study also suggested could be as negative in their opinions of Travellers as some of their settled pupils.

According to Troyna and Hatcher (1992), in most schools there was a lack of awareness of the extent of name calling, or a reluctance to see it as an issue, and therefore little attention was paid to addressing it as a school problem. Similarly, Lloyd and Stead (1999) found that there was a failure among schools to acknowledge the extent of name calling, with schools individualising problems rather than examining institutional practices. This finding is supported by Traveller parents who believe that name calling is a major disincentive to educational attainment.

OFSTED found that there was a difficulty with teachers at times misjudging Traveller pupils' behaviour (OFSTED, 1996). Lloyd and Stead (1999) contend that Traveller pupils are more likely to engage with teachers on an equal style of communication in line with their Traveller culture, which can be interpreted by the teachers as being 'cheeky', or 'disruptive'. Lloyd and Stead argue that *"difference can still be too easily interpreted in schools as deviance, particularly when the differences challenge ideas of 'normality' in school behaviour and attendance, as this study of Gypsy Travellers confirmed"*. The Aiming High report (DES, 2003) highlighted that Traveller pupils *"are disproportionately represented amongst pupils who are excluded"*. The excluded Traveller pupils are often disproportionately young males, and research has found that *"boys were more likely to be in trouble in school, to be seen as aggressive and more confrontational"* (Crozier and Anstiss, 1995; Lloyd, 1992).

2.7 Distance Learning and ICT

The difficulties facing Traveller pupils with regard to mainstream education have been well documented. Jordan (2000) outlined that Traveller pupils suffer from high levels of discontinuity in learning, in part due to the tension between Travellers mobility and an inability to attend mainstream education on a regular basis (see also OFSTED, 1996, Dobson et al., 2000). In 1989, the European Union (EU) outlined the importance of *"distance learning"* in tackling this

phenomenon referred to as "*interrupted learning*". Indeed, the Aiming High report (DES, 2003) found evidence that school based distance learning utilising information technology has been "*particularly successful in minimising the effects of discontinuity*". Jordan (2000) identified the development of distance learning as potentially very helpful but at present limited, due to a lack of resources and finance, while STEP (2006) noted that there have been no nationally organised paper-based or computer-based distance learning programmes for Gypsy Traveller pupils in Scotland.

In April 2003 an E-learning and mobility project (E-LAMP) was set up in Scotland to supply data-cards and laptops to twenty Traveller children during the 2004 Traveller season. Research by the European Federation for the Education of Travelling Communities has suggested that the laptops and equipment used in these projects increased motivation and aspirations among Traveller pupils (EFECOT, 1999), while Padfield and Jordan (2004) found that ICT was the one area that provoked interest among both pupils and parents, especially Traveller boys. Research by Jordan (2001) revealed that all but one local education authority in Scotland believed that the use of technology in "*distance based learning*" was a positive development. However, Padfield and Jordan (2004) highlighted that not one school involved in the research had developed distance based learning for Traveller pupils, but they stressed the potential for such a scheme as "*ICT offers a way forward for pupils traditionally excluded from education*".

Jordan (2001), although emphasising the potential for distance-based learning, also highlighted that it alone would not suffice in significantly improving Traveller pupils' educational attainment. Despite the potential of the scheme, it should not be used as the only solution for the problems, but rather needs to be integrated within a holistic, structured approach as opposed to the current *ad hoc* nature of a few geographically dispersed examples of good practice.

Vocational Training

Under the Education Welfare Act (2000) all children in the Republic of Ireland are required to stay in school until the age of sixteen. However, as noted, many Traveller pupils do not complete the education cycle for a variety of reasons, and for those Traveller children who have become disillusioned with mainstream education there are a number of options available to continue their educational and training needs. One of the main alternatives to mainstream educational provision is the Junior Education Centres for Travellers (JECT), which cater for Traveller students between the ages of eleven and fifteen years. There are currently three centres with eighty students in the Republic. The centres are funded by DES, however the Task Force report of 1995 commented that the JECT appeared "*to exist in a policy vacuum*" and it is unclear what future they will have in an inclusive vision of education with the DES Traveller Education Strategy recommending for them to be phased out.

Another alternative to mainstream education is the Youthreach programme directed at young early school leavers aged fifteen to twenty, providing opportunities for them to acquire certification. The programmes are designed to help young people return to learning and to prepare for future employment. Although not specifically targeted at Travellers, in December 2004 of the 2,752 trainees, 326 were Travellers (12 percent).

Adult education can be seen to provide a second chance in education for many Travellers. One alternative has been the Senior Traveller Training Centres, which were established in 1974 and cater for fifteen to twenty-five year olds. There are thirty-two centres in the Republic, with the vast majority of students being female (81 percent) and only 10 percent non-Travellers. It is recommended that these centres are phased out, with students transferring to mainstream training centres such as Foras Áiseanna Saothair or Training and Employment Authority (FÁS).

FÁS consists of twenty Training Centres and sixty-two employment offices, which aim to enhance the skills of individuals through training and re-training, apprenticeships, recruitment and employment services. In 2004 over 400 Travellers were registered with FÁS employment services, which was 8 percent of the student body. Similarly, estimates suggest that there are up to 500 Travellers involved with other vocational training schemes. Traveller organisations in general have two main difficulties with Further and Adult Education as presented. The first difficulty is that training allowances can act as an incentive to entice Travellers out of mainstream education early, and secondly, that the outcomes achieved by Travellers in terms of qualifications and employment after participating in further and adult education tend to be poor.

Murray, Smith and Birthistle (1997) note that mainstream training and employment provision in Northern Ireland has been criticised for not actively promoting its programmes among Travelling communities, and for not being sufficiently user-friendly for that community. One particular project was organised by the Belfast Travellers Education and Development Group, which is now known as An Munia Tober (AMT), having amalgamated with Belfast Travellers Support Group. The organisation runs an alternative educational provision for twelve girls between the ages of fourteen to eighteen who had either never been to school or who had been absent for at least a year and who were unlikely to return. The scheme has achieved significant participation and attendance rates among the Traveller pupils, with attendance rates of 77 percent for all pupils, and 92 percent for non-nomadic girls (ETI, 2000). The DES Traveller Education Strategy now recommends phasing out all segregated provision such as this and integrating the Traveller trainees within existing programmes. However, AMT has highlighted difficulties in accessing support from BELB and DEL to support the transferral of students from AEP.

2.8 Issues in Educational Provision in Northern Ireland

The Equality Commission (2006) highlighted that one key problem in Northern Ireland was the lack of follow-up by schools for non-attendance by Traveller pupils. The Commission also stated that there were problems with the Common Funding Formula, which allows for schools to receive additional funding for Traveller children in their school if they are present on the day of the school census in October. The main problem with this is that many schools continue to receive the funding months after the Traveller pupils have left and that the schools that receive Traveller pupils after this date do not receive any additional funding, this includes those delivering alternative provision such as An Múna Tober. The Report goes on to suggest that despite a number of promising initiatives, there is a distinct lack of a strategic framework to address the main issues, although the ETI (2000), contend that there is evidence that a co-ordinated approach to Traveller education has had an impact in Northern Ireland on academic achievement. The Equality Commission (2006) particularly placed an emphasis on collating data on good practice and sharing with the relevant bodies to develop a strategic framework from which to operate, and stated that four key strands need to be improved, namely attendance, participation, attainment, and transition.

The Equality Commission (2005) outlined seven key issues that need to be addressed in terms of Traveller pupils' education in Northern Ireland. These included access to education, with greater flexibility in school transport to reach more Traveller pupils and the provision of a more relevant curriculum to reflect Traveller culture. The report also argues for the removal of barriers to school registration and states that there is a need to work in partnership with Traveller parents and schools, while participation by Traveller pupils needs to be improved as does training for teachers. The report further states that resources need to be mainstreamed until disadvantage with respect to access and attainment is eradicated. Similarly, in the Republic, Pavee Point has called for resources to be ring-fenced and invested in support for Traveller education in

the mainstream. At present, there is an average of forty six million Euros spent on Traveller education per year with thirteen million Euros spent on STTCs alone, and rather than parallel services, Pavee Point would like to see mainstream services more in tune with Traveller needs to achieve an equality of outcomes for Travellers. It is hoped that such a strategy may begin to improve the educational attainment of Traveller pupils who have traditionally been disadvantaged in educational provision for a variety of reasons over the years. Save the Children (2001) suggest that in Northern Ireland Travellers have been *“more central to anti-racist drives”* but that in spite of this throughout the UK *“the actual disadvantaged experiences of school and education systems by Gypsy and Traveller children and young people are very similar”* (p. 276).

This report investigates further the adequacy and effectiveness of educational provision for Traveller children and young people in Northern Ireland. The next section documents the methods used in the research and subsequent sections detail the findings from interviews with statutory and voluntary representatives about their views and with parents and children of their own personal experiences of education provision in Northern Ireland.

3. Methodology

This aim of the research was to assess the adequacy and effectiveness of educational provision for Traveller children and young people in Northern Ireland. It was conducted by the Institute for Conflict Research, Trademark and An Munia Tober between May and December 2006. The approach was primarily qualitative in format and provided an overview of education for Traveller children through discussions and interviews with children, parents and key figures within the statutory and voluntary sectors. An Munia Tober were responsible for the collation of data from children and young people whilst ICR and Trademark carried out focus group discussions and interviews with parents and key figures within the statutory and voluntary sectors. Two young Traveller women assisted in the research with the children and young people, gaining skills in research methods.

Work with Traveller Children

In the absence of a regional co-ordinating body for Traveller Support Groups An Munia Tober has primary responsibility for co-ordinating policy developments on Traveller issues across Northern Ireland. In view of their previous experiences, AMT believed that artwork, paintings, story telling, music and drama would be appropriate consultation tools (this was a successful approach used in the recent ECNI Project) with the children and young people. The children and young people were asked about their experiences of school (a detailed list of the types of questions posed can be seen in Appendix 1).

Time was taken to explain the research process to the participants and ensure that they understood its purpose. Information sheets and permission slips were supplied which had to be signed by the participants and a parent if the young person was under fourteen. The discussions were recorded when possible but again circumstances sometimes meant that this was not possible and detailed notes were taken instead. In total sixty-three children and young people were

interviewed in group settings. Table 1 documents the total number of children along with their age, gender and location.

Table 1: Children Consulted, by region, age and gender

Region	Male 11 and under	Female 11 and under	Male 12+	Female 12+	Total
BELB (in school)	8	8			16
BELB (out of school)	0	5	4		9
SELB (1)	6	4		4	14
SELB (2)	2			1	3
WELB (1)	4	3	2	3	12
WELB (2)	4	4		1	9
Total	24	24	6	9	63

Interviews with Traveller Parents

The aim of the interviews was to elicit parents' views on a wide range of issues relating to the education of their children. These issues included access and progression through the various stages of the education system, the quality and appropriateness of the education provision, variations in quality, issues of bullying and harassment, physical access to places of education and other issues that emerged in the course of the research programme. The interviews also aimed to explore the positive experiences of the education system among Travellers and their knowledge of appropriate rights to education and related rights of children and young people.

The interviews were semi-structured and usually conducted in a group context although some parents were visited individually in their homes. Parents were contacted by AMT through local Traveller Support Groups in Craigavon, Coalisland, Omagh, Newry, Belfast and Derry/Londonderry. The location of the interviews was dictated by the preferences of the parents and was usually conducted at the same time as the work with the children was being carried out. The following questions were used as a guide to the interviews:

- Which school(s) do your children attend?

- Do they enjoy school?
- Do they have contact with settled children in school (outside school)?
- Do they encounter any problems at school?
- What (if any) concerns do you have about your child's education?
- Do you / your child receive adequate support from the school?
- If yes, what support do you receive? If no, what support would you like to see?
- How does your child travel to school?
- Issues around attendance e.g. How often does your child go to school? Do they miss days at school?

Some of the interviews were recorded and transcribed although on occasions the location of the meetings did not facilitate this and just notes were taken. Time was taken to explain the research to the parents and its purpose. All were assured of confidentiality and anonymity. In total twenty eight parents were interviewed (Table 2). All of these were women as men were either unavailable or unwilling to take part. These mothers were from five different locations within three Education and Library Board areas in Northern Ireland thus ensuring a geographical spread and an insight of experiences from across the various Education and Library Boards.

Table 2: Parents Consulted by Education and Library Board

Region	Parents
BELB	4
SELB	17
WELB	7
Total	28

No parents or indeed children were interviewed in the NEELB or SEELB areas due to there being no Traveller support groups in these areas. Attempts were made to co-ordinate a group within the NEELB but due to the absence of a support group this proved to be impossible.

Interviews with the Statutory and Voluntary Sectors

Twenty-nine semi-structured interviews were carried out with a range of representatives from the statutory (seventeen interviews) and voluntary sectors (twelve interviews). These included the various Education and Library Boards, Department of Education, Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS), the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI), individual schools, Save the Children, Barnardos and NIPPA (see Table 3).

Table 3: Interviews with Statutory and Voluntary Sectors

Organisation	Individuals Interviewed
Department of Education	2 representatives
Education and Library Boards	
SELB	2 representatives
NELB	2 representatives
SEELB	2 representatives
BELB	1 representative
WELB	3 representatives
CCMS	1 representative
ETI	1 representative
Equality Commission	2 representatives
AMT	1 representative
Derry Traveller Support Group	1 representative
Derry Children's Commission	1 representative
Coalisland Traveller Support Group	2 representatives
NIPPA	3 representatives
Save the Children	1 representative
Barnardos	1 representative
Schools	
Good Shepherd	1 representative
St. Mary's Primary Belfast	1 representative
St. Mary's High Newry	1 representative

In spite of repeated attempts by the researchers and NICCY some of the schools that were contacted refused to take part. No reasons were given for their decision.

The steering group, convened by NICCY, agreed a list of potential interviewees with suggestions for further interviews with key representatives made by

interviewees throughout the progression of the research. The interviews gathered views on issues relating to provision of Traveller education, policy, good practice and specific difficulties and problems. The interview schedule designed to guide the interviews is documented in Appendix 2. In most cases interviewees agreed for their interview to be taped. However when this was not granted detailed notes was taken.

4. Demographics and Education Statistics

The 2001 Census revealed that in Northern Ireland there were 1,710 Irish Travellers with the Southern Education and Library Board having the highest proportion with 653 Travellers and ultimately the highest number of pupil enrolments. Table 4 shows the population of each Education and Library Board area, the percentage of Irish Travellers and numbers of Irish Travellers.

Gaining accurate counts of the number of Travellers has been an issue widely discussed and due to Traveller mobility changes within an area can occur relatively rapidly.

Table 4: Travellers Population by Education and Library Board Area

Education and Library Board	Total Population	Travellers as a % of total population	Number of Travellers	% of Traveller Population
Belfast	277,391	0.09	250	14.6
North Eastern	394,384	0.05	197	11.6
South Eastern	388,577	0.04	155	9.1
Southern	343,700	0.19	653	38.3
Western	281,215	0.16	450	26.4
Total	1,685,267	0.53	1705	100

Source: 2001 Census

The Census also shows the age breakdown of Travellers (Table 5) 32 percent were under the age of sixteen compared to 24 percent for the non-Traveller population. The figures reveal that at least 462 children aged between five and seventeen were eligible for primary and secondary education and there were 160 children aged under four years old. Unfortunately the age categories do not enable an accurate count as some four year olds are within the primary school age range thus these figures cannot be compared to the School Census and enrolments and the under-four age category is not broken down further. It is also worth noting that the accuracy of the 2001 Census has

been questioned in that a number of Travellers either failed to respond or did not identify themselves as Travellers. This has led to claims that the recorded numbers are substantially lower than they should be. This might help to explain differences in the numbers quoted between the School Census and the 2001 Census.

Table 5: Age breakdown of Traveller Population

Age	Numbers	% of Travellers	Cumulative %
All persons	1,710		
0-4	160	9.4	9.4
5-9	155	9.1	18.5
10-14	193	11.3	29.8
15	43	2.5	32.3
16-17	71	4.2	36.5
18-19	48	2.8	39.3
20-24	160	9.4	48.7
25-34	241	14.1	62.8
35-44	193	11.3	74.1
45-59	222	13.0	87.1
60-64	58	3.4	90.5
65-74	84	5.0	95.5
75-84	63	3.7	99.2
85+	19	1.1	100.3

Source: 2001 Census (Figures add to more than 100 due to rounding up)

The Department of Education states that the '05/06 School Census had 700 Traveller children registered in schools (excluding pre-schools)' (DENI representative, Interview August 2006). The following tables highlight the number of Traveller children in education between 2000 and 2006. The figures are drawn from the Northern Ireland School Census conducted in October of each year. It is from this census that money is calculated and allocated to schools to help with the educational needs of Traveller pupils. The figures in Table 6 highlight that the uptake of pre-school places among Traveller children is limited when compared to the numbers who enter Year One of primary education. However, there has been an increase in uptake in both pre-school and primary school Year One, which is encouraging. The lack of

uptake for pre-school places among the Travellers is well documented and some Travellers commented to the researchers that they were keen to keep their children at home for as long as they could. However, a changing trend was observed partly due to initiatives run by the voluntary sector such as Toybox and Barnardos (see Section 6 for further details). These initiatives are praiseworthy but also raise questions as to what the statutory sector are doing (as promised in the PSI Traveller report) to encourage attendance among Travellers at pre-school and early primary school levels. The research team were not made aware of any statutory sector programmes, although the voluntary sector initiatives were praised and a co-ordinated approach with the statutory sector emphasised. The apparent absence of any statutory sector initiatives is of serious concern.

Table 6: Traveller Children in Pre-school Education and Year 1 Primary School

	2000 /01	2001 /02	2002 /03	2003 /04	2004 /05	2005 /06
Traveller children in pre-school education	27	32	40	49	39	40
Year 1 Traveller children in primary schools	56	58	69	72	83	70
Traveller children in pre-school education as a % of those in year 1 in primary schools the following year	47%	46%	56%	59%	56%	

Source: NI School Census

It is encouraging to note the gradual increase of children entering primary education over the six-year period reported with fifty-six children in 2000/01 compared to seventy children in 2005/06 (Table 7). This may in part be explained by the cumulative work being carried out by Education and Library Boards to encourage Traveller children to attend school. The figures also suggest that within primary school there is a gradual increase in numbers of pupils as you continue through the years, this may be explained by increased

numbers of Travellers, more schools submitting figures and indeed parents starting to send their children to school as they get older.

There also is a significant decrease in the number entering secondary education compared to those leaving primary education, a finding also highlighted within the literature review. In 2004/05 sixty-six children left primary school but only thirty-six entered secondary education in 2005/06 meaning thirty children either left school or moved from Northern Ireland.

Table 7: Enrolments of Traveller Children (Year 1 – Year 12)

Primary	2000/01	2001/02	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06
Year 1	56	58	69	72	83	70
Year 2	59	67	73	78	79	83
Year 3	72	56	70	79	87	82
Year 4	64	69	65	68	76	84
Year 5	61	56	65	72	73	76
Year 6	70	50	57	75	71	79
Year 7	70	71	56	56	66	78
Total	452	427	455	500	535	552
Post Primary						
Year 8	30	43	43	29	33	36
Year 9	30	37	46	38	36	37
Year 10	40	34	35	38	38	26
Year 11	32	36	30	28	27	30
Year 12	21	22	27	25	17	19
Total	153	172	181	158	151	148
Total	605	599	636	658	686	700

Source: NI School Census

When children fail to turn up at school the school is required to inform the Educational Welfare Officer (EWO) who investigates the case. Some interviewees in the voluntary sector reported that at times schools and Education and Library Boards are only concerned if pupils are in attendance for the School Census and after this date the urgency to get Traveller children to attend school decreases. However, it must be noted that no evidence could be provided to substantiate this claim. It must also be said that there was no clear sense from the interviews (and the complete absence of policy based evidence)

that the significant drop in Traveller children numbers was of particular concern to the institutions.

The figures suggest, as does previous research, that the numbers attending secondary education decline each academic year with much lower numbers in Year 12 compared to Year 8. The Education Reform (NI) Order clearly states that compulsory school age is sixteen but the statistics and the qualitative findings in this research suggest that many Traveller children leave school before this age. We could find little evidence that the school and or the Education and Library Boards had adequately addressed this problem. There was no clear evidence for the reasons for this drop in attendance.

It is also the responsibility of the parent to ensure that their child attends school and for those parents who persistently fail in this responsibility they are summonsed to court. The Belfast Education and Library Board did recount situations where such action was taken against Traveller parents. The qualitative research findings suggest that more research is needed into analysing the factors that influence a decision by the young person or their parents to leave at this age and the extent to which these decisions are influenced by racism and exclusion.

In addition to the given statistics, figures on performance at Key Stages 2, 3 and 4 were also requested from the Department of Education. Key Stage 2 figures were supplied for each school in Northern Ireland but were not broken down by individual pupil or ethnicity, as with Key Stages 3 and 4, thus comparison between all pupils and Traveller pupils is not possible. The PSI Report recommended that all data be reviewed and that ethnicity should be collated at Key Stages 1 and 2 however this was not available as of September 2006 although the Department of Education indicated that in June 2006 that they were revising data collection with the Equality Unit and ETI. It was also noted that some schools' figures were missing, most notably St. Mary's in

Belfast which has all Traveller pupils in attendance. It was therefore not possible for the research team to see if performance at this stage for Travellers varied to that of all pupils. The lack of such data is of serious concern as it prevents any detailed analysis and the researchers feel that St. Mary's should submit such figures in the same way as all other schools to enable comparisons to be carried out.

Performance at Key Stage 3 indicates significantly lower grades for Travellers compared to the average (Table 8) this is especially evident with English results with the average being 74 percent achieving Level 5 or above compared to only 19 percent of Travellers. The scale of the disparities in educational achievement for a group of children recognised as excluded, discriminated against and marginalised should be of serious concern to all. The Education and Library Boards and the Department of Education need to ensure that they are providing the best support for Travellers to raise grades.

Table 8: Performance at Key Stage 3 2004/05

	All Pupils	Travellers
	English	
Number of pupils in Key Stage 3 (inc. absent excl. exempt)	25,586	31
Number of pupils achieving expected level (5 or above)	18,764	6
% of pupils achieving expected level (5 or above)	73.3	19.4
	Maths	
Number of pupils in Key Stage 3 (inc. absent excl. exempt)	25,627	31
Number of pupils achieving expected level (5 or above)	18,203	9
% of pupils achieving expected level (5 or above)	71.0	29.0
	Science	
Number of pupils in Key Stage 3 (inc. absent excl. exempt)	25,633	31
Number of pupils achieving expected level (5 or above)	17,850	8
% of pupils achieving expected level (5 or above)	69.6	25.8

Source: NI School Census

Table 9 highlights that in 2003/04 – 2004/05 forty-one Traveller children sat Key Stage 4 exams. However, only 24 percent (ten pupils) achieved 5+

GCSE's at A*-G grades compared to 88-89 percent of all pupils. These figures confirm the poor performance levels among Travellers; but more worrying is that in discussion with relevant stakeholders these figures appear to reflect accepted norms. The raft of policies and initiatives clearly needed to improve educational performance and life chances were not evident. Only occasionally were targeted responses in evidence, such as the Southern Education and Library Board's Inclusion in Education Project, which aims to improve educational attainment. However, individual and unconnected initiatives such as this will not address the serious under performance of Traveller children. There needs to be a clear commitment to raising the achievements and related opportunities for Traveller children mainstreamed throughout Northern Ireland.

Table 9: Performance at Key Stage 4 2003/04 – 2004/05

	2003/04 all pupils	2004/05 all pupils	2003/04-2004/05 (combined) Travellers
Number of pupils in Key Stage 4 (year 12)	25,741	25,284	41
	15,320	15,449	★
Number achieving 5+ GCSE's A*-C	60	61	★
% achieving 5+ GCSE's A*-C	22,615	22,479	10
Number achieving 5+ GCSE's A*-G	88	89	24
% achieving 5+ GCSE's A*-G			

**Source: NI School Census
than 5**

★ Fewer

The Department were able to provide information on the destination of Irish Traveller school leavers from the School Leavers Survey. Table 10 shows the combined figures for 2003/4 and 2004/5. The most striking statistic is that nearly a quarter had an unknown destination. A greater detail of destination is needed in order to ensure that evidenced based policy can be formulated to meet the needs of Traveller children as they leave school. Based on the figures above given for educational achievement it is not surprising to see no evidence of Traveller children entering higher education. Some interviewees indicated that they were aware of some Travellers having progressed to higher education in the past but that these individuals were an exception.

Table 10: Destinations of Irish Traveller School Leavers 2003/04 and 2004/05³

	Number	%
Higher Education ⁴	0	0.0
Further Education	7	20.6
Employment	6	17.6
Unemployment	6	17.6
Training ⁵	7	20.6
Unknown	8	23.5
Total	34	100.0

Source: Department of Education

Summary

The 2001 Census revealed that there were 1,710 Irish Travellers in Northern Ireland. However, these figures have been disputed and it is thought that this is an underestimation with some Travellers failing to respond or to identify as Travellers.

Statistics from the Department of Education reveal that attendance both at pre-school level and post-primary level are not as high as they should be for the Traveller population. However, a changing trend was noted in the pre-school sector with more Traveller children starting to attend.

Performance at Key Stages 2, 3 and 4 were also requested. However, figures at Key Stage 2 were not broken down by ethnicity thus preventing comparison between all pupils and Traveller pupils. Figures at Key Stages 3 and 4 indicate significant under achievement and poorer performance among Travellers, which, though related in part to attendance figures, cannot be simply explained away. More worryingly, lower performance of Traveller children is clearly an

³ Excludes special and independent schools

⁴ Includes universities and training colleges. Numbers entering training include those entering the Jobskills programme, operated by the Department for Employment and Learning.

⁵ Training on Jobskills is delivered by a range of training providers, including FHE Colleges. Jobskills trainees who receive training at Further Education Colleges are recorded as being in training and not in Further Education. This convention avoids double counting.

accepted norm with little being done to change the status quo. This undoubtedly contributes to the expectations relating to education with the Traveller community. Statistics also indicate that Travellers are less likely to continue with their education with none attending Higher Education in 2003/04 or 2004/05.

5. Views and Experiences

This section documents the views and experiences of children and young people, parents and representatives from both the voluntary and statutory sectors. At times views expressed were contradictory both from within the Traveller groups and between Travellers and other interviewees. This highlights the varying experiences of the education system for Travellers in Northern Ireland and how these experiences have influenced the overall views of the adequacy and effectiveness of education provision for Travellers. According to the Department of Education, Traveller education needs to be *“flexible, integrated and needs based”* and some of the key issues for Traveller education include integration, segregation, attendance and transport.

5.1 Children and Young People’s Experiences of School

The young people and children were asked what they thought of school and, as might be expected, their views and opinions varied. One group in Belfast who were not attending school had very negative views, which for some were due to their experiences of teachers who they described as *“evil”*. One eleven year old boy from the Western Education and Library Board area stated, *“My teacher is a witch”*. However an eight year old boy in the same group and same school said, *“Oh no my teacher is kind”*. This highlights how many experiences are not only school specific but also teacher specific.

Irregular attendance led some children to fear returning to school, especially after long periods away. Some children said that they were worried that teachers would be angry yet one eight year old girl from Belfast explained that in spite of her fears the teacher was very supportive:

“When I was away from school for a long time I thought the teacher would be really angry and shout at me but we had a meeting with him and he was really nice to us and pleased to see us...” (Eight year old Belfast).

This provided a supportive framework in which the child felt enabled to return to school and it emphasises the need for mainstreamed guidance for schools in such situations to ensure all Traveller children receive equal support.

Some children also discussed that their dislike for school stemmed from how they were treated by fellow pupils, in terms of bullying and racial prejudice:

"I hate school because the children don't want to be your friend" (Nine year old Belfast).

For those who were being treated unfairly by fellow pupils, or indeed teachers, and suffering racist abuse, the school experience was less than enjoyable and there was a sense that some schools were not taking appropriate action to overcome such difficulties. This raises issues around school policies, especially those related to bullying, discrimination and awareness of cultural diversity and their adequacy in meeting the needs of Traveller children who may be suffering unfair treatment based on their identity. It is worth reiterating that the UNCRC states that children have the right to *"equality regardless of race and ethnicity"*. This fear of discrimination, along with negative past experiences of parents led some within the Greater Belfast area to choose St. Mary's as opposed to a mainstream school as a perceived safe haven from racism. Discrimination within schools has to be acknowledged and policies must be formulated to tackle the problem and training introduced to change such behaviour and challenge attitudes.

Some children stated that they liked school but due to peer pressure they were reluctant to say this:

"Everyone will laugh at me so I say I hate school" (Seven year old Belfast).

Pressure was also noted to come from within the family not to attend school and to start helping either in the family business or in the home. For some of these children there was recognition that attending school and learning to read and write was important, but the Traveller and family traditions inhibited them from pursuing educational opportunities:

"I can read and write, it is better if ye can" (Fifteen year old WELB area).

This is a crucial issue that needs further study, as it was clear from the interviews with the statutory sector representatives that Traveller culture is often used as means to explain away dynamics and choices that might have less to do with cultural choices and more to do with institutional racism. Institutional racism has been defined as:

"The collective failure of an organisation to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their colour, culture or ethnic origin" (Macpherson, 1999).

5.2 Cultural Issues

Many Travellers noted how their traditions and 'way of life' could impact on their school life. Particular examples recounted focused around family gatherings at significant ritual and communal events such as births, deaths and marriages and how at such times the whole family came together and normal activities such as going to school would cease for a few weeks. McCann et al. (1994) discussed the cultural values of Travellers and how these differ in many ways from the settled community they state:

"These values include nomadism...[and] include the patriarchal and extended family, independence and flexibility in economic adaptation, a resistance to wage labour in favour of self employment, rituals surrounding death..."

One fourteen year old Traveller female stated that she would find it very difficult to return to school if a family member died and most likely would leave school in such a circumstance. When asked how her parents would feel about this, she was of the opinion that they would accept her decision, as she had been at school for long enough. This highlights again the attitudes within parts of the Traveller community and the need for the statutory sector to work in partnership with the Traveller community and for the development of a shared understanding of the statutory obligations relating to education for children and young people. Previous work indicates that many within the Traveller community fear that their traditions will be lost with increased integration and that the norms of the dominant majority will become more accepted (Noddings, 1992; Young, 2000; Conaty, 2002).

Most of the Travellers that were spoken to were 'settled' thus travelling during school term time was less common. The statutory sector did however state that even so attendance around holiday time could be more erratic with some families taking extra days or indeed weeks to enable them to travel. One statutory representative said that this was difficult for the school and Traveller pupils alike but schools tried to accommodate the Travellers and such absences were only reported to the EWO if they became unacceptable and extended over a long period of time. This highlights that efforts made by some schools to understand the cultural norms of some Travellers can encourage a better relationship between Travellers and education providers.

Relevance of Education

In many of the interviews the need for and relevance of education was raised. Both Travellers and key representatives alike expressed the view that once Traveller children learnt the basics of reading and writing there was no longer a need for them to attend school. One boy, who noted his desire to start working within the family business, stated:

"Travellers don't like staying in school too long" (Twelve year old WELB area).

Traveller's views

Views on education did however vary from area to area and family to family. One group of mothers in the Western Education and Library Board area felt that it would be more worthwhile for their daughters to stay at home and learn skills such as cookery and childcare. It was felt that many mothers viewed the current education curriculum as not fully meeting the needs or expectations of their children and consequently they had to teach them skills at home:

"I've been learning to give them their own education at home. Learn them to read and write, home economics, cooking and cleaning and stuff like that, something that they didn't learn in school" (WELB area).

The views of the children and young people also indicated that the curriculum was not always meeting their needs with many emphasising that they desired to see more vocational subjects being offered. Comments made by the young people included:

"What is the point in going to school when you are going to get married and have a family?" (post primary female) and "What use is history or geography to you when you have to bring up a family, it won't put food on the table for you or help?" (post primary male).

Again there was an expectation of the roles that they would perform in adulthood and that males in particular would continue in the family business. However, Key Stage 4 Flexibility Initiative (Department of Education Circular number 2005/2) is one way in which education could become more 'relevant' to meet the needs of Traveller pupils. This is 'work related learning' where pupils have to complete a certain amount of time in school and sit certain

exams yet have the opportunity to work and learn skills in certain sectors of employment. The research team are not aware of the number of Travellers who are involved in this initiative or indeed of its success but are aware of discussions between AMT, the Department of Employment and Learning and Belfast Institute of Further and Higher Education to initiate a pilot scheme.

The negative views on education were not held by all the parents and some indicated that *"you need education for jobs"*. This was aptly articulated by one of the mothers we spoke to who fully supported her child's decision to remain in education:

"She has no intention of leaving...that is rare...she wants to stay on at school, get a job, and maybe get married when she is 26/27...wants to see a bit of life first" (SELB area).

Within this group views were more positive and the need of obtaining a good standard of education emphasised. The range of contradictory views among those interviewed shows that a diversity of opinions exists within the Travelling community in much the same way as a diversity of opinion exists in the settled community over the same issues. The extent to which Traveller culture discourages further education awaits a more comprehensive piece of research. Over emphasising the influence of Traveller culture on these decisions is in danger of taking the spotlight of institutional responsibilities.

Statutory and Voluntary Views

The relevance of the current education curriculum to Travellers was also echoed in the interviews with statutory and voluntary representatives, with many expressing the opinion that vocational subjects would appeal more to Travellers and also meet their needs for the future. Many said that females were expected to learn skills such as cooking and cleaning whilst young males would enter the family business:

“Young girls are engaged from a very early age, they are engaged to be married by the time they are about fourteen and are expected to leave school and start to prepare for married life...and boys join the family business”
(statutory sector representative).

However, it was highlighted that family businesses were now less common than in the past thus there was more pressure on young people to seek employment outside of their community. It was felt that this situation was slowly bringing about recognition for the need to gain a higher level of education and indeed some examples of young Travellers gaining A-levels and further qualifications were quoted but these were still the exception. In light of these changes within Traveller culture in recent times and their rising expectations of education and life chances, the continued existence and perpetuation of racial stereotypes within the statutory sector, as noted, needs to be challenged.

It was however encouraging to note that some Traveller Support Teachers felt that the situation within the statutory sector was improving and changes were being made to the quality of education for Traveller children, largely as a result of the commitment to initiatives such as the development of Traveller Support Teachers. However it must be recognised that the Traveller Support Teachers consulted highlighted the limited financial resources that they are required to operate under thus at times restricting what can be achieved.

Expectations and Peer Pressure

It was also noted by the researchers that as well as the curriculum not meeting Travellers’ desired needs there were low expectations about what they could and would actually achieve. This view was apparent in all the interviews conducted even among Travellers themselves.

Travellers' Views

In one interview with Traveller females aged between fourteen and seventeen it became evident that although some were doing well in school and gaining qualifications they did not intend or indeed expect to continue with their education. One young female expressed a desire to work with children but clearly stated that she did not expect to become a teacher, *"just a nursery assistant or something"*. It became clear that although this young person was very determined and able she did not aim for a career that would involve continued education. The discussions with young people also indicated that some who enjoyed school and wanted to continue with their education were encouraged not to do so due to the negative views among their peers. This points to the problems faced by some young people from within the Traveller community themselves.

Once again this might be construed as a reflection of Traveller culture, alternatively it could be a reflection of young people's negative attitudes towards an education system from which they have been largely excluded. Examples of some Traveller young people achieving good grades and having the potential to succeed within the education system were recounted but rarely led to a successful continuation of their educational careers. The reasons for this fracture in educational progress were related to family pressure, the persistence of low expectations leading to an attitude of *"what is the point?"*, an absence of assistance and direction from the education system itself and the perception that racist attitudes would prevent access to employment.

Statutory and Voluntary Views

It was reported by Traveller Support Teachers that only occasionally would a Traveller young person want to further their education. They believed that this was in part due to cultural issues, and failure to see the need for, or relevance of, education to meet the needs of Travellers, and also due to the discrimination

faced by young Travellers when they seek employment. It was indicated in the interviews that due to the difficulties in gaining employment many young people became despondent and questioned the point in actually trying. Many interviewees, Travellers and key representatives alike, highlighted how this inhibits young people from getting work and in turn creates no incentive for young people to continue with education. The PSI recommendations included the need for the Department of Employment and Learning to promote employment of Travellers, a recommendation yet to be discussed by the Race Forum (as of June 2006) but one which this research would indicate is vital for Traveller young people trying to find work. More innovative solutions to providing employment, such as through social enterprises, should be encouraged in an attempt to break this cycle.

Summary

These findings highlight the need for work among the Traveller community to help them realise their full potential and also work among the statutory sector to ensure that they are offering sufficient support. At the moment it is felt that this support for Traveller pupils is *ad hoc* and needs to be mainstreamed by the Department of Education. It also raises the issue of development work within the settled community including among employers to challenge racial prejudice and discrimination against Travellers. There must also be a practical focus on challenging the prevailing racial stereotypes and related behaviours that are limiting institutional ability to promote equality for the Traveller community. Only by challenging institutional racism at all levels can the rights of Travellers be secured and the situation transformed.

5.3 Attendance

All of those interviewed commented on difficulties in sustaining appropriate attendance levels of Traveller children, especially at post primary level. The Education and Libraries (NI) Order 1986 states that it is the duty of a parent to

secure regular attendance of their children at school, this order however was written for and by a settled community with little or no reference to the existence of other cultures.

Travellers' Views

Young people and children were asked about their attendance at school with one group who were not currently attending school putting forward reasons for their absence. These reasons ranged from family issues to a dislike for school:

"My mummy had a baby and we could not go to school" (Seven year old BELB area).

"I was away travelling and in England" (Eight year old BELB area).

"I've been out of school because all the people were shouting at me and I don't like it" (Seven year old BELB area).

Dislike for school was noted among many of the young people with one ten year old girl in Belfast stating:

"I hate school, I hate the teachers and I hate the children".

Many felt that their dislike for school was because of the teachers with one child's experience resulting in her becoming very upset:

"The teacher shouted at me and made me cry..." (Ten year old BELB area).

These experiences did not encourage children to attend school on a regular basis. The extent to which these negative dynamics and relationships were based upon racism was not overtly apparent during the interviews. However,

young people are not always aware of the reasons for abuse particularly when overtly racist language is not employed by the abuser.

Attendance varied between primary and secondary education with many education representatives stating that by Year 10 attendance would become more erratic. This is the time when pupils are working towards GCSE examinations and consequently many Travellers fail to either achieve grades or indeed sit final exams. This issue was raised with some young Traveller women who had left school before completion of GCSEs but who were now completing them through an out of schools programme. They were aware of the importance of these exams but did not regret leaving school as they had felt school did not meet their needs and was too restrictive, even in terms of dress and regulations:

“You don’t go outside, it is like prison” and “I really hated it and having to wear the uniform and all”.

These feelings of being ‘trapped’ were discussed with the young people who said that the restrictions were not what they were used to within their culture and although young Traveller females in particular were not allowed to ‘roam’ the streets as they pleased there was still a sense of ‘freedom’. These experiences do not lead to the young people enjoying school therefore they were not always motivated to attend. One young male explained that he attended school for a while but that he hated it as it was *“like a prison camp”*.

One group of parents recognised that missing school led to difficulties both with statutory bodies and children themselves:

“If they miss school you get into difficulties, especially if it’s a settled Traveller family and anyhow my ones don’t like missing school” (SELB area).

Many parents recognised that they would be held responsible if their children did not attend school, but some mothers stated that it was difficult to get their children to actually attend, and whilst this difficulty has to be recognised as having particular significance for Travellers the legal obligation on parents to ensure attendance still applies.

Statutory and Voluntary Views

One teacher commented that at times Traveller children would be withdrawn to attend family events for a period of weeks. Another teacher noted that some children would be taken out of school and sent away if the parents felt that they were adapting too much to the 'settled culture'. One young girl in particular who was making excellent progress at school was withdrawn for a period of time and it was the opinion of the school that this was because she was starting to mix too well with her 'settled' peers and indeed lose part of her Traveller culture. It is not clear to what extent these opinions reflect the reality of the situation or are based upon individual and institutional prejudice. But it is clear that a complex and competing hierarchy of pressures are faced by Traveller children in education, both internally and externally. It is also clear that some of the views expressed by public sector institutions seem to place blame for under achievement and poor attendance almost exclusively at the feet of Travellers themselves.

Many within the statutory sector highlighted that attendance had to be supported by parents, but it is also important to note that all within the education system have a role to play in encouraging attendance of Traveller pupils and this was highlighted when many felt the current education curriculum was not relevant to them:

"Parental support is the bottom line for attendance" (statutory sector representative).

The issue of attendance was also raised within the Education and Library Boards who all acknowledged that it could be sporadic among Travellers. However, it was interesting to note that within one Education and Library Board it was felt that attendance was no worse among Travellers than any other 'excluded' or 'socially disadvantaged' group. It was also emphasised that more had to be done to meet the needs and address the issues of why such young people did not want to attend school. The Southern Education and Library Board highlighted that in one of their areas attendance had improved in both primary and post-primary schools by 50 percent after employing an EWO to specifically work with Travellers. This highlights how targeted initiatives can impact but that such initiatives need to be mainstreamed if there is to be an evident impact across Northern Ireland.

It was brought to our attention that in one case a parent within the Belfast Education and Library Board was offered the option of home schooling, as her children were such poor attendees at school. However it was not clear what assessments had taken place to determine if home schooling was appropriate. This procedure is questionable and would need to be carefully monitored on a regular basis. Clarification was sought from the BELB with the policy on home schooling being provided, but this did not mention specifically Traveller needs or any special support arrangements.

5.4 Parental Involvement and Support

Travellers' Views

Attendance at school may be reliant upon parental support but many parents commented that they felt that it was more worthwhile for their children to stay at home and learn 'life skills'. In addition some parents highlighted that they worried about their children attending school due to the risk of them being introduced to drugs, promiscuity and compromising their values and beliefs:

“When they go up to big school all they learn how to do is smoke and curse Jesus”.

“It’s just crude”.

“They walk up and down through the town things like that when they should be at home doing something” (WELB area).

These concerns and fears cannot be ignored but also cannot be used as reasons for non-attendance. Parents were aware that their children had a right to education but at the same time were not willing to compromise their safety to access this right. The perception among Travellers that there was lack of understanding of the Traveller culture within some schools or among certain teachers did not help to alleviate the very real concerns of these parents. It was evident that this was why many parents within the Belfast area could not contemplate sending their children to any other school except St. Mary’s:

“I’d like them to stick with their own culture...if I sent her to (school beside where they lived) it would be easier but...”.

“The drugs that get taken in school today, that’s another thing to worry about. Travelling people don’t believe in taking anything like that...Travellers would be worried about that” (BELB area).

Many interviewees in the statutory sector commented that it was difficult to get parents to be involved in their child’s education and encourage their children to attend school. Indeed one group of parents openly admitted that they would be reluctant to send their children back to school in September as they felt that their children were not gaining anything from the experience:

"I don't think I'll be sending mine back to school in September, I want to learn mine how to read and write at home and I am going to make a big issue of it in September...why is Travelling children at these schools in the town not getting educated" (WELB area).

This was in spite of the parents reporting that their children did *"love the school"*. In contrast other groups of parents wanted to encourage their children to remain in education:

"If they wanted to leave school at thirteen I would try to get them to stay, they need education to get further in life..." (SELB area).

Parents of children attending St. Mary's Primary School in Belfast also encouraged their children to attend school for as long as possible and were very involved in their education, which the school actively encouraged:

"She (daughter) would like to go to Secondary school she likes music and art and is good at history and I'd like it (for her to go to Secondary school) as well".

"Mine are going back into Further Education".

"The teachers in St. Mary's too are like friends...they support you, they are very good" (BELB area).

In addition another group of parents said that they would like to see more support from schools and Education and Library Boards to help them in turn support their children. Many parents echoed the view that they struggled to help their children with their homework as the children had now gained more knowledge than they had:

“There should be more help for parents, it’s hard trying to help kids with their homework” (BELB area).

This was especially problematic as children progressed through school:

“As the kids get older we need more help, you really struggle” (SELB area).

It was felt that this help was not only essential for parents but also for the children to ensure that they continued with their education. Many children stated that their parents were often unable to help them with their homework and they relied on older brothers or sisters to help. AMT have noted that parents involved in their primary health project have increased their involvement with their children’s education as this was also addressing their own educational needs.

5.5 Transition⁶

Travellers’ Views

The transition from primary to secondary level has been noted to be a particularly difficult stage for many children and indeed many Traveller children do not move into secondary education:

Question: *“You are due to start secondary school in September, tell me about this?”*

Well, I don’t think I will be going, I don’t think I’ll be allowed to go...my daddy won’t let me” (Eleven year old BELB area).

Some pupils at St. Mary’s in Belfast also highlighted their fears concerning moving to secondary education:

⁶ The interview schedule raised the issue of transition into primary education and from primary to secondary education however as the text highlights mainly those in St. Mary’s Primary school raised it as being of major concern.

"It's hard if you go to High school because you get bullied and you can't just go off when you want...you get bullied, you get called names like Gypsy and they say 'you're from a different country, you should go back home'" (Ten year old BELB area).

Parents of pupils at St. Mary's also were very concerned of the impact this transition would have on their children:

"I am worried about them going to secondary school and being bullied".

"It's going to be every mother's nightmare in secondary school because it's a whole lot worse, taking them out of this school, it's like a haven for them".

These concerns were often based on the parents' negative experiences of education including racist abuse:

"I remember as a child I used to go up to school...at lunch time when you'd go for your dinner, I had to walk off and get a sausage roll, as you used to get called Gypsy, and you'd feel so uncomfortable...you couldn't even sit down because they'd be 'stirring ya' and calling you names. Even in the classroom if they were reading out something, they'd make jokes and some comment like smell or something" (BELB area).

Many parents sent their children to St. Mary's because they viewed it as the Travellers' school and it offered them a degree of safety for their children. The parents felt that the risk of bullying and discrimination was less when their children attended this school:

"If St. Mary's didn't exist I think every Traveller would be terrified to send their children to school".

"We couldn't cope without it".

"The principal is very good and I know he doesn't allow any bullying or anything to go on".

Their fears were further compounded by their own experiences at mainstream schools and of integrating with settled children, thus their choice was based on what they perceived would give their children a more 'happy' school experience. An HMI Discussion paper from 1983 recognised how the past experiences of parents can have negative effects on parental attitudes towards education. One mother in this study recalled her experiences of being in secondary education:

"I used to sit alongside him (her brother) at break times as I couldn't blend in because they used to call me names all the time. There was one girl who was nice, but that was it, but only if she didn't have her other friends if she had nobody else" (BELB area).

The transition to secondary education where their children would now have to 'mix' filled them with dread and fear. This group said that their desire would be to see a secondary school that would be viewed as a Traveller only school:

"I'd love it if there was a secondary school for Travellers, there is no secondary school for just Travellers that is the problem. If there was I'd send my child to that secondary".

The concerns and fears of these parents were understandable in light of their past experiences. However, it must be noted that as their children were not integrated in the education system with settled children before the age of eleven these fears were heightened in comparison to other parents who had children at 'non-Traveller only' primary schools. To help alleviate these concerns St. Mary's have been working on initiatives with mainstream schools to ensure that

the children do not feel isolated from other schools in the area and to encourage integration between pupils. In contrast, other parents did not voice as many concerns about the transition to secondary education with some stating that their children 'mixed' very well with settled children and had done so throughout primary school. As these experiences were positive they had no reason to doubt that the secondary school experiences would be very similar.

5.6 Segregation⁷

Travellers' Views

Some Traveller parents in areas of Northern Ireland felt that the main reason that parents chose St. Mary's was the access to transport:

"I think a lot go to St. Mary's because of the transport issue...(name of friend) was told she wasn't going to get any transport for her kids to go to settled schools" (SELB area).

However, it is the research team's understanding from the Belfast Education and Library Board that their policy is that all Travellers should have access to free transport to the school of their choice. However, this policy was not clearly defined by the interviewee. In addition some interviewees indicated that some children attending St. Mary's were not living in the BELB area, but were coming from as far as Larne each day.

In the interviews with Traveller parents from St. Mary's the subject of phasing the school out was broached:

⁷ When segregated education was discussed the majority of interviewees focused on St. Mary's with other projects, mainly within the voluntary sector, either not being referred to or unknown. However, Section 6 looks at some of these projects and discusses the issue of segregation.

“They couldn’t... every Traveller would be terrified to send their children to school” (BELB area).

Phasing out of St. Mary’s over a five year period was one of the recommendations made by the PSI but not accepted by the Department of Education, based on parental choice. However, it must be highlighted that other schools have been closed in the past in spite of parental objections therefore this policy does not seem to be consistently adhered to. The policy, although beneficial for the parents, children and staff of St. Mary’s, may be seen as the Department of Education relinquishing their responsibility towards integrating Traveller children into mainstream education. This research has highlighted that integration would require high intensity development work in both settled and Traveller communities by the education authorities over a considerable period of time. However, the education authorities would require support from all the organisations currently working with Travellers throughout Belfast. According to AMT there are anxieties among some Travellers to integration but it is felt that segregation is clearly an obstacle towards achieving wider integration and acceptance. The issue was also raised that the existence of a *de facto* Traveller school may contravene both the Race Relations Order and Section 75 (1) & (2).

This opposition and indeed fear was highlighted when parents were asked if mainstream schools were more accepting of Traveller children would they consider sending their children to other schools and the answer was still clearly “No”. Many felt that the level of discrimination was so high that it would never fully disappear. This clearly highlights that if St. Mary’s were to be phased out a high level of development work would be required with parents of current pupils. Many parents were happy with the progress that their children were making at St. Mary’s (although there is no point of comparison with children in other schools):

“They are doing better than their friends at other schools...they are not concentrating on the school because they are getting bullied...” (BELB area). However, some argue that this may be because there is a low level of expectation for their children’s education in general but until a comparison on performance levels is made this is difficult to determine. Interviews with the Education Training Inspectorate also indicated that the school was providing a good education for the pupils. However, it must be noted that no comparison in performance levels between the pupils at St. Mary’s and Traveller pupils at other schools has been carried out. This means it is not possible to assess if pupils at St. Mary’s are doing better or worse than their Traveller peers in mainstream education. Although St. Mary’s are inspected each year under the School Support Programme they do not go through a general inspection and figures on performance are not submitted. These should occur to be in line with all other primary schools in Northern Ireland.

Some parents from outside of Belfast who sent their children to mainstream schools felt that their children were not treated equally in the classroom and were being discriminated against, which goes against Articles 28 and 29 of the UNCRC. One parent stated that her child was being treated as a “skivvy” and was not being given the same opportunity as the settled pupils:

“Settled children get more attention, and Traveller children are second best...the teachers just shout at him and embarrass him” (WELB area).

Not only does this go against the UNCRC but also the Northern Ireland Children’s strategy which states that all children and young people have “rights as individuals” and “have dignity as human beings and are respected”. However, in spite of these experiences these parents felt that a Traveller only school was not the answer:

“No, it would be singling them out from children from the settled community”
(WELB area).

One group of parents in the Southern Education and Library Board area were very positive about their children’s education experiences:

“The local school here is great, I am glad my kids get a chance to mix with settled kids” (SELB area).

They felt it was very important that their children did mix with settled children and were very opposed to segregated education:

“If we were in Belfast my kids would not go to St. Mary’s they need to be with settled kids, they learn from each other” (SELB area).

It was felt that the education system had improved since they were at school and many also felt that improvements were still being made:

“When I was at mixed school we were left to one side, no one was interested in us...it’s a lot better now” (SELB area).

These experiences were noted to be both area and school specific and even children attending schools that were in close proximity reported very different experiences.

Statutory and Voluntary Views

Segregated education for Traveller children was discussed with statutory and voluntary representatives and inevitably St. Mary’s Primary School in Belfast, which only has Traveller pupils enrolled, was the focus of the discussion. Many

within the voluntary sector and indeed some in the statutory sector felt that this school should be phased out:

“St. Mary’s is a difficult issue ...it clearly should not exist. There clearly needs to be a departmental and a Board commitment to phasing out St. Mary’s”
(voluntary sector representative).

However within the Department of Education the policy is ‘parental choice’ thus whilst parents still choose to send their children to St. Mary’s it will and should exist. The Department also stated that although inclusion was the best, they had to ensure that they didn’t *“reduce educational achievement for the purpose of inclusion”*. However, as outlined previously there is no actual evidence to support the claim that Traveller children are doing better because they are segregated, highlighting the dangers of basing policy on anecdote and indeed institutional prejudice. Some interviewees however, did not feel that the policy of parental choice was acceptable as they felt that parents in many cases did not have a choice as they feared that their children would be discriminated against in any other school:

“In relation to St. Mary’s there really is no choice for Travellers because for them the alternative is for children to go into the unknown where they feel that their child may be bullied or discriminated against and actually that needs to be dealt with before there can really be a question of whether parents choose to send their children to St. Mary’s” (voluntary sector representative).

The support for St. Mary’s is of course problematic; on the one hand parents feel that their children are in a safe environment free from the kinds of racist abuse and exclusion suffered elsewhere; on the other hand the very existence of St. Mary’s as a *de facto* Traveller school highlights the very real social and political dangers involved in the racial segregation of children.

5.7 Needs and Support

Traveller's views

Many parents recognised the support within the classroom from staff including classroom assistants:

"At school kids get extra support if they need it classroom assistants are great" (SELB area).

One ten year old in Belfast spoke about receiving extra support for Maths and English and was *"much better at it now"*. She also highlighted that she did not mind receiving this and being removed from the classroom as *"lots of children in the class need help with different things"*. In spite of such positive initiatives to offer more support to Travellers some parents felt that the needs of their children were not being met and that they were not getting the standard of education they deserved or had a right to:

"Children go to school from P1 to P7 and half the children come out of primary without knowing how to read their name. What are they doing with the children in the primary that they don't know how to read and write?" (WELB area).

Some parents were aware that their children had the right to an education like any other child but were unable to expand further than this. It is the assumption of the research team that this would be the same for many parents throughout Northern Ireland both Traveller and 'non'-Traveller. Although this lower standard was only reported in one area it highlights how some Traveller children in Northern Ireland are not receiving an adequate standard of education and the adequacy and effectiveness of education is not acceptable. However, the reasons for the poor standards were not always clear and some

parents within the group felt that the attitudes of teachers played a significant part in the low achievements of their children. If teachers are at fault however the school, as their employer, has a responsibility to ensure that all children are treated equally in the school irrespective of who the teacher is. As the statistics in section 4 reveal attainment levels of Travellers are much lower than those of other pupils and it is recognised that there is:

“A clear need to raise levels of attainment both at individual level and as a community to bring these levels up to the norm” (statutory sector representative).

However, the research team felt that little was actually being done within the statutory sector as a whole to achieve this although targeted initiatives within the SELB were recognised (see Section 6).

Statutory and Voluntary Views

The needs of the children were discussed and it was felt that for many there was a desire to mix with settled children and become integrated. In terms of integration many Education and Library Board representatives stated that young Travellers were not inclined to become involved in after school activities such as sports. For many this was due to transport issues rather than a reluctance to ‘mix’ with their settled peers as can be perceived by the settled population. One school said that they had noted a sense from some of their pupils that they no longer wanted to ‘stand out’ as Travellers but it was felt that this in itself raised issues and problems from within their community. Alternatively this could be viewed as an attempt to hide their identities because of the inevitable abuse suffered if identified as a Traveller. However, such issues were not raised by the Travellers themselves and children and young people did not voice such concerns, this further highlights the gap between institutional understanding of Travellers and their views and the realities they face.

It was considered by many within the voluntary and statutory sectors and the Traveller community that Traveller pupils require more assistance with their education, especially in terms of literacy. At St. Mary's Primary (Belfast) 40 percent of pupils need extra learning support. The resources available to the school appear to be excellent as it is part of a school support programme, which also involves a yearly inspection to ensure that the resources are being properly utilised and that the children are benefiting. According to the principal these yearly inspections suggest that the levels of numeracy and literacy are improving, but no figures are publicly available to confirm this. The principal highlighted that the needs of children are identified by an education psychologist supplied by the Belfast Education and Library Board but may not be conducted in time to ensure the appropriate help is received due to a high demand for these services.

Within the Education and Library Boards Traveller Support Teachers "*have built up relationships with families and children*". In the North Eastern Education and Library Board the teacher is employed for twenty five hours per week offering the fifty seven children (as at June 2006) extra support. This teacher mainly helps with literacy problems and noted that "*numeracy is less of a problem, probably because of their business and trading backgrounds*". Once again the perception that this is culturally related is highly controversial and indeed is based on anecdote not research evidence. The continued existence and application of stereotypes needs to be challenged. The discussions also highlighted that this Traveller Support teacher not only provides teaching support but also practical and emotional support for Traveller pupils and parents. The relationship established between this individual and the Travellers in the area took time, but the individual is now viewed by the schools and Education and Library Boards as an invaluable support to the Travellers who report positive experiences within the education system with support teachers. These positive relationships with support teachers were also noted in other

Education and Library Board areas highlighting their potential as a focus for good practice.

Representatives from the Department of Education, Education Training Inspectorate and Council for Catholic Maintained Schools felt that Education and Library Boards and schools were offering the best support that they could. This included the provision of extra classes, Traveller Support Teachers and dealing with specific problems such as poor attendance. However, it was noted that there were variations within Education and Library Boards in terms of the level of support provided especially if specific problems arose such as poor attendance. This was raised within the interviews with key personnel and it was felt that some Education and Library Boards in many ways had been pushed to ensure systems were put in place to meet the demands from the high numbers of Travellers in their area. However, it was also highlighted that in some cases experiences are based on an individual school's approach, thus there can even be variations within Education and Library Boards. One Traveller Support Teacher emphasised that many pupils are capable but that their sporadic attendance at school does not give them the opportunity to achieve academically. Once again the reasons for non-attendance were largely attributed to the Travellers themselves and there was little or no analysis or understanding of the role of institutional racism and bullying in non-attendance figures.

5.8 Rights

Issues around rights and entitlements were raised with Traveller parents, however there was no sense that Travellers were aware that they had rights as an ethnic group under Section 75, the Race Relations Order or under UNCRC. Many Travellers recognised that their children had the right to an education of the same standard as any other pupil but that there was little overall knowledge of rights and legislation. When questions around rights were posed many parents either gave a brief answer such as *"they have the same right as anyone*

else” or didn’t answer the question. Some parents did raise the issue that if their children did not go to school they would get into trouble with the authorities, but it was indicated by Traveller Support Workers that this policy was often not strictly adhered to which at times was challenged for not helping to change attitudes. Statutory bodies did however state that the policies on attendance are consistent and indeed the Belfast Education and Library Board recounted cases where Traveller parents were brought to court for failing to send their children to school.

A study by Kilkelly et al. (2004) found that children’s awareness of their rights is limited and indeed this would also be the case among Traveller children. There was also a sense that many Travellers dealt with issues that arose in their own personal way but not based on any knowledge of rights but on what they perceived as fair and just for them as an individual.

In discussions with the statutory sector it became clear that there was no clear understanding of the rights of the Traveller community. There was no mention of the UNCRC or the potential impact of the Bill Of Rights for Northern Ireland. It is clear that the statutory sector, and the Traveller Support Groups, have much to do in developing a rights based approach to education.

5.9 Transport

Transport arrangements for Traveller children were discussed with the Department of Education and Education and Library Boards and it was highlighted that *“they would generally be treated within the usual home to school transport rules”*. It became clear through the course of the interviews that the policy for transporting Traveller children to and from school differed between Education and Library Boards and it should also be noted that at times it was difficult to ascertain from the Education and Library Board representatives exactly what the policy was. Policies such as this need to be clear and transparent.

It is the research team's understanding that the Belfast and Western Education and Library Boards are the only ones who are currently providing transport for Traveller children and the Western Education and Library Board did indicate that they were trying to phase this out. It had been noted that parents had become reliant on this transport even when transport was available at home and it was felt that parents had to be encouraged to "*take responsibility*". It was however recognised that this move may reduce attendance levels at school and poses other difficulties for the Education and Library Board to overcome.

The Belfast Education and Library Board indicated that the transport arrangements currently in place would remain and it was felt that Traveller children should have access to free transport outside the general home to school transport rules of two miles for primary school children and three for secondary school children. Other Education and Library Board areas felt that only in exceptional circumstances, such as illness or disability, should transport arrangements alter. Confusion did however occur when children living in the South Eastern Education and Library Board (SEELB) were attending school in the Belfast Education and Library Board (BELB) as to who was responsible for transport arrangements. The SEELB clearly stated that they did not provide free transport outside the general home to school transport rules however the BELB were less clear as to their policy in these circumstances. Anecdotal evidence, however from other interviewees suggests that BELB do provide transport for pupils living in other Education and Library Board areas but attending a school in the BELB area.

Some interviewees also raised the issue of the length of time some pupils spent travelling to school and the possible impact this would have on performance levels. It would be beneficial if Education and Library Boards had one policy for all Traveller pupils throughout Northern Ireland and also were clearer as to

their current policy and practices. We would expect a consistent policy to emerge with the development of the Education and Skills Authority.

5.10 Concerns of Parents

Traveller parents raised a number of concerns that they had about their children and their education. These concerns are discussed over the pages which follow and highlight the issues faced by Traveller pupils in the classroom.

Relationships

The Traveller culture sometimes sees young females becoming engaged at thirteen or fourteen years of age. Many parents and some teachers commented that at this stage young girls may be withdrawn from education in the fear that they will form relationships with other males. One interviewee noted that one parent always left his child at school and collected her, not allowing her to stay for after school activities to reduce her contact with peers. Parents raised the issue of the high morals within their culture and that there was a fear that young women would become involved with settled males and the possible implications this may have.

In addition it was noted in some groups that intra community relationships can have an impact on how young people will relate to the settled community. Incidents of conflict between Traveller young people were recounted by some Traveller support workers and it was noted that apologies among some communities were recognised as *“giving in”* or *“losing face”*. This can have implications in schools when disputes occur between a settled child and Traveller child. This emphasises the need for schools and teachers to become more familiar with the Traveller culture in an attempt to understand what can be easily dismissed as ‘bad behaviour’. The need for cultural awareness training must however be supported by specifically anti-racist education for policy

makers, educators and settled children in order to challenge and change the prevailing prejudicial views of the Traveller community.

Bullying and Discrimination

The fear of bullying and discrimination was an issue that was raised by all parents. Those at St. Mary's Primary School recognised that bullying still existed in the school but at least it was not based on ethnicity. However, there was an overriding confidence among parents that their children could *"give as good as they get"* and indeed it was also felt that older Traveller children were always there to *"look out for the younger ones"*. However, in mixed schools there were fears among parents that teachers did not treat their children equally and that the teachers would give Traveller children menial tasks and 'belittle' them in front of their peers. One parent recounted her child's experiences:

"She (the teacher) doesn't explain...and if they put their hand up and say 'Miss what is the meaning of this?' she'll deliberately make them stand up in class...she picks them out".

These experiences of racism were only echoed within one group but were related by the parents and children independently. However, it did emerge that this was one particular teacher in the school and the other mothers said that the other teachers appeared to be more understanding and supportive, but for this one mother her opinion of the education system had been clouded by this experience.

One Education and Library Board representative felt that at times Traveller families assumed that the problems their children faced were due to racism and/or discrimination when in fact it was more a general behavioural issue:

“Most schools in areas of high deprivation have problems with behaviour and attendance, sometimes if a Traveller child gets into problems the family assume it is because of racism”.

However, many Traveller parents and children clearly recounted incidents where they experienced racism and were discriminated against in the education system purely on the grounds of being a Traveller.

5.11 Summary

The views and opinions of school varied as would be found among any group of children and young people. Dislike for school and teachers is common among many children and these views were echoed among the Traveller children. Many children indicated that they worried about their irregular attendance and the impact it would have on them when they returned to school, indeed Traveller Support Teachers indicated that many children had the ability to succeed but their poor attendance had detrimental effects on their progress. Although some parents recognised their responsibility in ensuring their child or children attended school many failed in their ability to enforce this. On occasions the Traveller culture or lifestyle was used as the reason with some stating that they failed to see the relevance of school or the current curriculum in meeting the needs of their children. However, many parents opposed this view and felt that education was vital for their children to succeed and be able to find suitable employment.

It was however recognised among all interviewees that discrimination often inhibited what young people could achieve and this led many to adopt the attitude of “what is the point” in spite of their ability. This discrimination was often faced in the school setting and stories of racist treatment between settled and Traveller children were recounted. This clearly is not acceptable and the Department of Education, Education and Library Boards and schools must work

to ensure that such behaviours are not found in the school setting by either pupils or teachers.

This research has shown that whilst some Traveller parents and children recounted that schools were attempting to provide a sound education for their children, the education system as a whole for Traveller children is inadequate and that these failures are both school and area specific. Very real concerns were expressed about bullying and racial discrimination, which prompted some parents within the Belfast area to choose St. Mary's Primary School. This school offered many parents the security that their children were safe and this was their priority, not integration with the settled community. The research team recognises the dangers inherent in ethnic segregation of young people but also recognises the support given by parents to St. Mary's and their concern to its possible closure. If the PSI recommendation to phase the school out over the next five years had been implemented this would have required joined up thinking and work between the Department of Education, the parents, AMT and other stakeholders who aim to support and promote the right of Travellers in Northern Ireland. However, interagency work appears to be poor to non-existent with the voluntary sector offering the best examples of support.

6. Good Practice and Gaps in Service Provision

In spite of some of the negative experiences about education there were also positive experiences. However, most of these were within the voluntary sector and raises the issue as to what the statutory sector is doing to encourage and promote education for Travellers. Some of the best examples of good practice are in the pre-school sector including Toybox run by NIPPA in partnership with Save the Children and Tuar Ceatha run by Barnardos.

Toybox commenced in 2000 and works with children under the age of four throughout Northern Ireland, mainly in the child's own home. The project currently has funding until March 2008. Toybox was created to promote positive experiences for education and many parents mentioned and praised the work of Toybox:

"We have Toybox here they come round your home and help with playing they are great".

A Toybox representative indicated that:

"The crucial bit about Toybox is that we have gone out and worked directly with children and their parents where they live...and then try and facilitate that process of interaction".

Many parents indicated that the work of Toybox had encouraged them to send their children to nursery schools which:

"Made a lot of difference to my wee one, she is more sociable now, she is ready for P1, she can count before she is in P1 that is brilliant".

Toybox representatives highlighted that many parents and indeed children reported very positive experiences and those who went on to enrol their children in pre-school provision such as nursery education were very pleased at the service being offered. However, some Toybox workers reported that the successful pre-school experience was sometimes not being carried through to primary education and even less so through to secondary education:

“There’s a lot of good examples and a lot of poor examples and the difficulty is that the good examples don’t get disseminated out anyway and don’t become Board policy and mainstreamed...There is one primary school where the principal has a really good understanding of the issues...works fantastically well with the Traveller community...but his school’s work isn’t being developed elsewhere”.

This highlights the need for a more joined up approach throughout the education system from nursery to secondary level to help Traveller children adjust to school life and support and encourage parents in the continued education of their children. One voluntary sector representative stated:

“We haven’t really got a strategic approach...without an overall strategy at the departmental level this is difficult to achieve”.

Some parents indicated that schools themselves offered support but yet again this was not mainstreamed and varied from school to school. Within some rural locations it was felt that there was less support than in Belfast:

“We need something like AMT down here, there is no support for us” (SELB area).

However the exception to this would be projects such as Derry Traveller Support Centre and An Termann Project in Coalisland which offer pre-school facilities and support for parents such as mother and toddler groups, women’s

groups, essential skills and health support. Such projects offer the support required but are confined to one area and it was strongly emphasised during interviews that parental support has to be mainstreamed.

The Barnardos pre-school programme **Tuar Ceatha** offers a Traveller only pre-school service in West Belfast. Barnardos state that Traveller-only provision is needed at pre-primary because of the extreme disadvantage experienced by this age group:

“They need a specialised intensive service to prepare them for education, they are more unsettled than other kids, their speech and language and physical ability is about 18 months behind other kids, some are still in nappies when they start, their social skills are quite low, it takes them a good while to settle them in, they are well loved but there can be gaps in discipline and diet”.

Attendance levels at the nursery are high and are undoubtedly helped by the transport provided by Barnardos at a significant cost to the project. Barnardos also offer a **SureStart** programme, which involves a ten week programme of work on a one to one basis with children who the nursery staff have identified as needing additional support. Some of this work takes place at home, some at the nursery, with parents present on some occasions.

Inclusion in Education was another project within the Southern Education and Library Board area, involving the Education and Library Board, set up to meet the needs of Traveller young people who do not attend primary or post primary on a regular basis. The project sees a number of agencies and organisations joining together *“to tackle poor attendance and low educational attainment with an overall aim of improving the long term life chances and quality of life for Travellers in the Southern Board area”*. The project includes essential skills work, computer training, vocational skills development and

aptitude development for *“core areas of interest to young Travellers such as practice for theory and written parts of the driving test”*.

Throughout the course of the interviews it was evident that some individual schools and teachers are also promoting good practice. One such example was the Traveller Support Teacher at **Good Shepherd Primary** in Poleglass, Belfast, where a booklet has been developed to inform teachers more about the culture of Travellers and the issues that Travellers face in education. However, such positive examples have not been mainstreamed and also there are no opportunities for support teachers to come together and share such ideas and learn from each other's experiences.

A programme run by Barnardos in the Northern Health and Social Services Board area also has potential to be used with Traveller children. **The Pyramid Plus Programme** aims to identify children who are facing difficulties in their social and emotional development so that help and support can be offered to them. Barnardos are affiliated to the UK based Pyramid Trust and are the only provider in Northern Ireland for this programme. They are currently exploring options with AMT to run the programme with the Traveller community. AMT received funding in February 2007 to operate an after-schools support programme for forty Traveller children in Belfast.

These initiatives encourage Travellers to access education provision in Northern Ireland and indeed a change in attitude towards education among the Traveller community was noted within both the statutory and voluntary sectors. However, it is still evident that these initiatives are not mainstreamed thus service provision throughout Northern Ireland varies.

The Inner East Belfast Parent Support programme provides an example of good practice developed by the voluntary sector in partnership with the statutory sector to improve the educational experience of children in an area of

significant deprivation (Harrison, 2006). The programme was piloted with five Inner East Belfast primary schools and looked at the potential scope of a parental support programme within a complex set of factors influencing educational attainment. The report documenting the findings of the pilot study stresses the need for children to arrive at school 'ready to learn' and also acknowledges that:

"Support for parents is an important element of a strategy to tackle educational disadvantage but that it must complement work with communities, pre-school providers, the formal education sector and other activity aimed at addressing complex problems that underpin low levels of educational attainment"
(Harrison, 2006).

These examples indicate that there are a number of innovative and successful projects working with young Travellers but there is a need to share the emerging good practice within the broader education sector and to begin to mainstream these examples for the benefit of all Traveller children.

7. Conclusions and Recommendations

This report highlights how education provision for Traveller children and young people in Northern Ireland is not meeting the needs of Traveller children. The gaps in provision vary not only in terms of Education and Library Board area but also in terms of school and indeed family. The children and young people who took part in this study shared many of their experiences and for some these were very positive whilst for others they had only encountered negative experiences. It was also noted that parental support was a factor in determining a child's experience in that this encouraged attendance thus enabling better progression within school.

Attitudes towards education appear to be changing within the Traveller community with many parents recognising the need for their child to access educational opportunities on offer. Some children were remaining in education until sixteen, however others were still leaving at thirteen or fourteen for employment through family networks or to assist with family responsibilities. Both children and their parents partly explained this as education not being relevant and one parent stated:

"Hopefully they will stay on (into post primary)...90 percent of them see it as not being relevant...they prefer to do their own thing" (WELB area).

The actions of the authorities have to be challenged in such circumstances with some anecdotal evidence to suggest that at times absenteeism among the Traveller community is not challenged as readily as among the settled community. All absenteeism has to be treated equally and the same procedures adopted. However, there also needs to be recognition that reasons for absenteeism do not lie solely with Travellers but are also a reflection of the inability of mainstream education to adapt to the diverse needs of the Traveller community. It must also be recognised that entrenched racial stereotypes of

Travellers have an impact on the culture and behaviours (including lack of clear policies) of the relevant institutions.

In addition it was noted that many children and young people do not see the point of school and education as they are discriminated against when they seek employment. For many this did not act as an incentive to remain in education in spite of being capable of doing so. It was also highlighted that the attitude of teachers also determined a child's desire to attend school. One parent recounted her child's experience:

"My child started school in September but he only went one day he hasn't been back. He was grand on the first day, he had been mad keen to get there but on the second day the teacher shouted at him for crying and told him to "shut-up you are giving me a headache". She scared the life out of him...it's put him right off" (WELB area).

Such experiences undoubtedly have a negative impact and discrimination by either teachers or pupils cannot be tolerated. Schools must reassess their anti-bullying policies to ensure that the rights of Traveller children are protected.

Many parents highlighted that their children did not seem to have any difficulties mixing with settled children and some felt that their children's experiences were much more positive than their own in regard to this. However, in spite of this some parents who sent their children to St. Mary's Primary School in Belfast, did not want their children to go to a school that was integrated as they felt that their children were in a safer environment with their own culture. Other parents felt that this segregation was wrong and that their children should be mixing with settled children. This highlights the complex nature of this issue and how parents' views on segregation versus integration can vary. Some parents who did have their children in an integrated system felt that although the children mixed well with other children, at times, teachers

would not treat Traveller children the same. However, one parent highlighted that *“each school is different”* and indeed another group of parents concluded that each teacher within a school can be very different thus making their child’s experience either positive or negative depending on their experience of individual teachers.

It was generally felt that experiences of education for Traveller children and young people were improving and the Traveller Support Teachers were helping this transition. Instances of children and young people not enjoying school were still recounted with some children not attending school. Reasons for this varied from family circumstances, to a dislike for school or failing to see the relevance of school, to the continued existence of entrenched institutional racism. In spite of these slight improvements, the statistics still reveal that education attainment remains extremely low for Travellers. Many parents indicated that they were unable to support their child in terms of homework and they felt that this inevitably disadvantaged their children. Also many within the education sector highlighted that sporadic attendance among some Traveller children was problematic and indeed those who were capable of obtaining good grades were being disadvantaged. It was noted that as some children progress through school their attendance deteriorates and one mother stated:

“They get what they need from school and the rest they learn from working” and *“The girls will be having babies and minding them...boys will be helping out their das and uncles from early on”* (WELB area).

The tradition of working in the family business was acknowledged as becoming less of an option but that the tradition had become an entrenched stereotype within the education sector and was often used as a means to explain away low educational achievement, low attendance and early leavers. This was bringing about recognition within the Traveller community of the need to gain a higher level of education.

Together these circumstances are bringing about changes in terms of Traveller education both within the education sector and Traveller community. However, there are still many gaps in service provision and a more consistent joined up approach among all those working within this sector is required. Within the education sector Education and Library Boards need to work together to ensure that the systems within their areas are compatible and that all Traveller children and young people are receiving the same standard of provision. It also must be highlighted that the Department of Education needs to be more proactive, and ensure that Traveller education is a priority. This lack of prioritisation is clearly evidenced when circulars dating back to 1993 have not subsequently been updated. This situation is of serious concern to anyone interested in ensuring that young people have their rights to education ensured and is indicative of a perhaps unwitting institutional racism.

Also the lack of any clear education strategy for Travellers and a multi-sectoral committee to oversee this is evidence of how low in general Traveller education is held by the Department. This is unfortunate as much good work, funded by the Department, is being developed outside of any strategic framework and/or vision for improvement. The SELB area were noted to work closely with Traveller Support Groups; however other Education and Library Boards have limited contact with such groups which is again quite serious indictment of their lack of prioritisation of combating the continued exclusions and under achievement for Traveller children.

The following recommendations are based on the findings of this research, and would help to bring about improvements in the adequacy and effectiveness of Traveller education in Northern Ireland:

1. There is a need for more sharing of good practice and mainstreaming such practice throughout the Education and Library Boards and each individual

school. It was apparent that budgetary constraints do not enable Traveller Support Teachers to meet and share ideas. **We recommend that Education and Library Boards consult more with Traveller Support Teachers as to the needs of those providing support and put in place measures to share good practice to ensure a more equitable service for Traveller children.**

2. The current Department of Education circular on Traveller education dates from 1993, thus it predates both the 1997 Race Relations Order, which identified Travellers as a racial group, and the 1998 Northern Ireland Act which established a statutory duty. There are currently motions to update this policy but at the time of field research (November 2006) this had not been finalised. The significant delays in updating and implementing effective policies is unacceptable and potentially places the Department of Education in breach of its statutory obligations. **We recommend that the Department of Education update this circular immediately and continually ensure it is updated in line with their statutory obligations.**
3. The research revealed that the Department of Education gathers limited data on the educational performance of Traveller children. The absence of relevant data that might inform policy development in light of departmental statutory obligations to promote equality on the basis of race is of serious concern. Data collection must be more systematic to enable more detailed analysis when required. **We recommend that the Department of Education review the data that is currently collected and identify the gaps that exist to limit comparisons between Traveller pupils and all pupils. Systems should then be put in place to collect and monitor the data.**
4. Similarly there is insufficient data to enable a comparison between the performance of Traveller pupils in mainstream schools and those attending St. Mary's Primary School. **We recommend that the Department of Education consider such a study to be conducted as part of a**

wider Northern Ireland study on Traveller pupils' performance compared to mainstream pupils.

5. **In considering the future of St. Mary's Primary School extensive consultation needs to be undertaken with the Traveller community and a strategy and action plan, involving all stakeholders, but endorsed by the Traveller community should be developed.**
6. There is currently no formal interagency approach including key statutory and voluntary sector bodies to monitor and address the needs of Traveller children in education. **We recommend that the statutory sector work with the voluntary sector and make it a priority to ensure that interagency work is developed and mainstreamed. We also recommend that the terms of reference and membership of the Traveller Thematic sub-group of the Race Equality Forum be revisited as it is the researchers' understanding that this group meets in an *ad hoc* manner.**
7. Service provision, for matters such as free transport for Travellers outside the usual home to school transport rules, differs within Education and Library Board areas. It would be beneficial to all if service provision was consistent between Education and Library Boards to ensure equity for Travellers and to prevent confusion as to the levels of service available. **We recommend that Education and Library Boards work collectively to review such policies and adopt a more co-ordinated approach. This process could be developed within the new Education and Skills Authority (ESA).**
8. The research indicated that support for Traveller parents and pupils at pre and primary school level is better than that at post-primary level, however improvements are still required. **We recommend that the Department of Education look at the approaches adopted by the voluntary sector, for example Toybox, on the transition from pre-school to primary school and develop this into a more co-ordinated approach among all sectors to ensure the education experience is positive from start to finish.**

9. The Education Reform (NI) Order states that compulsory school age is 16 but the research findings indicate that many Traveller children leave school before this age. We found little evidence to indicate that either Education and Library Boards or schools were adequately addressing this problem. **We recommend that the Department of Education investigates and seeks to develop appropriate initiatives to remedy this issue urgently.**
10. Parents indicated a desire to be able to support their children more effectively with their homework. More support for parents must be offered by schools and Education and Library Boards to help them in turn offer support and help to their children. The negative experiences of some parents have to be reversed by offering support and encouragement to them and their children. **We recommend that Education and Library Boards undertake an assessment of the needs of Traveller parents and devise an action plan to address these needs.** The various Traveller Support Groups must be involved and engaged in this process.
11. The research pointed towards a weakness in curriculum provision pertaining to the extent to which the school curriculum is reflective of the cultural and racial diversity of society and in particular the experiences of the Traveller community. **We recommend that the Department of Education assess the curriculum and make it relevant to, and reflect the experiences and traditions of the Traveller community (including schools where no Travellers attend).**
12. **We recommend that the potential and scope for using mainstream programmes to increase opportunities for Travellers to access more vocationally orientated education should be explored by the Department of Education and implemented where appropriate.**
13. **We recommend that the pernicious view that Travellers do not want to be educated due to their cultural traditions must be challenged at all levels of the education system through**

anti-racist initiatives and specifically in relation to Section 75 (2). The responsibility of this lies with the Department of Education.

14. Anecdotal evidence that there is some resistance within the Traveller community to continued education needs to be investigated in order to ensure that Traveller culture is not used as an excuse for the continued exclusion and marginalisation of Traveller children. **We recommend that research should be carried out with the Traveller community to explore the factors that lead to early departure of Traveller children from the education system.**
15. **We recommend that Traveller education at all levels is reviewed by the Department of Education to ensure that adequate provisions are being made to meet the needs of both Traveller parents and pupils and that these are consistent at all educational levels. A specific strategy by the Department of Education (updating PSI recommendations) dedicated to Travellers' education would also be advisable.**
16. **We recommend that the Department of Education review the resources put into education for Traveller children in Northern Ireland and the outcomes achieved followed by a comparison between Northern Ireland and other jurisdictions.**
17. The issue of bullying for Traveller children needs to be addressed. Within the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry (Macpherson, 1999) Education Authorities were recommended to monitor racist incidents within schools. **We recommend that the Department of Education take forward plans to record and monitor bullying and anti-bullying policies and practice within schools to determine reasons for bullying against Traveller children, ensure protection of Traveller children from bullying and ensure that bullying is not a barrier to Traveller children accessing education.**
18. **We recommend that the Department of Education ensure the development of diversity training for all teachers, both**

during pre-qualification training and as part of professional development.

19. **NICCY should raise awareness of the children's rights under the UNCRC to children and adults in the Traveller community; and awareness of Traveller Children's Rights under the CRC to appropriate authorities.**
20. **ECNI should raise awareness of race relations, in particular the issues relating to Travellers.**

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Appendix 1: Children's Interview Schedule

About your School

I am really interested in learning about your school and how things are for you there, can you tell me about:

(Some of these questions are specific to Nomadic Travellers only)

1. Tell me a little about the school you go to?
2. How long have you been going there
3. Tell me a little about your teacher?
4. Do you have a classroom assistant, tell me about them?
5. Can you tell me how many other schools you have been to?
6. How do you feel when you have to leave your school?
7. And going to a new school, tell me about that?
8. Have you come back to this school after you have been travelling?
9. How does this make you feel?
10. Yes / No Why?.....
11. Tell me what is the very best thing about going to school?
12. And the very worst thing?

Curriculum / Attainment

I want to understand if the things you are learning about are important to you and I want to know if being in school is really helping you to learn, tell me about:

13. Can you read?
14. Can you write?
15. Can you do your maths?
16. Do you feel you are able to work 'just the same' as the other children in your class?
17. What is your very best / favourite subject?
18. And the one you really don't like?
19. Tell me about the books and pictures that are in your school, are there books about Traveller children? Tell me about them

(previous research carried out earlier this year has indicated that children feel the books and pictures of Travellers in their schools are 'old fashioned' with pictures of barrel wagons and tinsmiths. They live in trailers and houses, their Mam's and Dad's /Oul Mammy's and Oul Daddy's – Grandparents- do different work, they don't feel it represents their Culture or Tradition in a way that has meaning for them, some children mentioned feeling "shamed' by them)

20. If you have problems with understanding your lessons in class can you ask for help?
21. Do you need extra special help at school – where you are taken out of the class- with your reading and writing or your maths?
22. How does this make you feel?
23. What do you feel you have learned by being at school?
24. Do you think this will help you when you are older?
25. Some Traveller children can help their parents in ways like reading letters, papers, labels on food in supermarkets and road signs when travelling for their parents or older brothers and sisters, do you do this?
26. Do you feel it is important to be able to do this?
27. Do you think there are things Traveller children need to learn about that is not being taught at school?
28. Do you know any Gammon or Cant words? Do you use them in school?
29. Have you thought about what you would like to be when you grow up?
30. Do you think you will be able to do this?
31. Is school a help?
32. What do you think it would make it hard?
33. What age do you think you will probably finish school
34. When you grow up would you like your own children to go to school?
35. Why?

Attendance

I want to understand the things that affect you being able to go to school each day, tell me about:

36. What – if anything makes it difficult for you to get to school in the morning?
37. Do you get a taxi or bus service,
38. Does it come on time?
39. If you are up late will Mum or Dad or someone else bring you?
40. What happens if you have had a bad night?

(a bad night can be anything from an intra- community dispute involving alcohol/ drugs, hand guns, arson and threats of/ or actual physical violence or a police raid to a cramped nights sleep in an overcrowded trailer with a new baby awake all night- these are actual accounts)

41. What happens if you have no uniform to wear to school?
42. What happens when you go to school with no homework's done?
43. How does that make you feel?
44. What happens in school if books have been damaged or lost?
45. How does this make you feel?
46. Can you tell me how you think you could be helped with your homeworks?
47. What happens if you have just been 'off' for a while? How do you feel about going back into school?

(being 'off' can happen around the times of a birth, death, marriage, disputes, ill health etc which may be long or short term, one family have recently been off school 10 weeks after the birth of a new baby where their Mum has had little or no support)

Conflicts within the school setting

I want to understand about what happens when you 'get in trouble' at school for fighting, tell me about:

48. What happens in your school if you have a fight with another child?
49. Do you feel this is a fair way of sorting it out?

(Traveller children have a way of resolving conflicts which can differ greatly from settled children, this can vary from the children coming to making 'deals' with one another to offering some compensation in the form of an apology, extended family living means that older siblings, cousins and neighbours will watch over and mind younger ones at school. Traveller children have a tremendous sense of justice, fairness and pride, this is often greatly misunderstood and undermined by the settled community)

50. What happens if you have a disagreement with your teacher?
51. Have you been called names in school?
52. What sort of names?
53. How does it make you feel?
54. What do you do if someone calls you names?

Participation / Social and Personal:

I want to hear about how you feel when you are in school (this is particularly relevant where there are Traveller children in mainstream schools). I need to understand if you feel like you are 'a part of things' – (a sense that you belong) - tell me about:

55. Are you in any of the sport teams, drama groups or choirs in your school?
56. Have you ever been given a special prize or award at your school for your best subject?
57. Have you ever represented your school in art or music competitions?
58. Are there settled children in your school?
59. Are you friends with any of them?
60. Who is your very best friend in school?
61. Do you get invited to settled children's home for parties or visits?
62. Have you ever invited a settled child to your home?
63. Are settled children ever asked to help you with your work in school?
64. How do you feel about this?
65. Are you ever asked to help a settled child with their work?
66. How does this make you feel?
67. Do you have fun at school?

68. Do you attend fun days and fairs at your school?

69. And Summer play schemes?

**Please note:* To give total coverage to this needs analysis, a comprehensive list of questions are attached. However constraints of time and ability may impact on the completion of the full questionnaire therefore for practical and logistical reasons some adaptation / reduction may be required.

Appendix 2:

Interview Themes for Statutory and Voluntary Agencies

- Traveller Education – past, present, future.
 - Effectiveness of current education arrangements.
 - Needs identified, Are these being met?
 - Achievements, Inclusion, Attendance, Transition, Relationships, Access.
- Policies in place relating to Traveller Education
 - Who is responsible for implementation? Effectiveness of these policies?
 - Reviews of the policies, Future policies.
- Programmes in place for the policies
- Needs Assessments/Research
 - Any findings used to frame policies and programmes
- Funding
 - Issues, Allocation, Needs.
- Travel
 - Transport Arrangements
- Inter-agency work
 - Does this happen? Effectiveness?
- Examples of good practice
- Regional differences
- Rights and awareness



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