



## Pavee Point Travellers' Centre

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*"If a settled person gets a good education it will get them a good job, yeah. But it's all the same to a Traveller. A Traveller will never come home with a real good job because of discrimination,"*

*Thomas Collins,  
aged 17.*

# Education & Cultural Rights

The rights of children, including Travellers, to an education that accommodates and respects their culture and is free from discrimination are elaborated in various international instruments. Article 4 of the UNESCO Convention Against Discrimination in Education 1960 obliges governments to develop and apply policy in such a way as to "promote equality of opportunity and of treatment in the matter of education".

"Children of minority communities and indigenous peoples have the right to enjoy their own culture, to practice their own religion and to use their own language." (Article 30, UN Convention on the Rights of the child. See also Article 2 and 29).

## Policy Changes

Traveller education policy from the 1960's to the 1980's contradicted these rights. Education was viewed as a tool of settlement, or to put it starkly, a way of taking the Traveller out of the Traveller child. Nonetheless, despite the assimilationist aims, provision tended to be characterised by segregation, with most Travellers who attended schools in "special" all-Traveller classes. In practice this meant that many schools had one teacher who catered for all the Traveller children together, regardless of age, in one classroom.

Over the last decade this approach has been largely abandoned in favour of age-appropriate, integrated provision. This has not happened without objections and in 2001 there were two high profile protests where settled parents withdrew their children en masse from school rather than allow this placement of Traveller children in classes with their children.

While full integration is the policy, practice on the ground varies. Many schools now withdraw Traveller children regularly from class for learning support with resource teachers. While resource teachers are a great asset, there are concerns about how this system is operating. Interculturalism is another key issue identified.

## Traveller Strategy

The Department of Education and Science is currently developing a Traveller Education Strategy through the Advisory Committee on Traveller Education and the Educational Disadvantage Committee. One of the challenges for a Traveller Education Strategy is to ensure equality of outcomes for Travellers. In 2003, €46 million was spent on Traveller education. Pavee Point has, for many years, called for a review of how resources are spent as the statistics below show that equality of outcome is not being achieved for Travellers.

## Statistics

The National Traveller Education Officer estimates in 2002/2003:

- 5,500 Traveller children attended Primary school.
- 1608 Traveller children attended mainstream Post-Primary schools (forty per cent of all Travellers children of post-primary school age)
- The national retention rate to Junior Cert. is 94.3%. For Traveller pupils the rate was only 51%.
- Sixty two Traveller children attended 6th year Post-Primary .
- Visiting Teachers estimate that in 2002, 16 Travellers attended third level.

And in 2002, 62 Traveller children attended 6th year Post-Primary (an increase of 13 on the previous year).

- The Visiting Teacher Service estimate that in 2002 there 16 Travellers at third level.