



PAVEE POINT
TRAVELLER AND ROMA CENTRE

Opening Statement to Joint Oireachtas Committee on Education & Skills

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Introduction

I would like to thank the Joint Committee for affording this opportunity to hear about the challenges facing Travellers wishing to progress in education.

Pavee Point Traveller and Roma Centre has given central importance to pursuing full and equal participation for Travellers throughout the education system from its inception in 1985.

This was, and is, based on our understanding of education's key importance for human dignity and rights. In fact, it was previously part of our name – Dublin Traveller Education & Development Group.

Our work more recently expanded to include Roma and this has significantly enhanced our work.

Context

These are challenging times globally for all concerned with rights and equality as we remember the terrible tragedy in Christchurch, New Zealand this month and ongoing issues of racism in Ireland.

However, it is also a time of opportunity here for Travellers with the recent recognition of Traveller ethnicity by the Taoiseach and Dáil Éireann in 2017.

The National Traveller & Roma Inclusion Strategy (NTRIS) has set an agenda - including in the crucial area of education. But its aims have yet to be realised and urgent attention is needed to ensure implementation,

The disadvantage and the poor educational outcomes for Travellers have been well-documented.

- 13% of Travellers complete secondary education compared to 92% of majority... According to Economic & Social Research Institute (ESRI), Growing Up in Ireland Study 2012, Department of Children and Youth Affairs.
- 7 out of 10 Traveller children (67.3%) live in families where the mother has either no formal education or primary education only. According to the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (2014) State of the Nation's Children 2014 report

We also know from the National Action Plan on Equity of Access to Higher Education that it set a target of having 80 Travellers in 3rd level education by the end of 2019.

To date we know that has risen to 61 - 26 additional Travellers. This still points to the fact that we need to intensify our efforts in this regard.

Recommendations

Overall we need to create a more inclusive learning context that promotes respect for diversity, interculturalism and addresses racism. We would like to make a number of key recommendations in this area.

1. All education personnel, including policy makers, need to be visibly informed by interculturalism and anti-racism, including an explicit focus on Travellers.

For far too long there has been a culture of low expectations among teachers and principals in relation to Travellers. This means that many Travellers have missed out on achieving their full potential and goals in life.

2. In this context we welcome the amendment to the Education Act currently going through the Dáil which proposes that Traveller culture and history will be reflected in the school curriculum. The Department of Education and Skill's Integration Strategy (2017) provides basic principles for inclusion, but respect for both *cultural* identity as well as social and economic inclusion is essential. The proposed amendment will require concrete programmes and materials for schools, on Travellers' history and culture.

- 3 Now that we're post-recession we'd like to see the restoration of support services for Travellers attending schools - services that were savagely cut by 85% during austerity.

Direct and targeted resources are needed to promote Traveller inclusion in mainstream education. One size does not fit all.

4 Another important action in NTRIS is to promote affirmative action to support Travellers to become teachers. This is essential in promoting positive role models as well as influencing the culture and ethos of schools.

5 Direct engagement with Traveller organisations as equal and key partners in engagement with the education system at all levels is essential.

We worked with the Department of Education in the development of the Traveller Education Strategy. We don't currently know the status of this Strategy. We need the re-establishment of the Traveller Education Advisory Consultative Forum (or equivalent) at the Department of Education and Skills. We need a way to feed in and shape policy. We know the issues the community are facing and we know what approaches can work.

In conclusion, we can't deal with Traveller education in isolation from poor living conditions, high unemployment and low health status. NTRIS is designed to have that multi-faceted approach – but its recommendations have yet to be realised.