



PAVEE POINT
TRAVELLER AND ROMA CENTRE

Pavee Point Submission to the Joint Committee on Education and Skills on the Current Use of Reduced Timetables

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Introduction

Pavee Point Traveller and Roma Centre welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Education and Skills on the current use of reduced timetables. Pavee Point is a national non-governmental organisation that promotes the realisation of human rights and equality for Travellers and Roma in Ireland.

Serious concerns have been widely raised regarding the use of reduced timetables (effectively a form of reduced attendance) with a number of Traveller children at primary and secondary levels. Pavee Point recently carried out a Traveller Baseline Needs Assessment in Clare,ⁱ which highlights the use of reduced timetables as being a key issue impacting the education of Traveller children. Traveller parents highlight the use of reduced timetables as being disruptive to the delivery of high quality education to their children. Pavee Point believes this practice serves to reinforce unequal educational outcomes experienced by Traveller children.

Context

The issue of reduced timetables should be viewed and understood in the wider context of the need to address the root causes of lower enrolment, retention, attendance and attainment levels for Traveller children. Travellers face social exclusion in education, accommodation, employment and health as a result of racism and discrimination – all of which compromise the ability of Travellers to become fully included in the education system.

Key causes of poor retention and attainment levels are reinforced within an educational system that is culturally inappropriate and within which young children are frequently exposed to bullying, racism and discrimination. The budgetary cuts of -83.6% to Traveller specific programming as part of the most recent austerity measures has further contributed to the deterioration of this situation.ⁱⁱ

This situation results in poor outcomes for Traveller children, such as weak transition of Traveller children from primary school into the first two years of the Junior Cycle. According to the ESRI, 28% of Travellers leave school before the age of 13, compared to 1% of non-Travellers.ⁱⁱⁱ Evidence demonstrates that 13% of Travellers complete secondary education compared to 92% of the settled population.^{iv} In addition, the number of Traveller children who progress to third level education represents just 1% of the Traveller community.^v As such, education presents a significant area of inequality for Traveller people.

Key issues

1. Lack of access to disaggregated data

Serious concerns have been raised regarding a lack of available data on the use of reduced timetables. Pavee Point has received reports that the use of reduced timetables with Traveller children is occurring on an informal basis in different parts of the country. For instance, information gathered from Traveller organisations in the Mid-West shows that a number of Traveller parents report their children having been put on reduced timetables at primary and secondary levels.

The rising trend in this practice is underreported as children who are present in school for a limited amount of time per day are still marked as 'present'. Reduced hours are not reported to TUSLA or the Department of Education and Skills (DoES), and the responsibility to make a complaint is placed on parents.

Recommendation:

- Provide disaggregated data by ethnicity and other socioeconomic factors on the use of reduced timetables to monitor its use

2. Use of reduced timetables as a behaviour management tool

The DoES notes that reduced timetables should only be used in exceptional circumstances; should not be used as a behavioural management tool; and should only be used with parents' consent. However, parents of Traveller children have reported that reduced timetables are regularly used as a tool to manage behavioural issues related to ADHD. Reduced timetables are frequently agreed with parents of Traveller children following a diagnosis, generally of ADHD. Schools state that they do not have the capacity or resources to manage these situations and behaviours, and use reduced timetables as a management tool in these cases.

3. Effects of reduced timetables

Traveller parents report a number of concerns with regards to the effects of using reduced timetables. In particular, parents report concerns over children falling behind in their education, and children being frustrated when they do not understand what is being taught. This results in children acting out further. Parents are not always equipped to support their children to manage their ADHD and are looked to as being expected to cover the hours their children should be in school. This can lead to parents feeling helpless. Additionally, children who are on reduced timetables spend more time at home which leads to parental fears that children may become involved in drug taking or other illicit activity.

Recommendations:

- End the use of reduced timetable as a behavioural management tool as a matter of urgency.
- Provide additional and ring-fenced educational supports for Traveller pupils

4. National Traveller Roma Inclusion Strategy (NTRIS)

There have been significant delays with progressing actions related to Traveller education in the NTRIS, largely due to lack of a robust implementation plan and resources. Pavee Point has welcomed a new pilot initiative to support Traveller attendance, participation and engagement in education that is currently being progressed in three different locations through the NTRIS. However, it is imperative that positive action measures, such as this, are replicated across the country and are adequately resourced and sustained into the future.

There is a need to be cognisant of Traveller inter-generational educational disadvantage and the historical injustices that many Travellers have been subjected to during their engagement with the education system, including segregation. This can have an impact on Traveller parents' engagement with the education system. As such, parents of Traveller children need to be supported and empowered to engage positively with the education system and to advocate on behalf of their children. There needs to be targeted interventions to support and develop the capacity of Traveller parents to engage more proactively with the education system on behalf of their children.

Recommendations:

- Develop a robust implementation plan for the National Traveller Roma Inclusion Strategy with clear targets, indicators, outcomes and budget lines, particularly to promote the inclusion of Travellers in education
- Replicate the new Traveller education pilot project across the country and ensure it is adequately resourced and sustained into the future

ⁱ Pavee Point (forthcoming), *Traveller Baseline Needs Assessment in Clare*. The research uncovered the overall needs and issues for Travellers in Clare.

ⁱⁱ Harvey, B, 2013, *Travelling with Austerity, Impacts of Cuts on Travellers, Traveller Projects and Services*, Pavee Point.

ⁱⁱⁱ Watson, D., Kenny, O and McGinnity, 2017, *A Social Portrait of Travellers in Ireland*, Dublin, ESRI

^{iv} Economic & Social Research Institute (ESRI) 2012, *Growing Up in Ireland Study 2012*, Department of Children and Youth Affairs.

^v Watson, D., Kenny, O and McGinnity, 2017.