

## **Travelling Ahead response to proposal by the Children and Young People's committee for an inquiry into Educational Outcomes for Children from Low Income Households.**

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**Save the Children** works in more than 120 countries. We save children's lives. We fight for their rights. We help them fulfil their potential.

In the UK Save the Children works to ensure that the rights of children are protected, promoted and respected in line with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and other international human rights instruments. We believe no child should have their childhood experiences or life chances damaged by living in poverty.

**Travelling Ahead** was set up in 2009 to support and develop the participation of Gypsy and Traveller children in decision making, locally and nationally. The programme works across Wales, receiving financial support from the Welsh Government and previously from Children in Need. Through its small grant programme the Travelling Ahead project has supported the development of over 17 local young people's forums and projects; runs a National Forum twice a year; hosts a website and trains professionals to increase awareness of service providers and elected members to ensure that Gypsy and Traveller children's rights are realised across Wales. [www.travellingahead.com](http://www.travellingahead.com)

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The UN Convention for the Rights of the Child recognises the rights of children (under Articles 28 and 29) to education on the basis of equal opportunity and places emphasis on this taking place in a way that shows 'respect for the child's parents, his or her own cultural identity, language and values'.

In this context, the UN Committee has noted that in the UK 'significant inequalities persist with regard to school achievement of children living with their parents in economic hardship. ....and cannot fully enjoy their right to education, notably children with disabilities, children of Travellers, Roma children.....'.

(CRC/C/GBR/CO/4 para. 66)

In Wales, Gypsy and Traveller children are the lowest achieving ethnic group in terms of formal educational outcomes. (Welsh Government 2011)<sup>1</sup> The familiar, well documented issues and barriers (Estyn, 2005<sup>2</sup> and Jones<sup>3</sup> et al, 2006) remain a

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<sup>1</sup> Welsh Government (2011): Children and Young Peoples' Well-being Monitor for Wales (Cardiff: Welsh Government).

<sup>2</sup> Estyn (2005): *The Education of Gypsy Traveller Learners: A survey of provision made by schools and local authorities to meet the needs of Gypsy Traveller learner* (Cardiff: Estyn).

<sup>3</sup> Jones, G., Powell, R. and Reakes, S. (2006): Research into the Education of Gypsy

problem in many schools still including bullying, teaching styles and a curriculum content which does not often take account of the particular needs or culture of Gypsy and Traveller pupils.

Consequently some parents still choose not to send their children to school seeing 'formal education' as irrelevant to the needs of the community but also potentially damaging both individually and culturally leaving us with a significant percentage of children and young people from Gypsy or Traveller families (particularly those between 12 – 14 years) sometimes completely disengaged from formal education

In *Travelling to a Better Future – A Framework for Action 2011* and in other Welsh policy documents including guidance and good practice guides developed by Estyn for example, the emphasis is very much on tackling cultural barriers and bullying, building trust and making the curriculum more relevant in order to improve both attendance and achievement levels amongst young Gypsies and Travellers.

From the work that we do with young people we recognise the value of this approach and the urgent need that remains to ensure Gypsies and Travellers are supported to achieve their full potential through formal and through vocational education. A number of Welsh Government policies and initiatives have supported schools to achieve much better practice in delivering education to Gypsy and Traveller pupils including those whose families still travel on a regular basis through the provision of specific grant funding and changes to the way attendance is monitored and recorded etc.

However we are also aware that in fact it is often the dedicated services e.g. Ethnic Minority Attainment officers and the Traveller Education Services who in practice take the full responsibility for engaging with, teaching and supporting these young people as well as their wider families.

We believe that it is a relevant question to ask about how whole school approaches are supporting the attainment of this group of pupils - e.g. are policies, staffing, resources and initiatives such as the pupil deprivation grant targeted at those young people who may often be intermittent or irregular attenders or indeed not attending school at all?

In addition we believe that the link between educational attainment and low income families deserves further attention in the case of Gypsy and Traveller pupils. As noted above the reasons for low educational attainment are often given as being cultural – given that Gypsies and Travellers may often be living in uncertain or insecure housing situations with poor access to a range of services including access to the job market (traditional work is dying out and literacy levels can be a barrier for many) we can find very little research on levels of income poverty amongst Gypsy or Traveller families in Wales – there was clear mention of them in the original Child Poverty Strategy but this detail is missing from the Tackling Poverty Plan and associated documents.

Figures showing the number of pupils aged 5 or over, by ethnic background and free school meal eligibility are available for the 3 years 2009 – 2012 – whilst the sample size for Gypsies and Travellers is small the level of entitlement is significantly higher than for other ethnic backgrounds. Free School Meal entitlement is of course routinely used to measure poverty and this would suggest that higher numbers of Gypsies and Travellers may therefore be living in poverty relatively speaking than other ethnic groups – in which case there needs to be a more complex analysis of the barriers and of the solutions to educational attainment than those based only on cultural issues. In addition of course many pupils from Gypsy and Traveller families may not access free school meals so how then are those initiatives aimed at closing the attainment gap going to be targeted for the benefit of those pupils?

One other area that we believe is worthy of the Committee's further investigation is the link between paternal engagement and school attainment within Gypsy and Traveller communities – again the benefits (necessity) of building relationships with parents and whole families are well documented with some good practice in Wales by some Traveller Education Services in particular. In our work at Travelling Ahead which has included supporting young people and their families to engage on the theme of education with the National Assembly's Cross Party Group on Gypsies and Travellers. Young people and parents have strong views on what works in terms of education and what isn't working for them and indeed on what constitutes educational attainment and their preferred outcomes.

We believe that the focus on cultural issues only has the potential to result in some of the issues around poverty and income deprivation being ignored and pupils from Gypsy Traveller families receiving perhaps less support that is intended to improve educational outcomes. At any rate the issues affecting attainment for Gypsy and Traveller deserve a further and a closer look as part of the Committee's inquiry

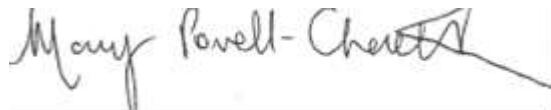
In summary we welcome the Children and Young People's Committee consideration of undertaking an inquiry into educational outcomes for children from low income households.

We believe that any such inquiry should look specifically at the situation regarding Gypsy and Traveller pupils in Wales, in particular at the levels of poverty experienced by Gypsies and Travellers and whether, and how far this is responsible for low levels of educational attainment in addition to the cultural barriers more commonly identified.

Following on from that we believe that there should be specific investigation as to how those initiatives aimed at raising educational attainment amongst pupils from low income families are implemented for Gypsy and Traveller pupils, in particular where pupils are on school rolls but not attending or are not claiming free school meals even though entitled to them.

Lastly, the engagement of parents from Gypsy and Traveller families needs specific exploration in particular because research (and practice) has shown this to be key in achieving better outcomes for Gypsies and Travellers, young and old.

Finally Travelling Ahead will be more than happy to provide more detailed written and or verbal evidence and support the engagement of young Gypsies and Travellers with the Committee's members



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