



## Education Committee

### Oral evidence: [Education challenges—Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children and young people, HC 963](#)

Tuesday 22 February 2022

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Members present: Robert Halfon (Chair); Apsana Begum; Miriam Cates; Tom Hunt; Dr Caroline Johnson; and Kim Johnson.

Questions 1 to 70

### Witnesses

**I:** Pauline Anderson, OBE, Chair of Trustees, The Traveller Movement; Emma Nuttall, Advice and Policy Manager, Friends, Families and Travellers; Lisa Smith, Committee Chair, Advisory Council for the Education of Romany and other Travellers; and Baroness Whitaker, Co-chair of the APPG for Gypsies, Travellers and Roma.

**II:** Marius Ciuca, Teaching Assistant and Translator to Roma and Romanian children, St Helen's Primary School; Jo Luhman, Headteacher, Kings International College, Camberley, Surrey; Vasile Sandu, Teaching Assistant, St Matthew's Church of England School; and Paula Strachan, Headteacher, St Teresa's Catholic Primary School, Darlington, County Durham.

Written evidence from witnesses:

– [Add names of witnesses and hyperlink to submissions]



## Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Pauline Anderson, Emma Nuttall, Lisa Smith and Baroness Janet Whitaker.

**Chair:** Good morning. For the benefit of the record and those watching on Parliament TV, can you all introduce yourselves and your organisations? May I start with Lisa, who is talking to us via Zoom?

**Lisa Smith:** Good morning, everybody. My name is Lisa Smith, and I am chair of a small charity called the Advisory Council for the Education of Romany & other Travellers. We are a group of people who consist of community members and academics.

**Pauline Anderson:** Good morning. I am Pauline Anderson, and I am here as the chair of the Traveller Movement, which is a London-based charity. I am also director of learning, inclusion and skills for Derby City Council, a former headteacher and teacher, and I am an Irish Traveller.

**Baroness Whitaker:** I am Janet Whitaker. I am here as the chair of the Department for Education's stakeholder group for the education of Gypsies, Travellers and Roma. I am also the president of ACERT, from whom you have had evidence, and of Friends, Families and Travellers. I am co-chair of the all-party parliamentary group for Gypsies, Travellers and Roma. I think that is about it.

**Emma Nuttall:** My name is Emma Nuttall. I am advice and policy manager at Friends, Families and Travellers. We are a national charity that works with Gypsies and Travellers. We do outreach work in Sussex, we have a national helpline and do case work, as well as policy work.

Q1 **Chair:** We are going to try to finish just after 10.45 am, so please be as concise as possible with your answers. I will start by asking you all, how were Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities impacted by covid, in terms of educational attainment? May I start with you, Pauline?

**Pauline Anderson:** It is very difficult to judge educational attainment because of the suspension of national examinations. Even at the best of times, there are more challenges with children who are being home educated if, in fact, they are Gypsies and Travellers.

What I can say is that due to some of the excellent work with our own Open Doors Education and Training—ODET—group, we have provided online and virtual education, and children have made really good progress. Attainment has been high, attendance has been high, and this has led to the expanded, £1 million programme, which is leading to a lot of success. So, there have been some gains in learning during the pandemic.

**Baroness Whitaker:** Pauline is closer to the ground than I am, but I have had very many cases reported of digital exclusion problems, because you have sometimes quite large families with one phone between them. I need not spell out how that has worked with distance learning, which is always a problem for Traveller families, anyway. The Department for Education



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has invested in tutoring programmes to help catch up, but I see in their news release that they mentioned that their delivery partner is Randstad, and there have been some questions about that, so I think that monitoring of that programme is really important.

There are still children who have not gone back to school for various reasons. Elective home education is a real problem for these communities. The parents, with the best will in the world, are sometimes too busy working, and they are not necessarily very well equipped to teach children. My own daughter had problems teaching her child. So there are three areas that have caused problems, and the only way to find out what is really happening is to monitor the tutoring and to pay attention to the school attendance.

- Q2 **Chair:** Before we come to Emma, you mentioned home education. In our home education report, where we called for a national register and for annual assessment of maths and English, we had evidence from the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller community that suggested that because the home education lobby is dominated often by middle class parents, it does not reflect the help that often is not given to disadvantaged communities. Would you agree with that?

**Baroness Whitaker:** Yes. Absolutely.

- Q3 **Chair:** Do you support the idea of a national register and at least an annual assessment of core skills such as maths and English?

**Baroness Whitaker:** That would be really important. It is my impression that the Government have agreed to a register. We have had questions in the House of Lords about that, but it has not happened. It is a very important policy. A large number of children receive inadequate education, often with the best will in the world, as I have said, and nobody really knows about it.

**Pauline Anderson:** In my role in Derby I have elective home education in my remit, so I would welcome those recommendations. We already fund people who visit the homes, and we visit about 95% of our families. We have access to them at least on an annual basis.

We have a register of those children and young people, including the reasons for elective home education. It is really important to continue to look at reasons, and my offer to any family of children being home educated is that as director of education I will attend any school visit with you if you wish to return to school, and I will personally attend the school with you to help you get back in—

- Q4 **Chair:** Do you agree with the idea of an annual assessment of maths and English?

**Pauline Anderson:** Yes, absolutely.

**Emma Nuttall:** I just want to echo what Pauline said about looking at the reasons. We support the measures, but often the reasons we find with



families we work for is that it is the position of last resort. They have not received the support in the school and there has been bullying or issues.

To try and resolve those issues, what you need is a Traveller education service in every local authority, because they know the families. They work with them. We have a very successful one in Brighton and Hove. It has a peripatetic teacher and an engagement officer, and it is about to appoint a teaching assistant as well. Quite often the teaching assistants are from the community. The service can try and resolve the problems before they get so far down the line that the family opts for home education.

**Q5 Chair:** The Office for National Statistics figure on the national curriculum at key stage 2 suggests that Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils are the lowest performing group, with only 19% reaching expected standards in reading, writing and maths.

There are other figures that you will know about. Key stage 4 destination figures show that only 58% of Gypsy/Roma and 59% of Irish Traveller pupils continued in education, compared to 85.3% of pupils from a White British background. Why is it that the educational attainment of these pupils is so low?

**Baroness Whitaker:** First of all, if I may, I would make a general point about statistics. There simply aren't enough of them in the right areas. The Department for Education is among the best, but even they—about a year ago, in the stakeholder group I mentioned, it was agreed that they would disaggregate Gypsy from Roma. These are very different communities, and they have very different approaches to education and educational experiences. For instance, very few of the Roma travel. They were enslaved until the last half of the 19th century, which tends to do away with the travelling culture. That is an important thing.

Education statistics would be enormously assisted by the Department of Health and Social Care, the Ministry of Justice and DLUHC, because all their spheres of action impact on education. Evictions impact on education. Poor health impacts on education. Poor experiences of the criminal justice system impact on education. There is a real dearth. People will say, if you ask them, "Well, the numbers are too small." It is true: the absolute numbers of the populations are very small and if you are doing a big, broad national sweep, they are left out, but that means you have missed the really important factors.

There has to be a revised and amended attitude to research. It needs to be targeted, perhaps, in the form of targeted surveys. So the figures you see, even from the ONS—we did manage to get some extra granular material into the census—do not give a really useful enough picture. But that is not quite what you asked. What you asked is why.

**Chair:** In a nutshell.

**Baroness Whitaker:** I think my two colleagues will be able to give you more background detail, but one of the really important things is the lack

of appreciation, understanding or valuing of Gypsy, Traveller and Roma culture in schools. There are some schools that are really very good, but they are a minority.

One of the related aspects of that is that there is a lot of bullying and a lot of prejudice. If you have got low self-esteem, you tend not to perform well. You tend not to push yourself. Very often, if you are a Gypsy or a Traveller, you drop out—particularly of secondary school. Those two areas—really understanding how they get bullied and valuing their culture—would make a huge amount of difference.

**Lisa Smith:** In ACERT's opinion, we would say that one of the single most effective initiatives to raise the achievement and attainment of young Gypsy and Travellers in school would be to strengthen the protection of young people while they are in education. At the moment, we have the public sector equality duty, but, unfortunately, many schools are failing to adequately protect children under that duty. I think there needs to be very strong and firm behaviour policies and anti-bullying guidance, that specifically mentions, in a national context, Gypsy, Roma and Travellers within that.

I have to agree with everything that Baroness Whitaker says. There seems to be a severe lack of awareness and understanding in education of who Roma and Traveller people are in society and the contributions that they make in many different ways. There was one recommendation that came from the Council of Europe that called on the 47 European member states to embed and include Gypsy, Roma and Traveller histories and teachings about language and the Holocaust into the curriculum. That does not need to add extra capacity in terms of extra hours—there are simple and effective ways that that could be embedded into sessions that already exist.

I would say this would be one crucial direction for young people. Many people feel alienated and on the margins in school when their identity is not reflected or represented. For many people, there is still a concern that young people will not be open about their ethnicity or background in education because of a fear of potential treatment.

One practical step the Government could take to improve outcomes would be to include Gypsy, Roma and Travellers under the pupil premium, as we see with the children of service personnel. We need to recognise the multiple disadvantages that Roma and Traveller children experience across different sectors—in not only education, but health and access to appropriate accommodation.

Another recommendation that could have an impact on improving outcomes would be for Ofsted to have an opportunity to specifically ask questions around the low attainment of young people from this group during inspections. Another point, which is related to the recommendations around the direction from the Council of Europe, is to have strong support for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller History Month within schools.



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From ACERT's perspective, something that creates a more inclusive school ethos is having dedicated members of staff who are from the communities embedded in the school workforce. That is something we would like to see more of. They bring so much value to the communities they serve by raising awareness about Romany history and culture in school and providing role models to children, but also a bridge of trust for those where concerns have been raised. Those are a few points I would say to your question.

**Q6 Chair:** Thank you. I will come to Emma, Pauline and then Tom. Could you please be as concise as possible?

**Emma Nuttall:** I would echo everything Lisa has said. A lot of our clients report a level of discrimination and racism in schools that comes from not only pupils but teachers. You need to train staff in Gypsy and Traveller cultural awareness. The Anti-Bullying Alliance has produced an audit tool as well as some online training.

A group of us are working on a pledge for schools, which kind of echoes the Gypsy and Travellers into higher education pledge; our pledge is to create a safe, warm and welcoming environment in schools for Gypsy and Traveller pupils where their culture is celebrated. It is very important to celebrate their culture during history month, in June, but it is also important to mark the Roma experience in the Holocaust. Research by YouGov has shown that 55% of the UK population do not know that Roma were victims of the Holocaust. Marking that in schools would go some way towards working on hate crimes, discrimination and racism.

**Q7 Chair:** Have you spoken with the Holocaust Educational Trust?

**Emma Nuttall:** Yes. We have written a letter to the Secretary of State for Education.

**Q8 Chair:** With the Holocaust Educational Trust?

**Emma Nuttall:** Yes, and they have supported it. I think there are 40 signatories on the letter. The HET is one of them, along with the Anne Frank Trust and the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust. All the NGOs working in the Holocaust field are very supportive that this community should be included.

**Chair:** Thank you. I will come to Pauline, Tom and then Miriam.

**Pauline Anderson:** It is important to note that there is a direct correlation between attendance at school and achievement and attainment. If children are not attending school, how are they going to learn? It is very difficult.

I will give you my own experience. My mum never went to school. She is barely literate. I taught her the basics when I was about 11 years old—that was my first teaching job. I then became an English teacher, so I must have graduated upwards. The important thing for me was that my parents told me I must never tell anyone at school that I was Traveller.



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We go into ethnic self-denial, and that is extremely damaging for children and young people.

The reason I believe it was possible to go from living on the roads of Ireland and never going to school to becoming a headteacher and a director of education in one generation is because I had to hide my ethnicity. It shows that children and young people can achieve if the conditions are right. I did not experience racist bullying or low expectations, so I was able to thrive. I think that is really important, and it comes back to Lisa's earlier point about low rates of ascription. Many children from Gypsy and Traveller communities are actually very successful in education, but they are not ascribing.

There is a hidden number of children who are counted among the majority population. I think that is really important; otherwise, there can be an underlying view that all Gypsy and Traveller children are incapable of learning, do not achieve and are experiencing some sort of underlying issue with education. That is not the case.

Freedom from racist bullying is really important, and it is all connected. I would like to bring back the reporting that used to be done on the perpetrators and victims of racist bullying in schools.

Q9 **Chair:** Can you explain what used to happen?

**Pauline Anderson:** A number of years ago it was stopped, but every school had to report all bullying incidents, by ethnicity, to the local authority. That was analysed, and there was a national dataset on the bullying.

Q10 **Chair:** When was that stopped?

**Pauline Anderson:** Now you are testing me. At least 10 years ago, I would say.

**Chair:** Okay. That is a very important point; thank you.

Q11 **Tom Hunt:** Thank you very much for that useful information. The Chair made a point at the start about some of the statistics. I understand that there can be a debate about statistics and whether there is enough data, but we know enough to know that there is a problem with achievement at schools. Whether we think there is enough data or not is a slightly different point, but the stats on progress in writing, reading and numeracy are quite alarming.

We are trying to understand fully why there is this discrepancy. I can understand why valuing the culture is an important point, and I think we all stand against any kind of bullying and racism at schools, but do you think there are any other reasons to explain this quite alarming set of statistics about performance at school? Is there anything to do with potential attitudes to formal education within those communities? Do you think that is a problem?

I know that attendance has been a challenge in my constituency. In fact, a



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number of schools have done some fantastic work in driving up attendance, but they found that when the schools closed during the pandemic, everything went backwards, and it was a real challenge to get children back into school at good attendance levels after they had stopped attending. I just want to know what your feelings are on that.

**Pauline Anderson:** I think it is like any group of people. There are Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people who want to achieve and do well in school and who are striving for maybe an academic or professional career, and there are others who perhaps want to go into businesses. Perhaps formal education is not necessarily for them. They might want to go into the building trade and so forth, like many of my family. You have a variety, and I think the difficulty we have is about stereotyping.

Could you put me alongside another person and say, "You are exactly the same"? I would not put you alongside a painter and decorator, who is very different from you and your profession. The difficulty we have is about stereotyping and making assumptions that all Gypsies and Travellers want the same thing from education.

However, we are seeing an increase in young men in particular—even if they are going into the trades and professions—clearly needing to have better levels of literacy and to be able to access health and safety courses, bookkeeping and all those kinds of things. I am an educationalist, and I actively promote education for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller young people because, whatever you choose to do in life, a good education will serve you. But we may all end up doing a different kind of job.

**Chair:** I am going to bring in Miriam next and then the other witnesses.

Q12 **Miriam Cates:** I think you have partially answered the question. We have talked about what changes schools need to make in order to be more welcoming, affirming and encouraging of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children, but we have started to touch on cultural attitudes within the communities.

You are saying that we cannot stereotype and that there is just as much variety in the Traveller community as there is in any other community, but you have also said, according to our written evidence, that there are long-standing community beliefs about girls and their need for education. Starting with Pauline, could you expand on that a bit more? I understand that we cannot completely generalise, but what kinds of attitudes are you talking about to girls and their need for education?

**Pauline Anderson:** Traditionally, in the past, the view would have been that girls married and had children very young, and that education was not necessarily useful to them. But all the statistics are telling us that the growth in education, the length of stay in education and the move into higher education is much greater among women and girls than among boys.

Q13 **Miriam Cates:** In the Traveller community?



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**Pauline Anderson:** In the Gypsy and Traveller community, myself and Lisa Smith included.

Q14 **Miriam Cates:** So, that is something more in the past now.

**Pauline Anderson:** It is a reducing factor, as you know, as people find they have aspirations to join the professions and so on. Of course, that is not what you see on the media.

Q15 **Miriam Cates:** Okay, that's interesting. Opening up to the others, are there any other cultural attitudes and traditions that you think may account for some of the trends we see in attainment, school attendance and leaving early? Lisa, can I come to you?

**Lisa Smith:** Like Pauline, I am a member of the Romany Gypsy community. I agree and echo what Pauline said, in that I don't think currently attitudes around this are the cause as much. We need to take a view on this that it is a systemic issue, where traditionally Romany and Traveller people have been on the margins, excluded from society.

There is often an assumption, when we talk about the inequalities that Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people experience, that we should think about this from a deficit model. We have an assumption that there is something inherently wrong with their culture or their way of life, which is why there is a significant problem. Now, there are very few people who are consistently mobile. Many people are in housing or on a private site for a big proportion of the year, because of the difficulties in maintaining a nomadic existence and being able to access health and school education at the same time.

I would say, for example, we now see children who are stable, with permanent accommodation, still experiencing the same difficulties in terms of stereotyping, low teacher expectations, assumptions about their background and family experience. What is fundamental for us as a British society is to highlight and address the systemic issue of anti-Gypsyism, which other European countries have started to get a grasp on and address.

That is a fundamental issue because, when we think about Romany and Traveller history, we need to think in terms of its being a fundamental part of our culture. There is no reflection of the fact that Romany and Traveller people were subject to the slave trade as well, back in the 18th century. There is no recognition of our own languages and dialects. There is no strong recognition of the Holocaust that took place in other European countries, and the significantly increasing number of Roma people coming to this country. I would say that overall—

Q16 **Miriam Cates:** Sorry to interrupt. I completely understand what you are saying, and you are describing much-needed changes to be made in school and wider British culture, and I completely agree with you. What I am trying to get at, is whether there is anything within Gypsy, Roma and Traveller culture that is still a barrier to children accessing education.

You said that people move around less than they used to. That is very



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interesting and makes a lot of sense in what you are saying about accessing services, and I'll come back to you. Are there any specific cultural traditions from within the community that are stopping access to education?

**Chair:** In a nutshell, please, Lisa, because we have got to bring in other witnesses.

**Lisa Smith:** Okay. I would say one significant issue would be—*[Inaudible]*—education of the parents or another family member who has not had formal education, not knowing the system and how schools operate, and how they can best support their child. Partnership with local authorities and schools, working with families, regularly from the earliest stage and years, is where we know that the most significant change can take place. A lack of education around this is key.

**Baroness Whitaker:** Just to underline what Lisa says vis-à-vis parental attitudes. There has been such a long history of mistrust of the public services. I would draw the Committee's attention to the inquiry now being carried out by the Public Services Committee on Gypsy, Traveller and Roma interactions with the public services. It had an extremely interesting and useful dialogue about education a few days ago.

There are all sorts of ways in which parents will have had bad experiences with the authorities—with "the system". Not all parents, but enough to make a difference, I think. Unless the schools make particular efforts to liaise with parents to understand their anxieties and their problems, this is probably going to exacerbate the situation.

**Emma Nuttall:** Some 50% of the families we work with are illiterate or partially literate, so that is a barrier. Then there is the digital exclusion barrier. For instance, in the pandemic, if they wanted to borrow a computer from the school, a family of five children was only allowed to borrow one computer. That is a big barrier. We did obtain some laptops from charity, but there's a limit.

It wasn't that easy for people to access IT for the homework. We have had incidences of children getting detention because they haven't done their homework, but that is all online and they haven't got the device to access it.

There is a need for funding for courses for younger Gypsy and Traveller people who want to follow a trade or another occupation. The funding is not really there—we are finding the colleges and schools don't have the money to pay for, say, children between 14 and 16 to attend those courses.

There is the issue of sites for families that are still nomadic. There is a lack of sites. Families that don't have a site are pushed from pillar to post—evicted 50 times a year. We have worked with families like that. If they are living on the side of the road, the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill is only going to make that worse.



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You can have the strange situation that, in the few local authorities that have a remaining Traveller liaison officer, they might be going round, they might know which school has an empty place and they can find a place for five children, but then that local authority evicts that family, after all that work has gone in. That is the importance of Traveller education services—so they can facilitate nomadic families more quickly into schools. They know where the places are, help with uniform.

It is really important to have properly funded Traveller education services. They have been decimated. Every local authority needs a Traveller education service. They know the families. They often have Gypsy and Traveller people working within those services. They can help when there is disengagement beginning to appear in a pupil or a family.

Also, on after-school clubs and homework clubs, we run some after-school clubs on sites in Sussex. We have a computer club. For a lot of the children, it is the first time they have even used a computer. We have homework clubs.

- Q17 **Apsana Begum:** Good morning, panel. Emma, I just want to pick up on what you were saying just now. In your organisation's written evidence, you state that families who are digitally excluded receive a lack of support. How can schools provide the appropriate support to pupils from these backgrounds, to prevent them from being digitally excluded?

**Emma Nuttall:** If the children and young people do not have access to a device, that is a major barrier. Every child that needs one, needs access to a device, and needs the help to work out how to use it. Some people have never done Zoom calls, never done email, can't access the platforms for the homework. I struggle myself with my phone! There does need to be help available so that families don't just have the device but can access the technology.

- Q18 **Apsana Begum:** Looking at the statistics, one in five Gypsy and Traveller participants had never used the internet, compared to one in 10 members of the general population. That is quite a big difference.

**Emma Nuttall:** Yes. Our digital exclusion research found that only 38% had access to broadband or wifi at home, compared with 58% in the general population. We did that research in 2018.

- Q19 **Apsana Begum:** To what extent has online learning contributed to disengagement in education for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities?

**Pauline Anderson:** One of the key issues is the ability of families to oversee that education. If Janet's daughter struggled, then many families struggled during the pandemic to deliver home education—they might have been graduates or even teachers, but it was a challenge for everyone.

With low levels of literacy in some families, it will obviously be very difficult to oversee and deliver equality of education. I actively promote attendance at school. I think that that is really important. I think we have



just come back around the cycle of needing children to be in front of qualified, skilled teachers.

- Q20 **Apsana Begum:** The Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill is going through Parliament. How concerned are you about provisions in the Bill on trespassing and Traveller sites, for example, and what risks those pose to children accessing education? Is there a risk, for example, of more children being left parentless if their parents are arrested and taken away from their families? I want to get your sense of that. This inquiry is pretty timely, looking at the overall picture.

**Pauline Anderson:** The risks are huge. Already, when there are evictions, children suffer. They are plucked out of school, they might come home from school—we have known of such families—but the site is not there anymore, social workers might be there to take them to wherever the family have moved on to, and so on. That is extremely damaging to children and their education. The police and crime Bill will make it a lot worse. It is more draconian—vehicles will be removed, trespassing will bring that sanction and so on. The whole thing comes back around to the shortage of sites.

Bear in mind that between 80% and 90% of Gypsies and Travellers live in fixed housing, not on sites. It is very easy, when you look at the media, watch the television or read the newspapers, to imagine that we are living on sites. That is not the case; it is quite a small minority who do. To protect the nomadic traditions of people who have been travelling for hundreds and hundreds of years, it is best to have sites. Then you do not have the issues of trespass.

**Apsana Begum:** That is one of the things I have thought about. I have heard from a lot of people in the GRT community that this is an existential threat, an attack on a living tradition.

**Pauline Anderson:** It makes it impossible to travel.

- Q21 **Apsana Begum:** May I bring you in, Lisa?

**Lisa Smith:** I echo what Pauline just said. There are big concerns in the community that the Bill will increase the numbers of children in social care. That is a big concern. Also, from our perspective at ACERT, it will make it more difficult for young people to access education if they are increasingly subject to eviction. The police Bill will have a detrimental effect on the life chances of young people in education, without doubt.

**Emma Nuttall:** I echo that. We are extremely concerned about the police Bill. For children to have a good education, they need to be able to stop somewhere and to have a home. The issue is that there is a severe shortage of local authority sites on which Gypsies and Travellers can stop.

In the interim, we could have negotiated stopping, and agreements between local authorities and Travellers, so people can stop and children go to school for a term. We can have that quite long term. We have seen local authorities that have allowed families to stop for a whole term to



attend school. It does not have to be in a draconian way. There is lots of local authority land where people could stop for a short while in the interim before having permanent sites and transit sites to facilitate the nomadic way of life.

**Chair:** Kim, you are next. If possible, will you ask both your questions together, to get some time back? We will get all the witnesses to answer.

Q22 **Kim Johnson:** Okay, Chair, thank you. Good morning, panel. My questions are on bullying and racism, which we have already touched on. The 2019 report, "Barriers in education—young Travellers in London", found that 60% of those interviewed said that they were bullied by teachers because of their ethnicity. My question to you first, Pauline, is, what do you think needs to happen to tackle that?

**Pauline Anderson:** As a teacher myself, I experienced racism when I was in my mid-20s. I hadn't actually told anyone that I was Irish Traveller, but as I began to be part of teacher groups, and working with people, I did begin to see the racism at work. I suppose that spurred me on to becoming more openly activist.

I chair the annual conference of the Traveller Movement and have done for 14 years. Last November, Daniel Kebede, from the National Education Union, acknowledged that there was racism against Gypsies, Roma and Traveller children in his own profession. He has invited the Traveller Movement to work with the NEU on educating teachers about cultural heritage, requirements and basic human rights, if you like, and not to be racist in teaching.

I am not saying that this is the case in all schools, but in too many cases children are telling us that. I would recommend a deep-dive review by Ofsted into bullying, to include all aspects of it and the culture and ethos in schools. It should listen to parents, children and young people, and listen to teachers. As a teacher myself it can be a challenging profession and people do need more support in being able to meet the needs of sometimes quite complex people.

Q23 **Kim Johnson:** Do you think that disciplinary action should be taken against any teacher who is found to be bullying and racist towards children and young people in schools?

**Pauline Anderson:** That should already be part of any HR policy in any school. If that were found to be the case for any other ethnicity, there would be disciplinary action without question, and I would fully expect it to be taken.

**Baroness Whitaker:** May I commend the Irish Government's "National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy"? It has some very useful information and the Committee might be interested in that. Also Ofsted have reorganised themselves and have got a useful long history of dealing with the education of Travellers. We used to have somebody on our Department for Education group. They are now thematically organised, but



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there is a Gypsy and Traveller adviser, who would have a lot to help the Committee with.

I have a copy of our letter to the Secretary of State for Education—when I say “our” it is signed by between 300 and 400 parliamentarians and others—about putting the Roma element into Holocaust education, if the Committee would find that useful.

**Kim Johnson:** Yes, thank you.

**Chair:** Kim, do you want to ask your next question, and then we can bring in the other witnesses. We are pushed for time.

Q24 **Kim Johnson:** My next question—perhaps Emma can come in on it—is about the disproportionately higher numbers of exclusions from school of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children. What is the reason, and what can be done to reduce those exclusion levels?

**Baroness Whitaker:** May I give a short overview?

**Chair:** Can you make it very snappy?

**Baroness Whitaker:** Very short. Okay. Let me leave it to my fellow witnesses, because they will have actual examples.

**Emma Nuttall:** To return to your previous question, and blending in the two, I do not think the level of racism experienced by students from staff in schools is surprising because there is such a high level of racism and prejudice in the wider society towards Gypsies and Travellers. The Equalities and Human Rights Commission did a study into prejudice and found that 44% of the UK public hold prejudice towards Gypsies and Travellers.

The University of Birmingham did a dinner table prejudice study—it was actually about Islamophobia, but they found that between 43% and 44% held that level of prejudice against Gypsies and Travellers. The next highest that the EHRC records is prejudice to Muslims at 22%. The prejudice against Gypsies and Travellers is significantly higher, and you will find that reflected in all walks of life. That is why it is so important to create the right atmosphere in schools to celebrate the culture and implement the Council of Europe recommendation.

Q25 **Kim Johnson:** Maybe diversify the curriculum?

**Emma Nuttall:** Yes, diversify the curriculum and have Gypsy and Traveller staff. With exclusions, we sometimes find that that is the end of a long line of things happening, whether that is racist bullying by pupils and staff, or digital issues.

With one family we worked with, the parent was actually in a refuge for domestic violence in the north of England, but they were originally based in Sussex. She was driving her child down from the north of England, such was her commitment to school, but the school did not take into account all the things that those children and that family had been through. Again, I



am bringing it back to Traveller education services. If they know the families, they can support them and create a bridge between schools.

**Pauline Anderson:** I was part of the expert panel for the Timpson review of exclusions in 2019. This was very similar to the Women and Equalities Committee: recommendations were made by both those reviews about tackling inequalities.

The difficulty was that post the Timpson review, there was no implementation plan, so how was this going to be taken forward? In my role as director of learning, inclusion and skills for Derby City Council, I thought, "Well, I can't be on the expert panel and do nothing back in my home town," so I went back to Derby and began—three years ago—to tackle the high levels of exclusion, which is an issue for other disadvantaged groups and not just Gypsies and Travellers. We are looking at all groups, but what works for one disadvantaged group often works for the others.

We had 62 permanent exclusions in that first year in Derby, and exclusion has a massive effect on every child's life. Over three years, we have reduced that to four permanent exclusions. We have devised something called Fresh Start/Fresh Start PLUS, where you have to come before a panel of your colleague headteachers and say, "We have tried absolutely everything for this child. We have worked with the family. This is what we have done."

You show the graduated response and what you have done before coming to the point of exclusion. And quite often it was obvious, when they were coming to the panel, that the schools had not done a quarter of those things. It has been peer-led. Obviously, I initiated it, but I have developed a peer-led approach, through the in-year fair access protocol. I have given strong leadership—and had a lot of pushback.

I will give you the example of a new academy trust that has come into the city. It has recently had a new headteacher; it is a new trust. We saw a spike in exclusions, particularly for Roma children. Immediately, we put it through Fresh Start/Fresh Start PLUS. We went back to talk to the CEO and the headteacher. And in the last few weeks, we have seen their exclusions beginning to come back down again. So you have to take direct action.

**Kim Johnson:** Pauline, thanks for sharing details of that programme.

Q26 **Tom Hunt:** Following on from what I was saying earlier, I don't doubt that significant improvements can be made within the school system to better understand the unique cultures that we are talking about today, but it seems to me that, when you are talking about things like integration and understanding each other, it is, to an extent, a two-way process. And it does seem a bit, with the statistics we have seen, as though you think this is entirely to do with the school system not being sensitive enough and not understanding enough and really there aren't any specific challenges within the community that need to be worked on



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and addressed. Is that the case? Is that what—

**Pauline Anderson:** I am here today as a member of the community taking direct action and devoting my entire life to promoting fairness in education, so what I would say to you is that many of us are taking positive action. Your underlying assumption is that there is some kind of fault within the community and that people are not achieving because there is this fault.

I think that is a very stereotypical view. It's exactly what you would see if you read the newspapers or watched television. I think that probably it would be good if Members met more Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people. You would meet more academics, more lawyers, more nurses and more activists, and would begin to see that those people probably are hidden in the statistics.

Q27 **Tom Hunt:** So there are no specific issues within the cultures—

**Pauline Anderson:** Certainly not.

Q28 **Tom Hunt:** To do with attitudes towards education or anything like that?

**Pauline Anderson:** I think I exemplify the fact that that is not innate.

Q29 **Chair:** Can I ask you a final couple of questions? I will merge them together. Given that we know that Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities are going to face problems in school, how important is early intervention? Should resources be targeted at early intervention, with mentoring for families as well?

I am talking about real, direct targeting at these communities. And in terms of the catch-up programme and also the £1 million education programme announced by Lord Greenhalgh for supporting Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children, what is the impact of this programme? Could you answer both together? We are going to finish in literally two or three minutes because of broadcasting restrictions.

**Baroness Whitaker:** The impact of the £1 million programme?

**Chair:** On early intervention and—you don't have to answer both—the impact of both the catch-up programme, because you mentioned Randstad, and the £1 million programme announced by Lord Greenhalgh.

**Baroness Whitaker:** There is broad evidence that early-years intervention is really useful for all children, and it is particularly important for children who are at risk of being marginalised. I have not seen evidence of the impact of early-years intervention on these particular communities, but there is no doubt that it would be really important.

On catch-up, again, I don't think the Department has very clear evidence on how it is working. I have heard lots of examples of it not working, but it is really up to the Department to show how it is working.

As for the £1 million, again, we have not heard what exactly the programmes are in those areas, but I would hope, as Emma says, that



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there will be more emphasis on Traveller education liaison people in every education authority.

You probably haven't got time to touch on further education, but this is a very important area for Gypsy and Traveller people. It is an entrepreneurial culture, but because of the secondary school drop-out, they quite often do not have the credentials that, actually, they are intellectually capable of. I will leave it at that, but there is a huge area there.

**Q30 Chair:** Lisa, were you able to hear our question about how important early intervention is, how the catch-up programme has reached these communities, and the £1 million announced by Lord Greenhalgh?

**Lisa Smith:** Maybe I could just comment on the £1 million programme that has been announced. Although we are, respectfully, very happy to see that there is some commitment, we fear that this is not enough to really address the systemic historical challenges and real underachievement going forward. We feel that such a programme would need to be better funded.

**Q31 Chair:** How much do you think would be the right number?

**Lisa Smith:** We would like to say thank you, but we feel that more is needed to be done. It needs to be targeted effectively and evaluated, and funding needs to be given for follow-up for it to be sustainable.

**Chair:** Thank you. Emma, in a nutshell if you can.

**Emma Nuttall:** The recent education recovery commissioner, Sir Kevan Collins, stated that a £15 billion catch-up fund was needed nationally. Only £1.4 billion has been allocated.

**Chair:** £5 billion has been allocated.

**Emma Nuttall:** At that point, there was. Obviously, we welcome the £1 million, but it really is a drop in the ocean, and we need it, as Lisa says, to be properly embedded in ringfenced funding for Traveller education services.

**Q32 Chair:** How much do you think would be the right number?

**Emma Nuttall:** It would be good if every local authority in the country had a Traveller education service or, if not, a dedicated officer.

**Chair:** How much do you think is the right number?

**Emma Nuttall:** It is hard for me to state the number right here and now, but I am sure we could get someone to cost it.

**Chair:** If you could do that and send it to us, that would be great. Finally, Pauline.

**Pauline Anderson:** On the value of the early years, the evidence is there for all people and communities. It is about the connection with families



and working with the whole family. The earliest intervention is the very best thing, because there is distrust of the education system and some families do not want to entrust their little one to a school where they may experience racism, bullying, name-calling and so on, which happens right from the age of four. Twenty or 30 children will be invited to a party, and the Gypsy or Traveller child in the class is not invited to the party. That is how it begins to happen at a very early age. Early-years education should include aspects of working with Gypsy, Roma and Traveller families, specifically.

In terms of the catch-up, it has been difficult nationally; I know there has only just been a data return to the DfE on catch-up. We have not actually had that data back yet, but we do know there has been difficulty in accessing high-quality tutors nationally. It is even harder to attract tutors who understand how to work with Gypsy and Traveller communities, so I think that has been a challenge for everybody.

In terms of the £1 million, we, as the Traveller Movement, have actually been part of that work, and we have built on various other programmes during the pandemic, such as online tuition. We have really had fantastic success and very high attendance, engagement and progress, allowing for very targeted support and one-to-one tuition. Families have reported that children are re-engaged with learning; some of them want to come back into full-time education because they have found that they can do it. It has given them the confidence that they can be a learner, they can achieve, and they are inside society—not outside of it.

**Chair:** Thank you very much, everybody, it is really appreciated. Your evidence has been invaluable, and I wish you well.

## Examination of Witnesses

Witnesses: Vasile Sandu, Jo Luhman, Paula Strachan and Marius Ciuca.

Q33 **Chair:** Good morning and thank you very much for coming today. For the benefit of the tape and those watching on Parliament TV, can I ask you to very briefly introduce yourselves? We are going to finish at 11.40 am, so can I ask all of you to be as concise as possible with your responses?

**Marius Ciuca:** My name is Marius Ciuca, and I work with an association called Ipswich Roma Support. I am a Roma myself, from Romania. I study business at London Metropolitan University. I am very happy to be here. Together with my colleague Vasile, I am involved very closely with the Ipswich Roma community. I hope this will bring positives.

**Paula Strachan:** Hello, I am Paula Strachan. I am the headteacher of St Teresa's Catholic Primary School in Darlington. We have 91 Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children in school at the moment.

**Vasile Sandu:** Vasile Sandu is my name. I work for St Matthew's Primary School as a teaching assistant and translator, and alongside Mr Marius at Ipswich Roma Support.



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**Jo Luhman:** I am Jo Luhman, and I am headteacher at Kings International College in Camberley, but I am here because of my 18 years of experience working at Ash Manor School, where 10% of the students were from the Gypsy community.

**Chair:** I should have asked how you would like to be addressed. Are first names agreeable to everybody?

**Witnesses indicated assent**

Q34 **Chair:** Thank you. I will merge my questions together because of time. What is the reason, in your view, for the under-attainment of so many of the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities in education? How have they been affected by the covid pandemic, in terms of education? In your view, is the catch-up programme, and the £1 million announced by Lord Greenhalgh, reaching those communities? I will start with you, Marius. I will again urge everyone to be as concise as they can.

**Marius Ciuca:** In my opinion, there is a lack of support among the schools within the area that I am from. Some of the schools do offer a lot of support to the Roma communities, and some have shown great improvements, but some of the schools have not. I believe that one step further would be to offer young role models from within the community that can represent the community, so that they can feel represented somehow.

**Paula Strachan:** There is a lack of high expectations from some educational colleagues for these children. These children will achieve the highest expectations if the opportunities are given to them. We have links with the University of Sunderland, where we have degree graduate students who are sharing with children what they can achieve. I think the big problem is a lack of education among professionals about what these children can achieve if they are supported effectively.

**Vasile Sandu:** During covid, we have supported Roma students, because they did not have access to a laptop or tablet. We were going to their houses and gave them work to do, because they could not access the internet and parents could not work with laptops: they did not know how to do it, because they did not go to school. It was really effective, because of the time that we were off.

**Jo Luhman:** I think it is quite a complex issue. Schools can do it: they can make the attainment figures higher. We are here because of what we have done at our schools.

The engagement with the curriculum, especially at secondary level, is quite difficult. Progress 8 has not been helpful, if I am honest, because what kept the students in our school was the option of doing vocational qualifications, which do not count in Progress 8.

If you are a headteacher who is being viewed by Ofsted under a data point and you have 10% of your students not completing qualifications that count in Progress 8, where is your motivation—unless it is that moral



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imperative—to actually do something about it? I think the move away from data-driven inspections has been helpful, but we do need to look at that qualification set at GCSE level that might be used by schools, because if you think about T-levels—which we really want to encourage students to go into—which are vocational, why have we not got that being replicated in 14 to 16 education?

Attendance is a key issue as well, but with that wider cultural capital, if you actually look at GCSE questions that our students have to complete, some of the language—some of the experience that it relies on students having completed in their life—needs to be put in place. Just simply, a maths question might say, “If you buy four tickets at the theatre in the circle, it costs this.”

Well, if you have never been to the theatre and you have never sat in the circle, how on earth would you know what that means? That is not just for children who are from Gypsy or Traveller backgrounds; it is any child from a disadvantaged background, so it is about education, it is about educating the professional community, and it is about having that teacher education service to support schools.

In Surrey, where I am from, I have to pay for Traveller education services as a secondary school. We do not get it automatically. It costs me £90 an hour for one person to come and work with one child. I get no pupil premium money for that. There is an impression that Gypsy or Traveller students come with pupil premium money, but they do not, because they have not claimed free school meals.

**Q35 Tom Hunt:** Thank you all for coming, particularly the representatives from Ipswich—the best place in the country.

**Chair:** Apart from Harlow.

**Tom Hunt:** I’m not sure about that. On attendance, I have spoken to some headteachers in Ipswich. There were some really encouraging signs in terms of attendance improving, but I think Vasile touched on it with the laptop issue—when the schools closed at the start of the pandemic and then reopened later on, it was harder to get some of the Roma kids back to school compared with the other groups. I am just wondering why you think that might be the case.

My second question is to do with apprenticeships and skills. Do you think that is a particular issue? Maybe we have had an education system that has not always promoted apprenticeships and skills enough, which may have had a particularly negative impact on the Roma community. Thirdly, do you think that if the education system does not engage and do enough to support young people from the Roma community, there may be a risk that they may get dragged into crime and antisocial behaviour—things like county lines? I will start with you, Jo, please.

**Jo Luhman:** I am not convinced that the county lines thing is an issue. From my experience, working in Surrey where we have got some county



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lines, I have found that most of the families we work with are exceptionally protective of their young people—exceptionally protective.

The children are not going out in the streets being approached, because they are at home, doing boxing, working with their horses, or working in the family. I don't think county lines is an issue, but I stand to be corrected on that. I will pass to my colleague who may know more, working more generally with that community now.

**Vasile Sandu:** I think it is mostly a lack of understanding about attendance. Parents do not really understand the system here. They don't know the education system. They think that the children can take a day or two off without saying why and how. I am talking from my own experience. Since I have been at St Matthew's primary school, I have engaged with parents and told them. I have explained how important education is; they did not know about that.

I think educators need to be educated as well. They need to be educated about the Roma community—how they are, how they think—so that they can understand them. I have experience with Lucy Hood, the SENDCo teacher at St Matthew's. We went to a school and they said, "Oh, Roma community, Roma people—why do you care so much about them? Because they don't like school." They don't like school because they don't feel safe in a school, being with others. They don't understand their culture or language. That has a big impact on attendance. That is why they are off so much.

**Paula Strachan:** We're actually seeing a change in our attendance, Tom. When fathers are travelling for work, mums are now choosing to stay at home with the children, because we have shared with them how important education is. When children join us in our nursery and early years, we explicitly explain the attendance procedures to them, so there is a clear understanding right from day one.

**Marius Ciuca:** Regarding county lines, we had a meeting in the days when I worked with St Helen's primary school as a teaching assistant. As my colleague said, the Roma community tends to be very protective of their children and won't allow them. As soon as they see something strange, they question it. That is something that is tackled as soon as it happens.

Regarding attendance, when I worked at St Helen's primary school, we physically went after them, in order to ensure that they are fine and have everything they need, so that they can attend school and have great results.

Obviously, some of the parents lack the education, lack the responsibility, not as a parent but as an educator in the family, to emphasise that to the children. That is where we come in as professionals, and as role models from within the community, in order to teach and educate them as to how important school is. I believe we can do that.



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- Q36 **Tom Hunt:** So, there have been some really great improvements and that is really heartening. I am aware of the work that both of you do and how valuable it is. In the past—to a diminishing extent but maybe still a little bit now—there was a certain attitude, particularly regarding attendance, that it was not critically important to be there every day, and that maybe missing the odd day might not be the end of the world. That is something that needs to be addressed.

**Jo Luhman:** That applies to every single family in the country. You have parents who have an attitude about attendance. I don't think that is the reason why they don't attend. I think it is a fear. If you've had a difficult day the day before, and you've been bullied or been subject to racism, why would you come to school the next day?

Ultimately, headteachers have a responsibility to create a vision and the values in their school, which mean that they are inclusive and celebrate diversity. We can do it, but it is down to us as educationalists to change the attitude in schools, which will then support the communities to attend.

- Q37 **Miriam Cates:** Following on from that, Vasile, you mentioned how you've spoken to parents about the education system and helped them understand a bit more about what's expected. Is there anything else that you can do—that you do do—to help engage parents and help them support children?

We have heard from previous panellists, and in evidence, that there can be lower levels of literacy and numeracy in parents, which obviously makes it harder for them to support their own children. From your experience, what can schools do in that space to help parents with the skills they need to support children?

**Vasile Sandu:** Before covid, we did coffee mornings, for Roma parents especially, with me. On my target, I had 10 to 15 parents every single morning attending to speak about school and about life. Also, we have printed out the details of some jobs and the money that they can get, so I can encourage parents to encourage children to continue school because they can get around £40,000 or £50,000 a year from being a mechanic or another qualified person. They were really up for it and really encouraged their children.

Also, we've been teaching them English. We've done ESOL classes with them so they can understand the system here and know how to ask for something if they go to the bank, or something like that. It makes life easier for them and their children. We help them in school and outside of school, as well.

- Q38 **Miriam Cates:** That's great. Does anyone else want to add to that?

**Paula Strachan:** It is about having a trusted adult for the parents. We've got trusted adults in school who will specifically work with that parental group. We will read documents for them—they often bring in documents that they are unsure of. It is about identifying what their needs are and ensuring that you accommodate them, so that you're serving that community correctly. I think that the trusted adult and that early-years



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intervention is key, because we're finding that when children join us, they don't leave. Once they've had that lovely nursery experience, they stay with us right the way through.

**Marius Ciuca:** I want to emphasise what my colleague Paula said. From within the community, we tend to find role models in order to hire them and get them into the schools, or wherever—it doesn't necessarily have to be schools; it could be GPs or wherever—so that we can gain the trust of the community.

When they see someone from within their community, they have greater trust, and the bridge is created much more easily. That is one thing we can do—look for role models—because there are so many who have great results in high attendance at high school, college or universities, and I am happy and proud that there are young Roma role models who can represent the community. I believe you can look and choose from within the community. That can help the Roma community progress.

Q39 **Miriam Cates:** Thank you. Jo, is there anything specifically from a secondary perspective that can be done for parental engagement?

**Jo Luhman:** Meeting off-site, initially, when you are doing that transition. We lose children, who don't then transition into secondary school, because there's that fear.

Q40 **Chair:** I was going to ask about that, because when we were looking at disadvantaged white working-class communities, we found that parental engagement makes a huge difference. We met Reach Academy Feltham, who do a huge amount of work going to parents' homes and so on.

**Jo Luhman:** Yes—being trusted so that you can go into their home and have a cup of tea. Taking that transition experience of doing the paperwork outside of your school environment is key. If you can find locations in the community where that will work, we have found that very successful in getting the transition between primary and secondary working.

It is also about ensuring that their first visit is something to celebrate. If their child is singing in the choir, or performing in something, then they're more likely to come—and every member of their family will come. Then, once they've had a positive experience, if you do have to have that difficult conversation, it's not so scary. Our employing somebody from the Gypsy community was the key to getting our attainment and attendance figures up. It was the one thing that made the difference, because that trust was suddenly there.

Q41 **Miriam Cates:** Moving on to special educational needs, we've been doing an inquiry into children in care. One of the things we have found is that for the children who did not have an adult who knew the system—or could persevere with it and keep pushing for the support, the certificate, or whatever else they needed—they really struggled to get the support they needed. Is that a similar experience, in particular for parents who do not speak English? What can be done to help children in the Traveller



community with special educational needs to access the support that they need?

**Paula Strachan:** It is the trusted adult again. It is having colleagues you are working with who want the very best for these children. If a child is SEN, no matter their ethnicity, you fight for them at every point. But there is also the potential for that community particularly to be targeted inappropriately. It is that trusted adult who will fight for those children.

Q42 **Dr Johnson:** May I ask a quick follow-up question on parental literacy? A lot of primary school homework and such things require a certain amount of parental support, which will be very difficult to provide if the parent's levels of literacy are not up to providing such support.

Are you aware of any programmes to support parents in improving their literacy? Is any work being done by maternity services or health visitors to identify parents whose literacy is poor, in a way that will make things difficult for their children as they get older in school? Are any programmes available for such parents to improve their literacy?

**Marius Ciuca:** As far as I am concerned, not at the moment, but we used to in the past. As my colleague said, we invited parents when I worked at St Helen's Primary. We had parents coming in and we would do ESOL classes, but we also educated them about the system and what the requirements were.

On literacy, we did not do much to teach them the alphabet or anything like that, because it was difficult; we would rather spend time educating them about the responsibilities of a parent when it comes to the child. Educating them in literacy or anything like that was beyond me, I believe.

**Jo Luhman:** There is no national programme. Individual schools are identifying the need and putting something in place. You have to think about adult education programmes—a lot are in the evening, and for most families that is not accessible, because they have to have childcare.

If free childcare support were available, you might find that more families would engage in a literacy programme, and specifically that would help them to do the forms. The SEN process is the most complex thing for anybody. You have to have the package, not just the programme of literacy support, to allow them to access it.

**Paula Strachan:** We have offered classes during the day for parents. Some of those have been well attended. We also run a homework club specifically for our Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children, so that they have support with their homework. We have discussed activities with parents, and a different way of doing it. For example, in nursery, we sent home story sacks. It is hard to read a story, but you can talk about the pictures and the different characters, so we have done a lot of training on the ground.

Q43 **Apsana Begum:** I want to ask a few questions about bullying and racism. You were here for and heard the last panel. I want to understand what more needs to be done to reduce bullying of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller



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people within schools. Also, to touch on the point made earlier, the Committee is fully aware that there is no requirement to record instances of bullying, particularly including data on protected characteristics, but I want to get your thoughts on what needs to be done.

**Jo Luhman:** In Surrey, we do report prejudice-related incidents. We have to collect that information. It is useful to have it on a school level, but you can have it on the county level.

You have to have a zero-tolerance policy. It is quite simple: if you have a zero-tolerance policy on bullying, and you are consistent and fair, then people trust you and tell you that it is going on. That is the hard bit—

Q44 **Chair:** What does a zero-tolerance policy mean in practice?

**Jo Luhman:** It is making sure that the students actually see that there is a consequence, that it is not hidden away, that they will be listened to and believed, and that you investigate it fully, without jumping to conclusions. That again comes down to ethos. It comes down to your values. It is also about engaging the parents.

It may sometimes be about getting the parents in and having that conversation with their child about an incident that has happened, to get to the bottom of it. You find that sometimes you have a conversation, and then when they go home, the children say something completely different from what they said in school. It is about having an open-door policy and being available to talk these things through all of the time. As a head, it is about phoning up those parents, rather than relying on somebody else to do it, because ultimately it is my responsibility.

Q45 **Apsana Begum:** Do you think that Ofsted needs to be empowered to hold schools accountable on this?

**Jo Luhman:** I just had my Ofsted two weeks ago and it absolutely did hold me to account for everything. It went through all my paperwork on bullying and talked to all the students and staff. I have to say that it was exceptionally rigorous. It was a good experience, and they were absolutely holding me to account.

**Paula Strachan:** I also keep records that have got protected characteristics listed in them, but I think a lot of it starts with the staff team. There needs to be a zero-tolerance policy on any sort of racial or derogatory language. It passes on to the children that we serve.

It is also about educating on the misconceptions about Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children. All our children have visited the local camp to get rid of any misconceptions they have. We have stories that have Gypsy children at the centre, and we share those regularly. When we have interviewed our children, they say that they are not bullied in school, but that they experience racism every day when they leave the school gates. That is heartbreaking to hear, but it is the world they live in.

**Vasile Sandu:** I came to England in 2012, and I want to share my experience of being bullied in school. Because I didn't know any English,



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children were swearing at me and kicking and slapping me. I could not tell the teacher because I didn't know how to. As time passed, I learned English, and it was different.

There needs to be a key person in school from the community that Roma students can talk to. That is what really encouraged me to work at St Matthew's Primary School, where I help to prevent Roma children being bullied, and help them to learn and be keen to attend school, so that they can have a future and get a qualified job—not work in the chicken factory, like people before who were unqualified. There needs to be a key person to stop children being bullied in school. They could talk to that trusted person.

**Q46 Apsana Begum:** We have seen the increase in racism that happened with Brexit. The Roma community in particular was a target of that racism. We have seen the police Bill go through Parliament with provisions outlawing trespassing and criminalising parts of the culture of Traveller communities.

We have also seen really high-profile examples of jokes being made about the Roma genocide, for example. Is there anything you can say about the impact this is all having on the GRT community overall and how it is manifesting itself in the experiences of children and teachers in the education system?

**Marius Ciuca:** Whenever these kinds of jokes are made, people look to the Roma community, point even more fingers than before and bring it down. To avoid bullying children and the community and to avoid racism, a curriculum needs to be implemented that covers the Roma values, Roma people's history and what they have done, showing that they are not meaningless people or trash on society.

In terms of levels of society, people consider that community lower down. When people are educated and know what Roma people stand for and what their values are, that can be avoided. We know that the British community are powerful. They have done great things in Europe. That is basically what we have to do.

**Q47 Apsana Begum:** This is specifically for Joe and Paula. Is there a risk that, in trying to support the GRT community in experiences of racism and discrimination in the education system, taking an approach of trying to get them to assimilate, trying to target them, and trying to take an approach of "You should be this way", and making assumptions, is wrong? There is a danger of falling into that trap of trying to say, "You need to meet these targets". Taking that narrow approach is a risk as well because it does not necessarily understand the cultural norms and practices of the community itself.

**Paula Strachan:** I think there is a complete misunderstanding of the nomadic culture and how it aligns with educational attainment. Children learn an awful lot when they are travelling, and that does not necessarily fit into our standardised education system.



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**Jo Luhman:** Again, it is about not necessarily fitting in, but celebrating the culture. What Lisa said about including the history of the Holocaust is really important. It should be required that it is in there, where you can put those opportunities, but it works for any ethnic group or disabled children. It applies to everything. Our curriculum and what we do in schools has to be more inclusive in general.

Q48 **Chair:** When they teach the Holocaust, don't they include Roma and other communities?

**Jo Luhman:** It's very briefly mentioned.

Q49 **Chair:** It is part of the syllabus.

**Jo Luhman:** It is, but it is not something that is focused on. When you get, as we have seen in the media, those sorts of jokes and people laugh, if that had been embedded in the curriculum, would it have had the response that it had?

Q50 **Chair:** How damaging was the so-called comedian's comments? It was Jimmy Carr on Netflix. What should be done about it?

**Jo Luhman:** It is exceptionally damaging. If we want our young people to have positive role models—we want all our young people to not laugh at jokes like that and understand how serious it is—we have to have good role models on mainstream media. It was completely unacceptable. It is really hard when you have got young people. You can't justify it.

**Vasile Sandu:** I agree with my colleague.

Q51 **Chair:** How damaging is it? Have you seen the impact that that comment has had on the communities?

**Vasile Sandu:** I personally have not seen it yet. Where I work there are little children. They probably have not seen the joke, but I think there is a big impact on adults, and especially on young people in high schools. There is a big risk for the Roma children that that kind of joke will be made again.

**Paula Strachan:** Young children are talking about it, and families are very upset at the amount of laughter that circled round after the joke was said.

**Marius Ciuca:** Absolutely. I totally agree. It is among young adults who attend high school, because they are much more with the media and all that, and they suffer the most. There has to be awareness raised to let people know that this is not something to joke about.

Q52 **Chair:** What should be done about it? Should Netflix—I think it was Netflix that had it on—have taken it off air? Should they stop him broadcasting other things? Should they ask him to do a proper apology online? What should be done?

**Marius Ciuca:** I believe there should be some sanctions—not take him off Netflix, because he makes a living off it, but that specific episode or joke



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should be taken off because there is no point in making fun of a community.

Q53 **Chair:** It hasn't been taken off, has it?

**Jo Luhman:** When young children make a mistake, we tell them they need to make an apology, so that would be a perfect example.

Q54 **Chair:** I don't think there has been an apology, has there?

**Paula Strachan:** Not that I know of.

**Vasile Sandu:** I think the specific episode has to be taken off.

Q55 **Chair:** Do you think he has broken the Race Relations Act legislation, and should he be prosecuted for it?

**Paula Strachan:** You wouldn't be able to say it about another racial group.

**Jo Luhman:** It is very difficult because even if you take it off Netflix, it is out there now, isn't it? I think the apology should be there, but if you think about old films, they all now come with a warning about language, if things are inappropriate. If it is going to be there, let's put something there to say that people can at least make a choice about whether they are going to watch it or not. I think there needs to be an apology, and it needs to be worded in such a way that young people understand why it was inappropriate.

**Chair:** That is very helpful. Tom.

Q56 **Tom Hunt:** I remember when I was at school, it was loosely touched upon that the Holocaust included the GRT community—but loosely, loosely. It was not significantly made clear.

Sorry to be specific about Ipswich, but we are an example of a part of the country that has a significant Roma community. How old is the community in Ipswich? Is it six or seven years old?

**Marius Ciuca:** The first parents arrived in 2010, so it has been 12 years.

Q57 **Tom Hunt:** In those 12 years, have you seen improvements in terms of the extent to which people feel settled and in the understanding of the community? As a community, do you feel fully at ease in the town, and in the country more generally?

**Marius Ciuca:** Well yeah, I tend to say that Ipswich is my second home. Yes, we have seen great improvements. There are things that need to be done a lot more, but I have seen improvements and I believe that together, with professionals and people from the community, we can do a lot more to keep children in school, have higher rates of attendance and access funds as an association. As Ipswich Roma association, we need to know where to go to access funds in order to help the community in a much broader way.

Q58 **Tom Hunt:** Generally, the Roma community in Ipswich is a settled



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community. Most of the community are living in houses and properties. Has the proportion of the community living in houses, as opposed to not, increased in the 12-year period?

**Marius Ciuca:** Yes. I believe most of the Roma people live in a house. The nomadic lifestyle that some of our colleagues have experienced is different from the Roma Romanian community. When they come here, they live in a house, because that is what they have done in the past.

Okay, 40 or 50 years ago they had that style of nomadic lifestyle, going with the caravan from one place to another, but that doesn't happen very much back in Romania, and that is why they are settled. They look for a house here; they don't look for a caravan. It is different from what we experience.

Q59 **Chair:** Paula, going back to the Jimmy Carr issue briefly, you said it had impacted the children. How did that manifest itself? Can you explain it?

**Paula Strachan:** They were talking about it. Children talk about anything that impacts them, so they were talking about it. We dealt with it as we always would in our school and talked about it with them. Quite a few of the parents mentioned it. I am on the gate every morning, so I see the parents. Quite a few of them mentioned it and were hurt by it, but they were very, very hurt by the laughter around the room.

Q60 **Chair:** I noticed that all of you called it a joke; of course, it isn't a joke, but I know why you were saying that. I am from a Jewish background, and I know if it had been said about that, as it quite easily could have been, there would have been uproar. I find it fascinating. There was a bit of fuss, but nothing in comparison to if it had been any other ethnic group.

I know you said that it is still out there on YouTube, or wherever it is, but if Netflix made a point, it would be an important symbol to say, "This is not acceptable." I thought it was very symbolic.

I am a huge believer in free speech. Normally I would say live and let live, but with this I thought that there are boundaries and that it was unacceptable. To joke about the Holocaust is just unacceptable. I am very interested to know about the impact. It plays into some of the comments made during the first panel about how these communities are seen—that someone can say that, get away with it and no doubt get paid millions of pounds, dollars or whatever.

Finally, I want to go back to early intervention. I think a lot of these problems could be solved by early intervention and proper targeting. We know that these communities are going to struggle at school, just as we found out during our report on white working-class disadvantage.

The Government are investing in family hubs and those kinds of things—£500 million was announced in the Budget. If you had a brilliant early-intervention programme that targeted the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities, how much would it work and how much money would be needed? You may not know the answer to that, but you could possibly



write to us.

What would be ideal? To me, it would have to include you going to the family homes, working with the parents and helping, as Caroline Johnson said, with literacy and numeracy. What would an ideal early-intervention programme be? We will start with you, Marius, and we will wrap up after this.

**Marius Ciuca:** I do not know the exact number. There is a need for funding to tackle a lot of problems and matters, but I believe that if we have the right advice and somebody to advise us to go to the right people in order to access some funding to start some ESOL or literacy classes for parents and invite them and have our own community, where we could meet and promote the good values of the community—

Q61 **Chair:** If you invite them to a place, a lot may not come.

**Marius Ciuca:** True, but we could have people from within the community inviting along with the professionals. People would then say, “Oh look—that’s a guy from my community. I will go there.” That is one thing that we could do.

**Paula Strachan:** You need a designated health visitor who specifically works with GRT communities and will go on to sites, provide inoculation and health checks. That is the first way of gaining that level of trust. You then also need early-years funding for two-year-olds for GRT pupils, because they do not qualify for that funding. If they qualify for that funding for two-year-olds, we could have them in nursery.

Q62 **Chair:** Why don’t they qualify?

**Paula Strachan:** Because they do not claim any benefits, generally. Schools need pupil premium, when you are assigning to these children, that can be monitored in the same way as all pupil premium is, but specifically for these children. They come with no funding and all your data is suggesting that they are the most disadvantaged children in education, but they have no funding attached to them at all.

**Vasile Sandu:** As my colleague said, we really need funding to help these people. Especially in the last period, when we travelled the settled status way, we really struggled because most of the parents would not know what to do and where to go. They end up having no settled status.

As a school, we tried, and I personally tried, to help them, but we did not have the funding to hire professionals to do it. Children ended up not having it. One of the parents gave birth and asked for money at the hospital. She is living here for quite a long time, but she had no help. We really need funding for the Roma community to help with education and every public service.

**Jo Luhman:** What Paula said is absolutely right. Making sure that members of the community are employed by the public services that support them is the quickest way to get the trust in there. That can sometimes be a challenge in terms of HR and qualifications, but there are



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people out there who want to work within public services. That would help massively.

Q63 **Dr Johnson:** Paula, you made a generalised statement that the GRT community do not claim benefits.

**Paula Strachan:** Generally, no.

Q64 **Dr Johnson:** Is that because the community has such a high income that they do not qualify? Is it a lack of awareness of the benefits? Is it a cultural belief that they do not want to accept help from the state? What causes it?

**Paula Strachan:** It is a cultural belief that you should support yourself.

Q65 **Chair:** What percentage do not claim benefits?

**Paula Strachan:** In my school, out of the 91 families I think we have about six who claim free school meals.

Q66 **Dr Johnson:** Do you believe that if more families chose to claim it, they would be entitled to it?

**Paula Strachan:** Possibly, but it is a moot point, if I am honest: they won't claim the benefits.

Q67 **Dr Johnson:** But you think they would claim the nursery places.

**Paula Strachan:** If they were entitled to pupil premium, they would be able to get their nursery funding for two-year-olds.

Q68 **Dr Johnson:** Do you think they would accept that?

**Paula Strachan:** I know that they would take it, yes.

**Vasile Sandu:** Most of the parents from our school did not know about it until I told them. I have helped them to apply for it if they are entitled. I personally helped them fill in the application and they were successful in getting free school meals. It is more a lack of understanding and of knowing that they could have it.

Q69 **Chair:** Nationally, the figures show that most Traveller communities do not claim benefits. Does anyone know the proportion, nationally?

**Emma Nuttall:** I don't think there is any research evidence, actually. We are not aware of any statistics.

Q70 **Chair:** But your view is that it is a significant majority.

**Paula Strachan:** Yes.

**Chair:** Okay, thank you very much indeed; it has been a brilliant session and we finished on time, which is very rare for us. It is really appreciated. No doubt Tom is very happy to have had Ipswich representatives here.

**Tom Hunt:** They should make up at least 50% of every meeting.

**Chair:** I wish you all well.