Provision and support for Traveller pupils

HMI 455

Contents

Introduction

1.   In the last four years, the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) has published two reports which have referred to the attainment and progress of Traveller pupils: *Raising the attainment of minority ethnic pupils: school and LEA responses* (Ofsted, 1999) and *Managing support for the attainment of pupils from minority ethnic groups* (Ofsted, 2001). The second report noted that, despite some improvements, there were still major concerns, in secondary schools in particular, about the access of Traveller pupils to education and their attendance and attainment. These concerns have also been raised in earlier reports by Ofsted.

2.   This survey took place against the backdrop of responses by local education authorities (LEAs) and schools to the requirements of the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000, including in-service education and training and the development of race equality policies.

3.   Between autumn term 2001 and summer term 2003, Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) from Ofsted visited 11 LEAs to evaluate provision and support for Traveller pupils in primary and secondary schools. These visits took place at the same time as the inspection of each LEA by Ofsted with the Audit Commission. The LEAs included London, shire, other metropolitan and unitary authorities.

4.   In each LEA, HMI met the staff of the Traveller education service (TES) and their line managers. They scrutinised a wide range of documentation, including education development plans, policies on the education of Traveller pupils, and data on their access to education, attendance and achievement. In five of the LEAs, HMI also met Traveller families, both on permanent sites and temporary, unauthorised encampments.

5.   HMI made one-day visits to 37 primary and 10 secondary schools. They held discussions with headteachers, teachers and the staff of the Traveller education service who were working in the school. They observed the teaching of Traveller pupils, both in mainstream lessons and in support sessions with the Traveller education service staff. They also examined data and records on the Traveller pupils' achievement and progress.

6.   The term 'Traveller' is used to cover a wide range of identifiable groups, some of which have minority ethnic status, who either are, or have been, associated traditionally with a nomadic lifestyle. These include Gypsies/Roma and Travellers of Irish heritage, fairground families, circus families, New Age Travellers, bargees and other families living on boats. In this report, the vast majority of the findings relate to Gypsies/Roma and Travellers of Irish heritage.

Main findings

❑   Traveller pupils make satisfactory to good progress in lessons. However, this progress is rarely sustained in the medium and longer term and many achieve

standards that are well below the national average. The gap in attainment is widest at the secondary phase. Traveller girls generally attain better than boys.

❑   The majority of Traveller education services provide at least satisfactory and often very good support for schools, Traveller families and children. A strength of all the services is the level of trust and the good relationships which have been established with the Traveller communities. In about half the LEAs in the survey, the quality of support is very good. The services undertake a good range of work to raise the achievement of Traveller pupils, including training for schools and special initiatives, particularly to support work in literacy.

❑   The majority of the schools visited had positive and productive relationships with the Traveller education service in their LEA. The services generally provide well-focused teaching support for Traveller pupils, particularly in literacy. However, in too many cases, the responsibility for supporting Traveller pupils and their families falls too heavily upon the Traveller education service.

❑   The average attendance rate for Traveller pupils is around 75%. This figure is well below the national average and is the worst attendance profile of any minority ethnic group.

❑   The access to education by primary age Traveller pupils, as well as their attendance, continues to improve. However, not enough Traveller pupils attend or stay on at secondary school. The 1996 Ofsted report *The education of Travelling children* estimated that at least 10,000 Traveller pupils of secondary age were not registered at school. This survey indicates no decrease in these numbers and estimates that the figure could now be closer to 12,000. Despite examples of success by some services, the picture at the secondary phase remains a matter of very serious concern. Not enough Traveller pupils attend or stay on at secondary school.

❑   There is a growing trend among Traveller families for secondary age pupils, in particular, to be educated at home. The adequacy, suitability and quality of such provision are very uneven and raise serious concerns.

❑   In many LEAs, a reorganisation of support services has placed the Traveller education services in a better position to influence and contribute to school improvement. The potential benefits of such reorganisation have yet to be fully exploited, particularly for secondary schools.

❑   All the authorities are responding to the requirements of the Race Relations (Amendment) Act. In one in four authorities, the Traveller education service had made a significant contribution to this work. Many authorities have clear statements about the inclusion of all pupils in education. However, in too many authorities, the ways in which they deal with unauthorised encampments contradict the principles set out in their public statements on inclusion, educational entitlement and race equality. Such contradictions undermine relationships and inhibit the effectiveness of the Traveller education services and other agencies.

❑ Until recently, schools' access to clear and comprehensive data from their LEA about the achievement of Traveller pupils has been very variable. The use of data to track the progress and achievement of Traveller pupils is developing well in some authorities; in others it is not accurate enough to be of significant help to schools. In a few regional consortia of Traveller services, there has been significant work to gather data across a number of LEAs. Such initiatives, as well as the new pupil level annual schools' census (PLASC), are important in monitoring more systematically the progress and achievement of Traveller pupils.

❑ A minority of schools achieve considerable success in ensuring that Traveller pupils affirm confidently their ethnic status. Nevertheless, there are still too many cases where Traveller pupils and their parents feel insecure or are unwilling to declare their ethnic identity to schools.

❑ The curriculum in many schools provides good opportunities to celebrate and affirm different cultures and lifestyles. Too often, however, attempts to include those of Traveller communities are purely incidental and often divorced from the mainstream efforts of schools to promote race equality for all pupils. In too many schools, Traveller pupils are an 'unseen' minority ethnic group.

❑ The vast majority of Traveller pupils linger on the periphery of the education system. The situation has persisted for too long and the alarm bells rung in earlier reports have yet to be heeded.

Points for action

❑   To build on the findings of this survey, those with **national responsibility** should:

- provide guidance to LEAs to improve the level and accuracy of reporting by Travellers of their ethnicity so that more realistic and precise data are available

- provide guidance for LEAs on the education at home of Traveller pupils which takes account of their educational entitlement.

❑   **Local education authorities** should:

- draw together more effectively the work of various services, including the Traveller education services, to improve Traveller pupils' access to education and their opportunities to continue successfully in secondary education

- eliminate contradictions between their written policies on inclusion and race equality and their practice in dealing with temporary encampments of Traveller families.

❑   **Schools** should:

- promote and affirm the culture and lifestyle of Traveller pupils in a way that reflects the principles of recent legislation on race equality and that improves the quality and accuracy of pupils' and teachers' knowledge

- take greater responsibility for promoting and sustaining links with Traveller families.

LEA support for Traveller pupils

Organisation and management

7.   The populations of Traveller pupils in the different LEAs varied considerably. In one shire authority, the Traveller pupil population in one year was 725, of whom 601 were supported by the Traveller education service. The population represented a mix of different groups including Gypsy Travellers, Travellers of Irish heritage, European Roma, families from visiting circuses or fairs and New Age Travellers. Around 40% of the Traveller pupil population in this authority was highly mobile, moving or being moved on within ten days. In contrast, one of the smallest authorities had a Traveller pupil population of 77 pupils, of whom 44 were supported by the Traveller education service; in this authority, the majority of the Traveller families were in housed accommodation.

8.   The overall quality of support provided by the Traveller education services is at least satisfactory and often very good. At best, the services make a significant contribution to improving access to education, and the attendance and achievement of Traveller pupils. Underpinning this are the excellent, trusting relationships with the Traveller communities that have been nurtured patiently, often over many years.

9.   The majority of the Traveller education services are led and managed well by the head of service or the co-ordinator. The staff range from a single teacher/co-ordinator to a service of ten full- and part-time staff. Most Traveller education service staff are suitably qualified and generally well deployed to undertake a wide range of work. This includes support for teaching, training and liaison with Traveller families. In several authorities, the Traveller education service had made effective contributions to the LEA training on race equality. The training often covered a wide range of audiences including other professional groups and elected members. Some newly appointed staff have valuable knowledge and awareness of national initiatives, particularly of literacy and numeracy. Staff recruited – for example, as learning support assistants – from the Traveller communities act as influential role models for the rest of their community and for pupils in school. In the best cases, the Traveller education services use data well to deploy staffing and resources efficiently and effectively.

10.   In about half of the authorities, the Traveller education services have specialist staff such as education welfare officers (EWOs), home-school liaison officers, social workers or field officers who focus on pupils' attendance and liaise with their families. Their work often has a significant impact upon Traveller pupils' participation in school. For example, in one primary school, the specialist EWO worked with the family of a recently arrived Year 6 pupil to ensure that the good start he had made was not jeopardised by his forthcoming transfer to secondary school. Important work with the family and the pupil, explaining the processes and procedures of transfer from the primary to the secondary school, resulted in his successful transition at the end of the year.

11.   Several services have been particularly successful in securing funding from sources such as the Single Regeneration Budget to appoint additional personnel who also acted as important links with the Traveller communities. In one LEA, they were called 'Traveller Community Champions'. They were very effective in involving Traveller families with a range of initiatives, such as Sure Start which promotes access to pre-school education. These and similar appointments capitalised upon but also consolidated the good relationships and trust that had built up gradually between the Traveller education service and the Traveller community.

12.   All the services had a clear focus on securing Traveller pupils' access to school, their attendance and their achievement. This involved liaison with other council agencies, voluntary bodies and work with the parents of Traveller children to ensure that they were clear about their responsibilities for their children's education. It also meant supporting schools to ensure that they welcomed Traveller pupils and understood and met their educational needs.

13.   Most Traveller education services were located in LEAs' pupil support services or in the ethnic minority achievement teams. During the survey, several Traveller education services were being relocated as a result of reorganisation in the LEAs. These changes offered advantages by enabling the services to link more closely with LEA school improvement teams. In one authority, the Traveller education service had become part of the Children's and Young People's Directorate and had good links with a wide range of multi-professional teams. The Traveller education service had collaborated with them to tackle a range of child protection issues affecting housed Travellers. In another LEA the service was located in the Achievement Directorate to ensure that it was at the heart of a multi-professional approach to raising achievement in the authority. Not all Traveller education services, however, are so closely aligned with mainstream work on school improvement. Many authorities have not made the best use of the opportunities offered by such restructuring and, at secondary school level, there is some way to go before teams work effectively together.

14.   Many of the Traveller education services have extensive links with other council departments such as environmental services, social services and housing. There were a few examples of good co-ordination by different services to meet the needs of Traveller families and children of school age who were on unauthorised encampments. These efforts were underpinned by a clear corporate policy, ensuring that the various agencies had a good understanding of their different roles and responsibilities and how these contributed to satisfying the educational rights of Traveller pupils and their access to school.

15.   In too many authorities, however, there was a lack of a coherent approach. The absence of a corporate policy on dealing with unauthorised or temporary encampments hindered the efforts of the Traveller education service. Different agencies within the authority acted in a way that was at odds with their own recently published council policies on inclusion and race equality, which had usually been written in response to the requirements of the Race Relations (Amendment) Act and the Human Rights Act 2000. A wide gulf still exists between policy and practice in ensuring race equality for all groups, as set out in legislation.

Access, attendance and achievement

16.   All the Traveller education services work hard to improve access to education for Traveller pupils. This has met with some success in the primary phase. In one large shire authority, all primary age children from permanent sites were enrolled at school. In one of the London authorities, this was also the case and, over the last two years, the figure had not dropped below 95% of families new to or moving within the authority. There are, however, marked differences between access rates of pupils from permanent sites and unauthorised encampments. In the shire authority, school places were found for only 25% of Traveller pupils of primary age who were on unauthorised encampments.

17.   The figures for Traveller pupils who had access to pre-school education, whether on site or in other nurseries and playgroups, varied considerably across the authorities. In one authority, it was estimated that only 29% of pre-school age children who had been in the authority during the year had received some form of pre-school provision. In another authority, around 75% of four year olds were enrolled in pre-school settings.

18.   Secondary and post-16 education show considerably lower percentages of Traveller pupils enrolled in education. The overall figures for the authorities visited ranged from 60% to 70%, with an average of just over 60% for Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 as a whole. There was often a significant decline from Key Stage 3 to Key Stage 4 where registration of known pupils was as low as 47%. On post-16 courses, the overall enrolment figure was less than 20%. These figures are similar to Ofsted's data on other regions in England.

19.   The 1996 Ofsted report estimated that up to 10,000 Traveller pupils, most of them of secondary school age, were not registered at school. The data from this survey indicate that this figure has probably increased to around 12,000. Overall participation rates, based on a population of between 70,000 and 80,000 Traveller children of school age, are unacceptably low, at around 84% at Key Stage 2 and 47% at Key Stage 4. A very significant number of Traveller children, mainly at Key Stages 3 and 4, lack education.

20.   The overall average attendance rate for primary pupils in the 11 authorities was 82%. Attendance ranged from 76% to 87% of the Traveller population known to be residing in the authorities. Almost all the authorities report gradual but continuing improvements in primary school attendance by Traveller pupils. The determined efforts of the Traveller education service and especially the work of specialist EWOs working with particular families has made a difference: success in improving and maintaining attendance depends on the quality of relationships between the schools and families. In one authority, the Traveller education service arranged for staff from the nursery unit of a school to join them in visiting the Traveller site. This broke down barriers and strengthened the school's relationship with the Traveller families. The school produced a better informed action plan to improve provision for Traveller pupils as a result. Traveller pupils' attendance, and communication between families and the school about absences, improved.

21.   A school's recognition of its responsibilities is also important in sustaining attendance. In one authority, the Traveller education service placed four pupils from an unauthorised encampment in an infants' school within a day of arrival on the site. Two of the pupils, who had never attended school before, were placed in the early years unit while the other two children joined a Year 1 class. The pupils maintained good attendance throughout the term. Two of the factors that made the school's response effective were the adaptability of early years staff which allowed the older pupils to come into the class to settle the younger children, and the sensitive use of key workers in the unit to target support for particular pupils in the classroom and the playground. In addition, the class teacher attended one of the regular training courses run by the Traveller education service about the education of Travellers and was able to use ideas from the course to affirm the lifestyle and culture of Traveller families. The Traveller education service and the school took joint responsibility for meeting the needs of the Traveller pupils.

22.   The average attendance rate of secondary age Traveller pupils is about 73%, ranging from 66% to 85%. Most of the pupils come from very caring and protective families who report fears of racist bullying and the potential erosion of their community's moral code and values. In addition, they perceive the secondary curriculum as irrelevant: there is a very strong tradition of starting work in the family business at a young age. Whatever the reasons, many Traveller children miss opportunities to acquire the skills and knowledge necessary for full and equal participation in society. This is a serious cause for concern, both for them as individuals and for society more generally.

23.   There were several promising initiatives led by Traveller education services to encourage Traveller pupils to remain at school. Many services focused considerable effort on supporting pupils and families when children were due to transfer to secondary school at the end of Year 6. The work undertaken by one Traveller education service ensured the successful transfer of 11 pupils from one primary school. The service delivered, discussed and completed with each parent the Year 7 induction pack for the children. These packs helped parents to become aware of requirements about uniform, lunch money and arrangements for pupils' induction. During the school's three-day induction programme in July, the pupils were supported by staff from the service; this continued at the start of the autumn term at the secondary school.

24.   In a number of authorities there had been various pilot initiatives to attract disaffected Traveller pupils back into secondary education. These carefully devised initiatives often involved collaboration with other agencies, such as Connexions or New Start. In one authority, the 'Cellar Project' involved small numbers of pupils following a flexible programme of out-of-school sessions in literacy, mathematics, craft and outdoor activities. The success of this initial small-scale project encouraged the Traveller education service to continue with other groups of students. In another LEA, a group of Gypsy Travellers and fairground Travellers worked on a motor project which eventually formed part of a display and presentation at a county show.

25.   The apparently intractable problem of increasing enrolment and attendance at secondary level stretched to the limit the resources of each Traveller education service. It is increasingly being recognised that such issues demand co-operation and concerted efforts by various agencies across an authority. The better linking of

some Traveller education services to the school improvement teams has potential, but too many authorities still lack a co-ordinated strategy for tackling the low levels of participation in secondary education by Traveller pupils.

26.   Despite the continuing efforts of various Traveller services with families, a minority of families do not recognise or are unwilling to take their responsibility for ensuring their children's regular attendance. One authority decided to prosecute families for pupils' persistent non-attendance. These families' unwillingness to accept responsibility undermines the efforts, dedication and determination of all services to make mainstream education a reality for their children.

27.   In a majority of the LEAs, the Traveller education service reported an increasing number of Traveller parents choosing to educate their children at home. In one authority, the numbers of pupils educated at home have doubled in two years to nearly 50 out of 150 on the home education register. The majority of pupils receiving home education are of secondary age. When the parents have expressed an interest in educating their children at home, the services, properly, have advised families of their rights and responsibilities. They have also put parents in touch with the appropriate departments in the LEA. Most Traveller education services maintain a watching pastoral brief for such families if they finally decide to provide education at home.

28.   While the survey did not focus specifically on the nature and quality of the education provided at home for Traveller pupils, it was discussed with the Traveller education service staff and, in one case, with an LEA inspector with responsibility for education at home. Staff outlined a number of serious and legitimate concerns about this trend among Traveller families. Their concerns included:

- the adequacy and suitability of the provision provided by the parents and/or part-time tutors

- the breadth and balance of the curriculum

- the achievement and progress of the children

- the availability of appropriate books and other learning resources

- the genuineness of the commitment of the parents to education at home

- the adequacy of the resources available to the LEA to monitor provision and give advice

- the potential disparity between what are judged to be acceptable standards of provision for non-Traveller families and that for Travellers

- difficulties in ensuring adequate child protection measures.

29.   Most Traveller education services are concerned about these issues, but they have not received clear national guidance which takes account of issues relating to race equality and the pupils' educational entitlements.

Data on the progress and achievement of Traveller pupils

30.   Of the 11 LEAs, about half had a good range of data about the achievement and progress of Traveller pupils which was used well to allocate support. In three cases, the use of data was exemplary and worthy of wider dissemination. One London service, which was a member of a consortium of Traveller services, benefited from the analysis of data provided by the co-ordinator of the consortium. This analysis provided a detailed breakdown of strengths and weaknesses in Travellers' achievement by key stage and year group. For example, the data showed the increase in average points score from Key Stages 1 to 3 for all pupils, for girls and boys, and for different groups. It was also possible to compare the achievement and progress of boys and girls from English Gypsy, Roma and Irish Traveller families. Consequently, in one year, the service decided to focus on improving Traveller girls' writing at the end of Key Stage 1 and on easing their transition into Key Stage 2. This level of detailed analysis and use of data is rare.

31.   At least four of the authorities, all with small Traveller services, were in the very early stages of developing a more effective database about the achievement of their Traveller population. There would be obvious benefits in terms of economy of scale and effort if their development of a database could draw upon the expertise and guidance of the London consortium.

32.   In all the authorities, Traveller pupils generally performed worse than their peers in any other minority ethnic group. The overall picture was better in the primary phase than in the secondary phase. In the majority of authorities, there was evidence of progress and improvements amongst Traveller pupils in the end-of-key-stage tests and assessments conducted in Year 2 and Year 6.

33.   Although the information is limited and patchy, girls appeared to make better progress than boys at both primary and secondary school. In one London consortium, the data showed that the average improvements in points scores of all Traveller pupils between Key Stages 1 and 2 and between Key Stages 2 and 3 were 6.9 points and 3.2 points respectively. The comparable figures for girls alone were 7.4 and 4.7 respectively; and for boys they were 6.3 and 2.6. Nevertheless, these average point scores compared poorly with the national average; for example, between the end of Key Stage 1 and the end of Key Stage 2, the national average improvement in point scores is 12.

34.   There are undoubted difficulties in setting targets and monitoring performance when there is a significant gap between the numbers who take the national tests and public examinations and the total cohort of Traveller pupils. The data available may also not be accurate if Traveller parents do not willingly and confidently ascribe themselves to a particular ethnic group.

35.   Despite the need for caution in the compilation and interpretation of data, there are strong indications of serious under-achievement by Traveller pupils. For

example, in 2001 the data from one LEA showed that only 33% of Traveller pupils gained Level 2 and above in reading and writing and that only 44% did so in mathematics at the end of Key Stage 1 compared with the national average of 84%, 86% and 91% respectively. At Key Stage 2 the proportions of Traveller pupils gaining Level 4+ in English and mathematics were 66% and 44%, compared with the national averages of 75% and 71%. At Key Stage 3, the figure achieving Level 5+ was 16% for both subjects, compared nationally with 64% in English and 66% in mathematics. In the same year, only half of the Traveller pupils who took GCSE examinations gained five A*-G grades; nationally, the figure was 90.9%. Although the numbers of pupils in these samples are small, the figures are very similar to those in other authorities. Under-performance is the consistent theme, mainly because of interrupted schooling. This is confirmed in the schools visited by the many examples of individual pupils who are making at least satisfactory, and often good, progress when they attend school for a sustained period.

36.   In half of the authorities, the Traveller education services have undertaken significant curricular initiatives to improve teaching and raise the standard of achievement of Traveller pupils. In the best examples, these initiatives were aligned closely to national strategies such as the National Literacy Strategy. One authority devised, and demonstrated in classrooms, a resource pack for teachers of texts that raised awareness of Traveller culture and lifestyle which could be used during literacy lessons. In another example, a project involved staff from the Traveller education service, the ethnic minority achievement service and schools in planning and presenting a series of literacy sessions which very successfully promoted awareness and understanding of pupils, including Travellers, from a variety of ethnic and cultural backgrounds. There were other good examples of collaborative teaching covering, for example, topics such as the Holocaust and Tudor and Stuart periods in Key Stages 3 and 4, and aspects of work on citizenship and on personal, social and health education.

Work in schools

Quality of teaching and support

37.   The overall quality of teaching was at least satisfactory in the majority of lessons. In just over a quarter of the lessons, the Traveller education service provided support. This was divided evenly between in-class support and the withdrawal of pupils. The quality of the support from the Traveller education service was generally good. The positive characteristics of both the teaching and support were:

- good knowledge by teachers of Traveller culture and lifestyle and how these might be used in lessons

- well-focused service level agreements between the Traveller education service and the school which set out clear targets, the nature of support and timescales

- carefully thought-out, well-balanced and complementary roles and responsibilities for the school, teachers and the Traveller education support staff.

38.   The following examples illustrate these.

In a Year 2 class the class teacher and the learning support assistant from the Traveller education service had planned together to use texts within the literacy hour which showed different aspects of Traveller culture and lifestyle. There were two Traveller pupils in the class. As a result of their work together, the teacher had become much more aware of the cultural background of the Traveller pupils; the support assistant had been able to suggest suitable texts and to use this knowledge effectively in shared and guided reading. In the lessons which followed, the two Traveller pupils were able to discuss with the rest of the class other details about their lifestyle. This collaboration between the teacher and the learning support assistant affirmed positively for the whole class the Traveller culture and lifestyle.

A Year 2 teacher used to good effect her previous knowledge and understanding of work with Traveller pupils in a whole class discussion on different houses and homes as part of a topic on that subject. In addition to photographs of houses, bungalows and flats, the teacher had also introduced pictures of Traveller trailers and had brought in a small replica model of a trailer. During the whole class discussion, the Traveller pupils in the class enthusiastically shared with the other pupils the details about life in their homes. The rest of

> *the class gained a better understanding of the similarities and differences between one another's homes.*

> *One school's very detailed service level agreement with the Traveller education service provided a relevant and well-focused plan for work with Traveller pupils in Key Stage 1 and 2. The weekly withdrawal sessions focused on work in literacy and were carefully aligned to the teacher's planning from the Framework objectives in the National Literacy Strategy. In one Year 1 session, the support teacher worked with the pupil on blending skills, focusing on consonant-vowel-consonant words such as cap, tap and rap. The teacher provided valuable reinforcement of work in the classroom. In this authority, the Traveller education service co-ordinator and staff monitored all service level agreements before their implementation to ensure that the time and specialist expertise were being used to best effect.*

39.   Where the service-level agreement is vague and lacks any clear outcomes for the pupils' learning, teachers are uncertain about the contribution of the support and how it links to their main work. Consequently the teaching provided by the Traveller education service was ineffective and was isolated from the work in the classroom.

40.   The positive impact of support from the Traveller education service is also evident in the following examples, where previous support from the service stimulated good outcomes for pupils and teachers.

> *The value of outreach work previously undertaken with Traveller families was seen to good effect in a reception class. An early years support worker employed by the Traveller education service worked effectively with the Traveller children in small groups on simple counting and matching exercises. There was an excellent relationship, with the pupils building on previous work at home. The pupils were enabled to settle more quickly and confidently into the routines of classroom life. Again the involvement of the support worker was the result of careful planning with the class teacher.*

> *In a Year 3 literacy session, the class teacher used a poem to compare and contrast differences in the lifestyle of Traveller communities. The text had been suggested by the Traveller education service support teacher during her weekly joint planning session. In a previous one-to-one session, the support teacher had worked with the Traveller pupil in the class on her comprehension of the text. This additional support enabled the Traveller pupil to contribute confidently in the lesson.*

41.   In the lessons observed, Traveller pupils generally made satisfactory progress; in a few cases, it was good. Where there was teaching support from the Traveller education service, the Traveller pupils mostly benefited from this. Support was less effective when there were no clear links between the support and the mainstream work in the classroom. Occasionally, the teachers allowed the staff from the Traveller

education service to decide what work should be set and showed little inclination to be involved. In these situations the support often took the form of withdrawing the pupils from the classroom. At best, the combination of support and the pupil's own motivation and positive attitude ensured that progress was rapid.

42.   Overall, however, the majority of Traveller pupils achieve standards that are below average and the gap is widest at secondary school. The weaknesses are most evident in reading and writing. Primary-age Traveller pupils are frequently at least one year behind their peers and, in many cases, more than this at whatever age they enter primary school. At the point of transfer to secondary schools, their attainment is mainly well below average.

43.   Intermittent attendance has a clear, negative impact on achievement. The weaknesses and gaps in basic skills, which are marked at primary level, become more obvious at secondary.

> *In a Year 1 class, one Traveller pupil had recently been admitted with little or no experience of school until then. The pupil had little or knowledge of initial letter sounds, struggled to recognise and to count numbers up to ten and found difficulty in adjusting to classroom routines.*

> *In a Year 2 class, a Traveller pupil had weaknesses in phonic skills, particularly the blending of letters and sounds in simple words. This lesson was observed in the first three weeks of term, the pupil having attended for half of that period.*

> *A Traveller girl was admitted into a Year 10 class in a secondary school, having attended only intermittently at her previous school. The initial assessment of her at her new school indicated little awareness of letters and sounds, no secure knowledge of the sequence of the alphabet, little basic vocabulary and inability to read the days of the week or months of the year.*

44.   However, there are a number of positive examples of Traveller pupils who have maintained good records of attendance and have started to close the gap on their peers. One primary school, for example, had 12 Traveller pupils who transferred to secondary school at the end of Key Stage 2. Seven of the pupils had taken the national tests at the end of Key Stage 1. At Key Stage 1, most had not achieved Level 1 in writing and in reading, the group's achievement was only marginally better. At the end of Key Stage 2, four of the seven achieved Level 3 in reading and one achieved Level 5. In writing, three gained Level 4 and two Level 3. In mathematics, there was a similar picture of achievement.

45.   The survey data suggest that the number of pupils staying on into Years 10 and 11 has shown a small increase in recent years, although the situation is by no means uniform. These pupils, mainly girls, are completing compulsory schooling, including some with distinction in terms of their GCSE results. A tiny number are now progressing to further and vocational education in Years 12 and 13. As noted earlier,

there were some good examples of pupils, particularly boys, benefiting from the school's imaginative and creative use of the curriculum in Key Stage 4. This had a very positive impact on staying-on rates and especially for boys considered at risk of premature drop-out, disruptive behaviour or other disaffection with school.

Attitudes and behaviour

46.   Traveller pupils' attitudes to work and behaviour in lessons were at least satisfactory and often good. This was particularly the case at primary level. In the lessons, pupils were well integrated and generally enjoyed good relationships with other pupils. Occasionally there were tensions between different groups of Travellers, but these were managed well by schools, often with good support from the staff of the Traveller education service. Some schools worked hard to support and sustain the positive attitudes of the Traveller pupils. For example, when a class was making an educational visit, the teachers had made a visit to the Travellers' site to explain the purposes of the visit and allay any anxieties or concerns the parents might have had.

47.   Some secondary schools have responded imaginatively and positively to any instances of serious misbehaviour by Traveller pupils. In these cases, the schools clearly demonstrate their commitment to their stated policy of inclusion for all pupils. In one secondary school, the approach focused on individual programmes for pupils to try to reduce levels of exclusion, particularly at Key Stage 4, and also to avoid the frequent and predictable 'disappearance' of Traveller pupils. For example, when a pupil's behaviour resulted in a temporary or permanent exclusion, staff, with support from the Traveller education service, responded by putting together a package of work for the pupil to do outside school, linking home, community and the local further education or agricultural college. The school enjoyed some success with pupils who were disaffected by the mainstream curriculum; they successfully completed courses at a local agricultural college in blacksmithing, farrier work and game-keeping. The school was regarded by the Traveller families as one which took seriously the meeting of the particular needs and preferences of their children. There was a similar response when a Traveller became deputy head girl of the school, joined the sixth form and left to become a nurse. This had a very positive impact on the Traveller community and the school and earned a great deal of respect for other Traveller pupils.

Many schools reported that there was still deep seated prejudice within the wider community towards Traveller people. The comments of the Traveller families who spoke to HMI also confirmed this. Examples ranged from brick-throwing by passing motorists at a trailer parked in a lay-by to refusal to serve Traveller families in shops in the local village. There were cases reported by schools, although infrequent, of name-calling of Traveller pupils which triggered bad behaviour. Schools generally dealt firmly and successfully with these incidents; the successful outcome was inextricably linked to the level of trust in the relationship with the Traveller families, often over a considerable period of time. Not all schools, however, had developed such secure relationships with their Traveller families.

Partnership between schools and the Traveller education service

48.   The majority of schools enjoyed a good relationship with the staff of the Traveller education service. They appreciated the work done by the service in securing access to school for Traveller pupils and efforts to improve attendance. Often, the assistance took the form of a combination of work by the support teacher and specialist EWOs or social worker. This work was often of significant importance for Traveller families on unauthorised encampments. In a small authority with limited staffing, however, there was often a lack of time to support other Traveller families in similar situations.

> *In one authority, the teacher/co-ordinator was able to get children from two families from a roadside encampment into local primary schools within 48 hours of their arrival. Through help with transport, providing information to the schools about the families and assistance with initial assessments, the co-ordinator was able to ensure access and regular attendance of the children who stayed for approximately two months.*

49.   The contribution of the Traveller education service was crucial in supporting the rapid integration of children from families of Roma asylum seekers.

> *With the help of the Traveller education service, three pupils were admitted to a primary school. The service made important contributions to assessing the children's language needs and helping the school to understand and respond to the pupils' timid and frightened behaviour. The service discovered a teacher of English as an additional language who spoke the children's home language. The school received help with background information, resources and texts. In the initial stages, there were some difficulties over attendance; the service's specialist EWO made contact with families and carried out home visits with an interpreter. These visits helped to allay the parents' fears about what happened at school. The children's attendance improved rapidly and they started to make good progress in learning English.*

> *A specialist social worker volunteered to meet a secondary age pupil at the bus stop where he would catch the bus to his new school. The social worker had already arranged for 'buddies' from the school to meet the pupil at the other end of his journey. This temporary but thoughtful arrangement reassured both the boy and his mother and helped to eliminate any possibility that he would not turn up at school. At another secondary school in the same authority, the Traveller education service had provided transport for newly transferred pupils into Year 7 until their bus passes arrived. This support ensured that the pupils maintained attendance from the start of term.*

50.   The main focus of classroom support by the Traveller education service was dealing with poor literacy skills. Almost all support staff were up-to-date with current developments in literacy and numeracy and, in some authorities, there had been useful joint training sessions with the LEAs' consultants for the two national strategies.

51.   In several schools, the service had made positive contributions to training on race equality and had also held training sessions with staff about Traveller culture and lifestyle. In one authority, several schools had benefited from 'Social Skills days' which focused on specific year groups and, through a series of workshops, helped raise the awareness of staff and pupils about Traveller culture. Almost all schools found these sessions helpful, particularly where new members of staff had been appointed or where some time had elapsed since previous training. Few schools, however, had thought through a strategy for evaluating the impact of these sessions. There was often a tendency for schools to rely on the Traveller education service for regular updates rather than to pursue actively any follow-up programme of their own.

52.   Very few schools have undertaken any audit of curriculum provision to identify opportunities to promote positive images of Travellers. In a few cases there is deliberate avoidance of the issue; schools resort to the argument that 'We do not see any differences and we respond to them [Travellers] in the same way as we do any other children'. Such statements would not be made or accepted about other minority ethnic groups. Often it amounts to cultural blindness, despite the fact that schools have policies on equal opportunities and are preparing policies on race equality. This applies both to primary and secondary schools. Several schools visited had an ambivalent attitude towards and little understanding of the legitimacy of the Traveller pupils' minority ethnic status. Too often, in these schools, Traveller pupils were unwilling to affirm their ethnic identity. This limited the schools' ability to meet the needs of Traveller pupils within the context of race equality.

53.   All schools had at least a sound commitment to ensuring that Traveller pupils receive appropriate support and they work in partnership with the Traveller education service to achieve this. A minority of schools are more active and determined in their responses to the needs of Traveller pupils. These schools are characterised by:

- positive leadership from the headteacher in building and sustaining with the Traveller families a good relationship based on mutual trust and respect. Often this means not relying totally on the Traveller education service to forge the links with families

- good use of data to track the progress and achievement of Traveller pupils, using the information as part of a whole school strategy for raising the standards of all pupils, including Traveller pupils

- teachers who use the curriculum to celebrate the diversity and culture of all pupils, including Travellers

- an active partnership with, rather than dependency on, the Traveller education service

- acceptance of the responsibility to meet the needs of all pupils, despite the considerable challenges presented by Traveller pupils' disrupted education and hostility towards them from some parts of society.

54. The most recent annual report (Ofsted, 2003) from Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools stated that 'the education system is doing better and better for more and more pupils'. But the system continues to fall short for a significant number of pupils and students, particularly those for whom 'academic' learning does not come easily. The results of this inspection clearly indicate that Traveller pupils continue to make up a small but very worrying proportion of those pupils and students. The situation is at its most serious at the secondary phase and in this respect has changed little since the earlier HMI inspection reports. Traveller pupils are still the group most at risk in the education system. They are the one minority ethnic group which is too often 'out of sight and out of mind'.