

Improving Traveller children uptake in the Early Years Foundation Stage: Holy Family Catholic Primary School

URN: 108026

Region: North East, Yorkshire and Humber

Remit: Schools

Provider background

[Holy Family Catholic Primary School](#) is a medium-sized 3–11 voluntary aided primary school with 231 pupils on roll, located close to Leeds city centre in an area of high deprivation. The school was judged good in its [last inspection](#) in November 2012.

Brief description

This good practice example shows how Holy Family Catholic Primary School improves the uptake of Early Years Foundation Stage education for Traveller pupils and families.

This is part of a set of examples showcasing good practice in raising the achievement and attendance of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils, as well as reducing their exclusion rates.

The good practice in detail

The proportion of Traveller pupils at Holy Family Catholic Primary School is 6.9% and has fallen over recent years from 12.6% in 2011. There are no Gypsy/Roma pupils on roll.

The school ensures that the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) coordinator and the learning mentor visit families on the local Traveller site, to engage the trust of parents and ensure that they are familiar with staff when their children start school. The learning mentor also supports the family with wider issues, for example reading documents for them and offering advice where they are facing hardship or other difficulties. This allows the school to develop good relationships with the families of younger children who are yet to start school and has been essential in order to gain

the families' trust. Previously the school found it difficult to engage Traveller families in Early Years Education. Numbers used to be two or three starting in Nursery each year. Last year there were eight new starters from Traveller families.

The EYFS coordinator encourages the families to visit the EYFS provision in school and offers, at the request of parents, more flexible and longer sessions for children. Children can now stay all day and parents can pay for the extra time, which reduces the number of times that the parents have to travel to and from school if they also have older children at the school.

Learning and support

The learning mentor is the key worker in the school for Traveller parents. She develops ongoing relationships over a long period of time once children have started school. She understands the needs of families on the site well. She sends short text messages to families rather than letters, as literacy levels are low among the Traveller parents. A proactive approach to visiting families and a willingness to listen to their needs is also essential to build their trust.

Traveller pupils are assessed in the same way as their peers and set similar aspirational targets. The current cohort joined the school at well below the level typical for all pupils nationally in language and numeracy but have gained ground fast. The introduction of story-telling sessions every Wednesday has increased the numbers of Traveller parents visiting the EYFS unit. They can get involved in this enjoyable activity for pupils and watch as the teacher demonstrates how to read stories to children. This helps parents to support and improve their children's reading at home. Parents have commented that listening to the way the teacher reads and shares stories with their children has helped to build their confidence when reading to their children. The school sends reading books home every day and provides additional reading support for Traveller children to build up their vocabulary.

EYFS resources and activities support pupils' cultural heritage and language development through posters and artefacts reflecting Traveller history and lifestyle. A Gypsy story teller visits the school to promote Gypsy, Roma and Traveller cultural heritage. The school keeps chickens and ducks to draw on Traveller pupils' close affiliation with animals. Gypsy/Roma and Traveller history month is regularly celebrated.

The success of this approach has been a considerable increase in the uptake of places in the Nursery by Traveller families. The school used to get two or three children per year. Currently they have eight Traveller children registered in the EYFS. Parents are now approaching the learning mentor to request EYFS places for their children, whereas previously there had been a reluctance to let their children start school until they were five.

The overall attendance rate for all Traveller children in the school is 90.1%, compared to the national average for Traveller pupils of 79.6%. Persistent absence is

9.1% compared to the national average of 40.6%. There have been no permanent or fixed-term inclusions for Traveller pupils in the last three years.

The good practice case studies that Ofsted publishes highlight specific examples of practice that providers of education, learning and children's services have used to achieve successful outcomes.

For education, the case studies do not recommend a single particular approach to teaching and learning. Ofsted has no preferred lesson structure or teaching style. We showcase and share a wide range of approaches that providers have found work well for them in achieving good outcomes for children, young people and learners.

Are you thinking of putting these ideas into practice; or already doing something similar that could help other providers; or just interested? We'd welcome your views and ideas. Complete our survey [here](#).

Click [here](#) to see other good practice examples.

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