

Supporting pupils from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities

Executive summary

This report highlights the progress and persistent challenges in supporting Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils. Where provision was most effective, schools fostered a strong culture of inclusion and anti-racism, built trusting relationships with families, and adapted curriculum and support strategies to reflect cultural heritage and meet individual needs. Effective partnerships with local authorities and Traveller Education Services (TES) played a key role in improving attendance, engagement and outcomes. Schools that succeeded prioritised professional learning, embedded community voice, and used data effectively to tailor provision.

However, across Wales, support remained too inconsistent. Weaknesses included poor transition between phases, limited cultural representation in curricula, and underdeveloped systems to track progress. A lack of accurate ethnicity data and barriers to self-identification further hindered effective planning. Sustained improvement depends on strategic leadership, culturally responsive practice, and a long-term commitment to equity. Schools and local authorities must continue to reflect, adapt and collaborate to ensure that Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils thrive.

Background

In recent years, there has been growing national recognition of the need to enhance support for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils in education. Estyn's 2019 thematic report, *Provision for secondary school-aged Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils*, set out clear recommendations to improve both the outcomes and experiences of these learners. The report identified challenges, including low attendance, limited curriculum engagement, and negative experiences of schooling often underpinned by discrimination and exclusion.

In 2023, the Welsh Government published revised guidance aimed at raising educational outcomes for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils. This guidance placed increased emphasis on promoting inclusivity and fostering greater cultural understanding within schools. The WG has continued their funding commitment to supporting Minority Ethnic and Gypsy, Roma and Traveller learners, with £11m awarded per year in 2024-5 and 2025-6. This investment was intended to help remove barriers to learning, increase engagement, and ensure equitable opportunities for pupils to progress.

In July 2024, the Welsh Government issued a public statement in response to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), reaffirming its commitment to equity in education. The statement included a pledge to "reduce the negative experience of racism by Gypsies, Roma and Traveller pupils in schooling". This policy direction reflects a long-term vision for developing inclusive and anti-racist education systems across Wales.

It remains the responsibility of all schools and local authorities, regardless of their pupil population, to promote an anti-racist and inclusive curriculum that recognises Gypsy, Roma and Traveller culture and its contribution to modern Wales

Data collection

Having accurate and consistent data about Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils is essential for identifying their needs, providing appropriate, targeted support and monitoring their progress and outcomes. However, schools across Wales continued to face challenges in securing reliable data, relating primarily to two key factors.

1. Voluntary self-identification and reluctance to disclose

As part of the Pupil Level Annual School Census (PLASC), schools routinely gather information about the ethnicity of pupils. One of the main barriers to accurate data collection was that ethnic self-identification was voluntary. A few schools reported that families had been reluctant to disclose their ethnicity, often due to concerns about stigma, racism or discrimination. As a result:

- a minority of gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils had been recorded under broad categories such as 'White Other' or had no recorded ethnicity, leading to underrepresentation in official data
- schools had often been unaware of a pupil's cultural background unless explicitly shared by the family

This lack of accurate data limited the ability of schools and local authorities to provide tailored support, allocate resources effectively, and monitor outcomes for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils.

2. Mobility and disruption to education

A few schools reported that Gypsy, Roma and Traveller families, particularly those with mobile or seasonal lifestyles, experienced frequent changes in school enrolment. This mobility presented a range of challenges for data continuity.

- Pupils were sometimes recorded more than once or omitted entirely from datasets.
- Periods of home education or gaps between placements led to incomplete or missing educational records.
- Attendance monitoring and tracking of attainment had been inconsistent or disrupted.

Together, these factors contributed to gaps in understanding the educational progress and well-being of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller learners, making it more difficult to address inequalities effectively.

Support from local authorities

Local authorities played a key role in ensuring that Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils received the support they needed. Many worked in partnership with schools through dedicated Traveller Education Services (TES). In a few cases, they provided practical support such as free transport to reduce financial barriers to attendance. For example, Flintshire local authority provides additional free transport from home to school, specifically for pupils from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities. A few schools reported that this had a positive impact on attendance.

Effective partnerships were characterised by a commitment to understanding the lived experiences of

Gypsy, Roma and Traveller families and by the provision of tailored interventions. Where schools worked closely with TES officers, they were more likely to break down cultural barriers and support families in navigating the education system. These collaborative efforts contributed positively to attendance, engagement and attainment. For instance, in Torfaen local authority, TES staff supported schools in developing their understanding of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller culture and traditions. They were especially successful in helping families to understand how sensitive topics such as Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) were taught.

Support in schools

A shared vision: inclusive and anti-racist practice

Successful schools shared a strong, inclusive vision that promoted equity, celebrated diversity, and recognised the unique cultural identity of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils. These schools set high expectations for all pupils and fostered a culture of aspiration and achievement. Inclusivity was not limited to policy but was embedded in daily interactions and expectations across the school community.

In the most effective schools, leaders and staff went beyond compliance with equality duties and embedded anti-racism as a central part of school life. This included proactively challenging prejudice, educating the wider school community, and ensuring that Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils felt valued and safe. For example, at Stepaside Primary School in Pembrokeshire, a fully inclusive approach ensured that most Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils were happy and made good progress from their starting points.

Although we haven't carried out specific work with colleges to review their support for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller learners, we picked up examples of their work with these learners during link inspector visits. For instance, Cardiff and Vale College, funded by Medr, recently included a module on Gypsy, Roma and Travellers in their anti-racist curriculum project. This module includes voices from the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities, sharing their educational experiences and aimed to help staff understand their cultures and experiences.

Whole-school approach: community-focused collaboration

Schools that adopted a whole-school approach rooted in strong partnerships with families and community services were highly effective in supporting Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils. For example, in Sandycroft Primary School in Flintshire, leaders regularly visited local Traveller sites and engaged in informal discussions with families to understand their cultural values. This approach fostered mutual respect and improved pupils' attendance.

Schools working closely with external partners, including local authorities and specialist services, were in a better position to offer culturally appropriate support. For instance, West Monmouth School in Torfaen worked with the TES officer and Gypsy, Roma and Traveller families to maintain proactive communication. As a result, parents developed trust and a deeper understanding of the school system.

The curriculum: reflecting Gypsy, Roma and Traveller heritage and voice

Where Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils thrived, the curriculum was carefully adapted to reflect cultural diversity. For example, at Monkton Priory Community Primary School in Pembrokeshire, pupils learned about the culture and traditions of the local Gypsy Traveller community. Nearly all pupils

reflected on their values and challenged stereotypes.

Staff in effective schools consulted with Gypsy, Roma and Traveller families to inform curriculum planning. At Maindee Primary School in Newport, Roma families were regularly consulted about cultural celebrations, which were then integrated into the curriculum. This inclusive approach was valued by both pupils and parents.

Supporting transition between schools

Transitions were a significant challenge for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils. Successful schools provided bespoke support to help pupils and families navigate the changes. For example, George Street Primary School and West Monmouth School in Torfaen worked with TES officers to deliver tailored transition programmes, including regular visits and meetings. Staff with Gypsy, Roma and Traveller backgrounds further strengthened relationships and trust with families.

However, many Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils across Wales did not transition successfully to secondary school due to:

- cultural differences between home and school a lack of clearly understood vocational options
- an overall lack of vocational learning opportunities
- limited trust in secondary school due to the previous experiences of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller family members
- a lack of a single point of contact at school for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils and their families
- insufficient targeted support from both the school and local authority, leading to problems with behaviour, attendance and overall engagement in school life

Improving pupils' attendance

Improving attendance remained a persistent challenge. Schools that made progress worked collaboratively with families and adapted communication methods to suit their needs. For example, Sandycroft Primary School in Flintshire enhanced its outreach strategy and benefited from transport funded by the local authority. This led to improved attendance and stronger relationships with families.

Helping pupils make progress

In the most effective schools, Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils were well supported to make strong progress. Schools monitored learning closely and adapted strategies to suit individual needs. A few provided targeted programmes in foundational skills such as language development.

At Queensferry Primary School in Flintshire, a six-week well-being programme supported Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils in developing emotional resilience and forming positive relationships, which helped with learning engagement. Portfield Special School in Pembrokeshire celebrated cultural diversity and provided tailored support to reduce learning barriers.

Strengthening professional learning

Professional learning was central to effective practice. Increasingly, schools prioritised training on

anti-racism, cultural awareness and well-being approaches. At Lliswerry High School in Newport, leaders undertook research into Gypsy, Roma and Traveller culture and used the findings to inform inclusive practice. Staff adapted their curriculum and expanded pathways for learners.

In the most effective schools, professional learning was ongoing and embedded in school development. Peer learning and reflective practice were encouraged across all levels of staffing. A minority of schools also benefited from employing Gypsy, Roma and Traveller community members. This helped schools to build relationships with families and supported staff to gain a better understanding of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller culture and potential barriers to learning.

Engaging Gypsy, Roma and Traveller voices in decision-making

Successful schools and local authorities involved Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils and families in shaping education. Some introduced pupil ambassador schemes to amplify Gypsy, Roma and Traveller voices. For example, George Street Primary School in Torfaen established a Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupil voice group to support curriculum development and foster cultural understanding.

Regular consultations with families also enhanced provision. In Maindee Primary School in Newport, contributions during coffee mornings led to the celebration of Roma cultural events across the curriculum.

Monitoring progress and evaluating impact

Effective monitoring and evaluation were essential to understanding the impact of provision and ensuring that Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils made strong progress. Schools and local authorities that prioritised data-informed approaches were better equipped to identify emerging needs, adapt provision responsively and replicate successful strategies.

In the most effective practice, schools disaggregated data by ethnicity alongside key indicators such as attendance, attainment, exclusion and well-being. This detailed analysis enabled leaders to identify patterns and inequalities, tailor interventions and allocate resources where they had the greatest effect. Crucially, data was not viewed solely as a compliance measure but as a tool for continuous improvement, which was used in partnership with families to drive better outcomes.

At Ysgol Harri Tudur in Pembrokeshire, staff used detailed knowledge and tracking of individual pupils to shape provision and personalise the curriculum. This included bespoke tailored academic and vocational programmes that aligned with pupils' interests and aspirations. As a result, many Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils at the school made strong progress and achieved well during their time in education.

Sustaining momentum: challenges and opportunities

Although there has been notable progress in improving provision for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils, sustaining long-term improvement presents several ongoing challenges. These include a lack of transparency in securing funding, addressing persistent societal prejudice, and ensuring that effective practices are embedded system-wide, rather than remaining only in isolated examples of good practice.

At the same time, there are clear opportunities to build on existing strengths. The Welsh

Government's strategic policy direction, combined with targeted financial investment, provided a strong foundation for inclusive education. National networks, including regional consortia, local authorities and third-sector partners, offered valuable platforms for collaboration, shared learning and joint strategic development. In addition, the use of digital tools presented new possibilities for engaging transient families, delivering flexible support and promoting continuity in learning.

Evidence from schools shows that Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils succeeded where provision was inclusive, culturally responsive and based on high expectations. Effective schools fostered strong partnerships with families, adapted their curriculum and support mechanisms to meet the needs of learners, and created environments where every pupil felt valued and understood.

Local authorities also had a critical role to play. In the best examples, they maximised the impact of government investment, ensured that grant funding was devolved directly to schools and used strategically and effectively to target support and developed sustainable models of provision.

Schools and local authorities that embedded anti-racist values, worked collaboratively with their communities, and actively celebrated cultural identity, were best placed to ensure that Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils not only accessed education, but thrived within it.

To maintain momentum, it is essential that education for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils remains a strategic priority at both national and local levels. Schools must be supported to continue reflecting on and improving their practice, while inclusive approaches must be embedded across policies, systems and leadership.

Questions for Reflection

- Do schools and local authorities promote an anti-racist culture and a curriculum that reflects Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils in Welsh society today?
- How effectively do local authorities use available grant funding to provide targeted, support for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils?
- How well do schools and local authorities build trust and develop meaningful relationships with Gypsy, Roma and Traveller families?
- In what ways are the voices of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils and families actively involved in shaping school policies, curriculum content and support strategies?
- To what extent do school leaders and practitioners understand the cultural values, beliefs and lived experiences of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils and their families?
- How well is professional learning in anti-racism, cultural competence and inclusive practice embedded across all levels of the school?
- Does the school curriculum reflect Gypsy, Roma and Traveller heritage, culture and contributions, and does it support Gypsy, Roma and Traveller learners in developing a strong sense of identity?
- How effectively are transitions between educational phases planned and supported for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils, and what bespoke arrangements are in place?
- What systems are in place to monitor attendance, attainment and well-being for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils, and how is this information used to inform planning and provision?
- How do schools and local authorities evaluate the impact of interventions and adapt approaches to meet the changing needs of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils?
- How are high expectations for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils communicated through daily

practice, and how are these expectations supported through strategic planning?

- What partnerships exist with Traveller Education Services, community representatives or third-sector organisations, and how do these enhance the support available to schools?
- How well do schools understand and respond to the barriers to self-identification among Gypsy, Roma and Traveller families, and what further steps could be taken to build trust?
- Are efforts to support Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils sustained over time, and how well is inclusive practice embedded within the school's wider improvement strategy?
- How do local authorities and schools share best practice, particularly with schools with low numbers of or no Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils?

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