



Cuts to Traveller Education

Position Paper

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‘Travellers will be attending and attaining at all levels of education and have the confidence in their identity within a whole school environment where diversity is valued and where more Travellers view education as one of the valid means to fulfil their own potential’. (Irish Traveller Movement vision for Traveller Education)

The Irish Traveller Movement position in context

The Irish Traveller Movement firmly believes that education is a cornerstone to equality, vital for Traveller’s integration and that an intercultural approach to educating Travellers within the Irish Education system which respects, recognises, celebrates and caters for diversity, is imperative. We are committed to working closely in partnership with all key stakeholders ensuring the Intercultural Education Strategy 2010- 2015 is implemented for the best interest of Travellers inclusive and educational needs.

While progress has been made within Traveller Education over the past number of years there remains a significant gap between the participation, attainment and outcomes of Traveller learners in comparison to their settled counterparts. Specifically, 63.2% of Traveller children under the age of 15 had left school as compared to 13.3% nationally (Census of 2006)

To this end, we recognise the need and continued value of targeted initiatives to ensure that attainment and outcomes of Traveller education is brought in line with its settled counterparts.

The Irish Traveller Movement contend that recent budgetary cuts to Traveller education are short sighted and undermine Traveller’s integration and potential future educational and career opportunities.

Proposed Withdrawals

- Withdrawal of Resource Teachers for Travellers by Sept 2011
- Withdrawal of the 42 Visiting Teachers for Travellers by Sept 2011
- Withdrawal of additional teaching hours for Travellers at Post Primary

- Phasing out of Senior Traveller Training Centres by June 2012

In response to proposed cuts the Irish Traveller Movement convened focus groups including Traveller representatives, Traveller parents and other related stakeholders to analyse the impact of the reduction of education resources and to seek opinion on the effectiveness of those services to date, to Travellers pupils.

Visiting Teachers Service – Proposed Withdrawal

"The withdrawal from September 2011 of 42 Visiting Teachers for Travellers posts, currently assigned to the National Educational Welfare Board (NEWB). The School Support services, including the School Completion Programme and the Home School Liaison Service under the NEWB, will be adapted to undertake work with Travellers in the future."

Service function: The overall function is to promote, facilitate and support the education of Travellers from pre-school to 3rd level access.

Feedback on service

The main benefits as identified by groups centred on the link to building relations with schools including enrolling assistance and a source of information and aid in seeking education entitlements. Visiting Teachers acted as advocates for Traveller students and their needs within schools and supported Travellers to remain in and further their education. The service provided outreach to most marginalised and nomadic families and provided for crucial data collection on progression of Travellers in education annually.

Principal concerns: Traveller Visiting Teachers Service (VTS)

The Report & Recommendations for a Traveller Education Strategy (RRTES) recommended the Visiting Teacher Service for Travellers be reviewed, evaluated & adapted if necessary. No review was undertaken of the service with Travellers, Traveller organisations, existing Traveller structures NTMAC, TESACF Forum or within the internal units of the Department of Education and Skills.

Given the low level of participation, attainment and outcomes of Traveller learners and their continued experience of obstacles to accessing education including exclusive enrolment policies (Stokes Case Equality Tribunal, 2010) the proposal to address the

gap created by the removal of the VTS by an already overstretched School Completion & Home School Programme, cannot provide for an adequate alternative.

Without consultation or a review of the service how credible or damage limiting can an exit strategy be in order to protect the best interests of Traveller school children who will be affected by its loss.

Resource Traveller Teachers – Proposed Withdrawal

“Traveller pupils who are eligible for learning support teaching should receive this tuition through the existing learning support provision in schools. All schools should select pupils for learning support on the basis of priority of need. Resource Teacher for Traveller (RTT) posts /Teaching Hours for Traveller pupils will therefore be withdrawn, effective from 31 August 2011”. (Department of Education and Skills Circular No. 0017/2011)

Service function: “RTTs were allocated on the basis that Traveller children were taught either in their classroom with the RTT working in partnership with their classroom teacher or withdrawn in groups for intensive tuition according to their ages and perceived needs by the RTT”. (Circular 7/99 DES)

Feedback on service

Feedback from consultation groups reflected a mixed view on the effectiveness of this service to Travellers, specifically where some Travellers had negative experiences for e.g. the segregation from a mainstream class on the basis of identity and not need and which resulted in some Travellers experiencing poor levels of education within these settings.

Principal concerns: Resource Traveller Teachers (RTT)

Without adequate learning support resourcing for some Travellers, education attainment levels and transition levels throughout the entire education system will decrease. Traveller pupils who are eligible for learning support teaching will now receive this tuition through the existing learning support provision the Department propose that in “*Primary schools currently in receipt of enhanced Pupil Teacher Ratios*” Traveller pupils will be included in the valid enrolment for the purpose of allocating additional staffing under DEIS. However for other schools (and only where there are 33 or more Traveller pupils) proposed alleviation measures must be considered in the context of the limited

resources which are available to the Department. (*Department of Education and Skills Circular No. 0017/2011*)

As this service becomes mainstream, it impinges on its vulnerability to be further cut. Should a school be successful in its application for resources, which is not guaranteed as shown above, the school may be forced to compete for resources and prioritise those in other ways. Also this resourcing arrangement could have the unintended consequence of creating tensions between the Traveller and the settled community with competition for resources.

Additional Teaching Hours for Travellers in post primary schools – Proposed Withdrawal

Resource Teacher for Traveller (RTT) posts / Teaching Hours for Traveller pupils will therefore be withdrawn, effective from 31 August 2011. (*Department of Education and Skills Circular No. 0017/2011*)

Feedback on service

The effectiveness of these additional Teaching hours for Travellers was reported as providing significant support to Traveller pupils in post primary schools supporting those students from lower educational backgrounds to participate more effectively and keep in line with the curriculum, specifically during times of exams, for e.g. junior and leaving certificate. Positive benefits were gained aiding Travellers to reach their true potential within second level education and support to progress to third level.

Principal concerns: Additional Teaching Hours for Travellers in post primary schools

In the absence of consultation regarding the cuts and with no audit of the service provided as a basis for imposing those cuts, what now will replace this service if anything. Additional teaching hours for Travellers is the only intervention / support for Post Primary Traveller pupils. Given the acknowledged “*educational disadvantage experienced by Travellers*” (DES), there is an unquestionable need for specific supports for Travellers in need, at second level. Without this resource Travellers effective retention and participation may decrease and negatively impact on their educational attainment and affect their longer term employment prospects.

Adult Training and Allowances – Proposed Withdrawal

The Phasing out of Senior Traveller Training Centres by June 2012

Principal concerns: Adult Training and Allowances

There is a **very time sensitive concern** regarding cuts to adult training and training allowances. We believe these cuts will disproportionately affect Traveller learners where mainstream education has failed to meet their needs. While consultation took place with regard to the phasing out of Traveller Specific Training Centres there was no specific consultation regarding an exit strategy. Concern remains as to replacement initiatives and the need for a coordinated response which will include an input from Travellers and Traveller organisations. The retention of Traveller educators from Training Centres, the need for positive affirmative actions for trainees from other programmes to new programmes for e.g., BTEI and specific targeted measures to attract Travellers to engage with new initiatives remain a concern, most especially given the short time before their closure.

Cuts and changes made in 2010 to LTI FÁS training allowances resulted in a decrease in Traveller participation in adult Traveller specific training initiatives. While Travellers will be mainstreamed to new services, like the BTEI, the incoming environment should be culturally appropriate, responsive to their needs and their culture safeguarded within the main VEC structures

Conclusions

The recent concluding observations of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination - Ireland (March 2011) (13) found that “While *noting the efforts made so far by the State party to understand the issues affecting Travellers through the Survey of Traveller Education Provision in Irish Schools (STEP) and the All-Ireland Traveller Health Study, the Committee regrets that efforts made to improve the welfare of Travellers have not substantially improved their situation. The Committee notes with regret the poor outcomes in the fields of health, education, housing, employment for Travellers as compared to the general population. (Article 5(e))*

CERD recommendation: *The Committee recommends to the State party to strengthen its efforts to implement the policy advice offered by the National Traveller Monitoring and Advisory Committee. The State party should ensure that concrete measures are undertaken to improve the livelihoods of the Traveller community by focusing on*

improving students' enrolment and retention in schools, employment, and access to healthcare, housing and transient sites.

The budgetary cuts in Traveller education are disproportionate compared to financial cutbacks of other mainstream educational cuts and undermine young Travellers future life opportunities. The Irish Traveller Movement and other Traveller organisations have consistently called for the review of Traveller services in line with the Traveller Education Strategy to ensure efficiency and value for money. To date no review has taken place.

We contend that these educational cuts were not made in the best interests of Traveller children and in order to safeguard the best outcomes for Traveller's Education in Ireland we recommend:

- ❖ A review of the proposed cuts
- ❖ An evaluation and review of current Traveller education supports in line with Government recommendations
- ❖ Ring fencing of resources for Traveller education for the best interest of Travellers inclusive and educational needs.

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