



**Irish Traveller Movement submission
to the National Education Welfare
Board in relation to the development
of Guidelines for schools on codes of
behaviour**

June 2007



Irish Traveller Movement submission to the National Education Welfare Board in relation to the development of Guidelines for schools on codes of behaviour

June 29th 2007

The Irish Traveller Movement (ITM) welcomes this opportunity to make a submission to the National Education Welfare Board in relation to the development of Guidelines for schools on Codes of Behaviour.

The ITM, as a national representative organisation, is keenly aware of the many issues facing Travellers in education. As a membership organisation, we aim to represent our members nationally by facilitating collective policy development and also to generate debate and discussion on how best to address any issues that may arise.

The ITM was heavily involved in the development of the recently published *Report and Recommendations for a Traveller Education Strategy* and has delivered training to Travellers and Traveller organisations nationally on how the strategy will aim to promote equality of access, participation and outcome for Travellers in all forms of education.

Through numerous regional and local meetings with Traveller learners and parents the ITM feels it is in a position to add to the draft guidelines that the NEWB has so far developed. The ITM agrees with the NEWB that guidelines on behaviour that a code should “develop the kind of ethos, relationships, policies, protocols and practices that promote positive behaviour and prevent unacceptable behaviour”. The ITM feels that all efforts need to be made to codes of behaviour need to be underpinned by strong commitment at a school level to promote equality and diversity.

The ITM would like to make the following points in relation to the

guidelines:

In developing school guidelines, it is important to recognise the importance of parental involvement in understanding the role of behaviour. The ITM recognises that some parents will have literacy difficulties and schools need to provide spaces for parents to become familiar with school guidelines and not rely on simply posting out school guidelines

Not every parent will have had the same experience of school. Historically many Travellers have had a negative experience of school, often receiving a poor education in a segregated service. Other Traveller parents may have had limited education opportunities themselves. Schools need (as stated in the *Report and Recommendations for a Traveller Education Strategy*) to be aware of this and ensure that they are welcoming to parents and develop strong relationships with Travellers and Traveller organisations. It is important that principals and teachers have this dialogue with Travellers to ensure that concerns of both parties are heard and an understanding can be shared. This will be especially important for Traveller parents who have had little or no contact with the education system themselves to be informed on school policies and how that will impact on their children's school experience and for schools to understand any fears that Traveller parents may have of the education system.

The ITM recognises that learning is inextricably linked with behaviour and whole-school experience. In consultations across the country the issue of anti-Traveller racism is raised by many parents and how it impacts on Traveller participation in school. The issue of racism and schools failing to deal with it needs to be addressed strongly. Guidelines on school behaviour need to strongly address this issue, as it is clear that children suffering racism will be become withdrawn or ultimately drop out due to bullying received.

The ITM also has concerns around asymmetric punishment. In consultations, a number of instances have been recounted where young Travellers respond to continuous verbal slurs and receive large punishments. This issue is undoubtedly linked to the above.

Traveller parents in a number of parts of the country have raised con-

cern about the punishments that their children receive. Traveller children have been repeatedly sent home from some schools, particularly in relation to uniform issues. In many instances schools and principals are unaware of the issues facing Traveller families in temporary sites or on the side of the road, where in the latter (and often intermittently in the former) running water may not be accessible and this will impact disproportionately on Travellers. Schools need to become aware of these issues before issuing sanctions that ultimately discourage young Travellers from attending schools.

Members of the ITM have raised concerns in some cases where young Travellers are sent from school without contact being made with parents. The issue of duty of care and young children being sent home unattended raises huge issues should this occur. Again, dialogue between parents and school is of paramount importance.

The ITM welcomes the development of these guidelines and sees many positives in developing these to ensure a whole-school environment that will be beneficial to all. However, we are concerned that unless there is an implementation process or training to match the guidelines, they may not become a working document. One area that the NEWB could look to address is to work intensively with a school in using the guidelines and develop training from this.



For more information, please contact the Irish Traveller Movement on
01-6796577 or see our website www.itmtrav.ie