

## NEWHAM TRAVELLER EDUCATION SERVICE

### FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

- Q. We have never had Gypsy Traveller children in our school before and a family has just moved into the local area, what support is available to help us?
- A. Your local Traveller Education Support Service, part of the LEA, will be able to offer you practical advice, guidance and support to help you liaise with the family and settle the children into your school. If the children have had an interrupted education they will also be able to help with baseline assessments and, if necessary, provide specialist support to your teachers and school staff.
- Q. A Gypsy Traveller family has requested places at school for their children even though they are camped on the roadside and may not be here long. Do I have to admit them?
- A. Yes. They should be admitted on the same basis as any other children. Local Education Authorities have a statutory duty to ensure that education is available for all children of compulsory school age in their area appropriate to their age, abilities, aptitudes and any special educational needs they might have. This duty applies to children whether they are residing permanently or temporarily in the area and therefore includes Gypsy Traveller children.
- Q. Three Gypsy Traveller siblings asked for places mid-term. We have room for the Year 3 and Year 6 children, but our Year 1 Class already has 30 children. Will the parents have to go to appeal for a place in this class?
- A. The Infant Class Size legislation makes sensible allowance for the entry of an additional child in certain limited circumstances. In the case of Gypsy Traveller pupils this would usually arise “where a child moves into an area outside the normal admissions round and there is no other school which would provide suitable education within a reasonable distance<sup>1</sup>”. There are no special provisions under the Regulations for Gypsy Traveller pupils, who must fall into one of the general categories to become an excepted pupil.
- Q. We had a child on the school roll for a few months but they seem to have left the area as we have not heard of them for a considerable time. Can we take them off roll?
- A. It would be reasonable to expect the parents to let you know if they are going travelling and if they expect their child to return to your school. If they have not done so and the child has been continuously absent from school for a period of not less than 4 weeks and the school and LEA have failed, after ‘reasonable enquiry’, to locate the pupil, they can be taken off roll. However, if you are the Base School for this pupil, their absence should be recorded as ‘authorised’ and a place kept open for them. If you

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<sup>1</sup> The Education(Infant Class Sizes)(England) Regulations 1998

are not sure whether you are the Base school, your LEA Traveller Education Support Service will be able to offer advice.

Q. We have Gypsy Traveller children in school at the time of the end of Key Stage Tests, what do we do?

A. If the children are on your school roll, you should administer the tests in the same way as you would do for all other children. Their marks should be added to the school mark sheet for each subject taken, their scripts should be sent for marking in the usual way, and you should report their results to their parents.

If the children have dual registration and they are 'guests' in your school, you should administer the tests in the normal way and then pass the results to their base school which should take 'ownership' of the results and report them to their parents.

Q. We are an over-subscribed school. Our over-subscription criteria include giving preference to children whose older siblings have attended the school and a newly arrived Traveller family is objecting to this on the grounds that it discriminates against them. Are they right?

A. Admission Authorities should carefully consider the possible impact, direct or indirect, on equal opportunities of their criteria. Bearing in mind the Race Relations (Amendment) Act, your criteria could disproportionately (even if unintentionally) disadvantage Gypsy Traveller families who have more recently moved into the area.

Q. How do we record absences of Gypsy Traveller children?

A. In exactly the same way as for any other child with the exception of instances where it is known that the family is travelling away from the area. In that case the mark "T" or other chosen letter is put in the register and the absence is recorded as authorised.

Q. What do we do if the poor attendance of a Traveller child is causing concern?

A. Your local Traveller Education Service may have a specialist Education Welfare Officer who will assist the school, in the first instance, in liaising with the family to improve attendance rates. If the issues persist then the mainstream Education Welfare Officer should be involved and procedures followed as for any child, with due regard for the need for sensitivity.

Gypsy Traveller parents are protected from conviction for the non-attendance of their children at school, where they can demonstrate the following:

- that they are engaged in a trade or business of such a nature that requires them to travel from place to place;
- the child has attended at a school as a registered pupil as regularly as the nature of that trade permits; and

- where the child has attained the age of six years, they have attended school for at least 200 half day sessions during the preceding year.

This concession is designed to protect Gypsy Traveller parents from unreasonable prosecution. *200 sessions should not be regarded as the norm.* It does not relieve parents of their legal duties to ensure that their children are receiving efficient, suitable, full-time education even when not at school.

- Q. There are always at least ten Gypsy Traveller children in our school as we are the closest school to a Traveller site that opened six years ago. The local Traveller Education Service put plenty of support in for the first few years but they now give us support only when new children arrive even though we keep requesting extra. Shouldn't we be having more help?
- A. Support from Traveller Education Support Services is targeted towards the most vulnerable children and the first priorities would usually be:
- highly mobile children to secure access and attendance at school:
  - transfer to secondary school; and
  - maintenance of attendance at secondary school.

When a Gypsy Traveller child enrolls in a school the child "belongs" to that school, not the Traveller Education Support Service. Those schools that are located near sites and always have Gypsy Traveller children on roll usually develop their own expertise in this area of work and may well become beacons of good practice for other schools who take these children in less frequently. However, Traveller Education Support staff can always be contacted to discuss specific issues and can provide a wide range of practical help and advice.