



STEP

**A review of the
educational experiences
of children and adults
from the Gypsy/Traveller
communities in Scotland**

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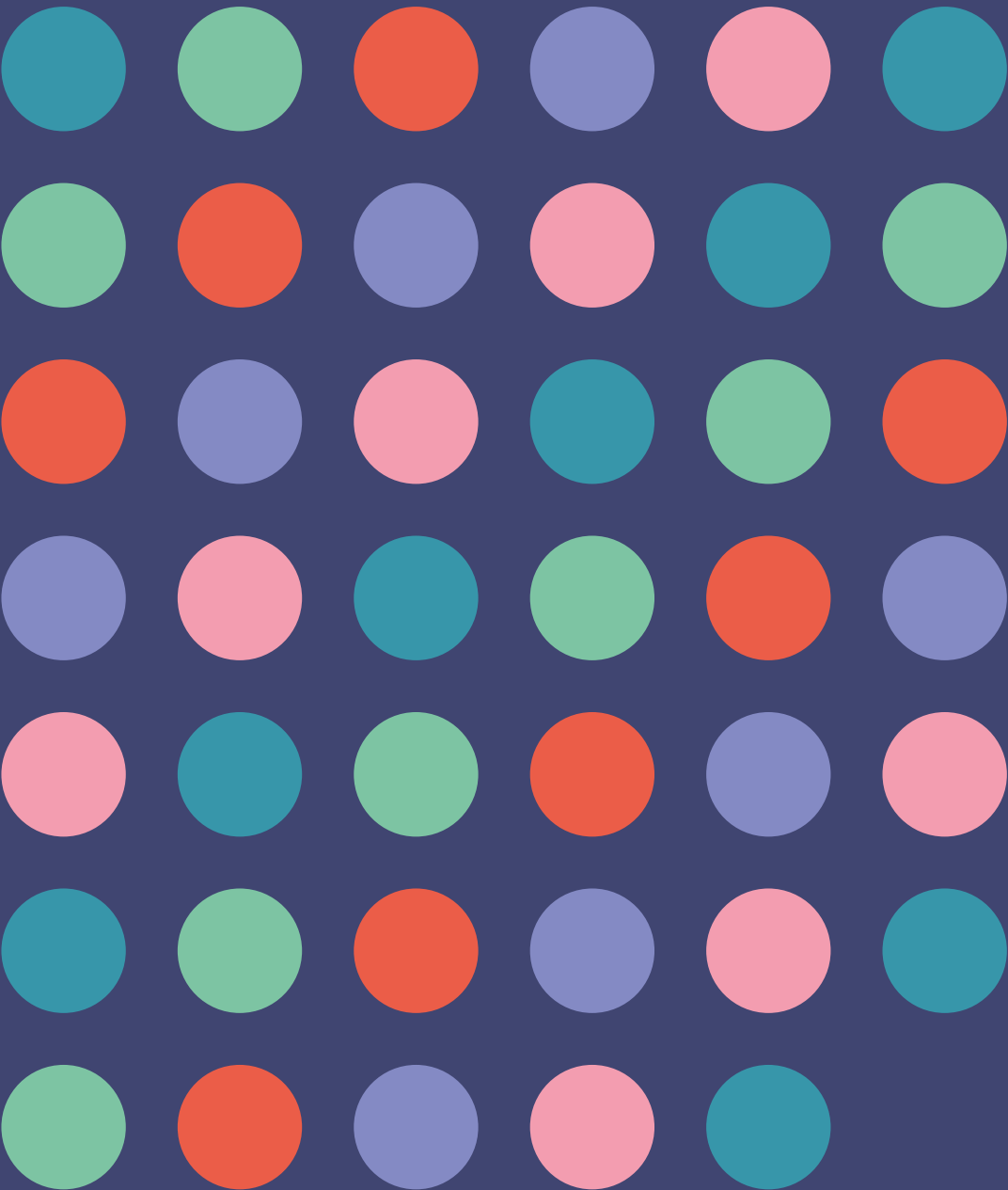
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We would like to thank the forty-one community members who gave their time to contribute to the conversations. We hope that we have been able to share the majority of community experiences and views. We have not shared names in the report to protect participants' privacy. We would also like to thank those teachers, local authority staff and community members who facilitated the interviews in community and school venues.



¹ STEP was previously The Scottish Traveller Education Programme. It is now described STEP: Centre for traditionally nomadic communities and education.

Gypsy/Traveller families and school education

Children and young people from Gypsy/Traveller communities in Scotland have the highest rates of school exclusion and absence, and the poorest attainment of any minority ethnic group (COSLA & Scottish Government, 2019). Additionally, for over a decade, community members have reported feeling excluded, unheard and even silenced by those in authority (Lloyd & McCluskey, 2008). A series of 'listening exercises' (COSLA & Scottish Government, 2019) has gone some way to engage community members in sharing their experiences of public services, however, to date there has been no consultation specific to education. This report is the result of a series of conversations with Gypsy/Traveller community members, undertaken by STEP¹, during 2022–2023. The conversations focus entirely on education. The report was commissioned by Scottish Government Directorate for Learning.

The aims of the report

This report shares the findings from the community conversations, which had the following aims:

- To understand how community participants have experienced education and how this has informed their current perspectives.
- To explain how participants' cultural beliefs and values affect their engagement with education.

- To learn what participants know about the education system, additional support and children's rights in relation to education.
- To generate proposals for how education might be improved based on participants' beliefs and experiences.

The research process

Forty-one adults and children participated in the conversations, which took place in a range of settings. Some participants met the researcher on their own while the majority were in small, family or friendship groups of 2 to 4 people. Where participants lived on local authority sites the community portacabin was used to host conversations. Participants who lived in housed accommodation were invited to suggest where they would feel most comfortable meeting. Venues included participant's homes, libraries and local cafes. The conversations were based around a series of images, which acted as the catalyst for discussion (see Annex 1: Visual prompts). Most conversations lasted 20–30 minutes. The study followed British Educational Research Association (BERA) ethical guidelines and was approved through the University of Edinburgh Research Ethics Committee.

Research findings

The findings from the conversations are arranged in response to four of the central research aims outlined above: experiences of education,

how attitudes to education affect engagement, knowledge of the education system and proposals for improving education services.

Experiences of education

In relation to experiences of education in schools, the research found that:

- Gypsy/Traveller children and adults feel that they are treated differently. Many do not feel included particularly when there is an absence of positive relationships with staff and other pupils. School staff frequently overlook bullying against Gypsy/Traveller children.
- Staff assumptions about children's educational potential are frequently based on Gypsy/Traveller ethnicity and cultural factors and result in low expectations.
- Children often experience discomfort sharing their Gypsy/Traveller identities in schools. They frequently feel the need to shift their identities to feel included when moving between home and school environments.
- The absence of Gypsy/Traveller culture in schools and the curriculum contributes to feelings of exclusion.

How attitudes affected engagement

Negative experiences of school impacted strongly on participants' attitudes to education and their subsequent engagement with schools for their own children. There were

also cultural factors that impacted on attitudes to school. The most frequently described issues were:

- Primary school and nursery were frequently described positively. A deep-rooted fear relating to children attending secondary schools runs across generations. The two main concerns are fear of cultural dilution and children's safety—there were numerous accounts of bullying being ignored by staff.
- Family members felt excluded from education settings because Gypsy/Traveller cultural practices and sensitivities were not respected. Many self-excluded because they did not feel valued by school staff.
- Most families had expectations for children to live and work as part of their communities. They did not attend secondary school because the curriculum did not prepare children for Gypsy/Traveller work and trades.
- Community attitudes towards qualifications were becoming more positive. Over recent years, participants were increasingly keen to find flexible ways to participate in education beyond primary school stage because it was viewed as important for the economic survival of the communities.

Knowledge of the education system

Poor communication between schools and families prevented knowledge and information about the education

system being shared. Participants described both cultural and practical barriers:

- The need for privacy, driven by fear of authority, was a recurrent theme and affected how families gained knowledge and communicated with school staff.
- Some people had difficulty with written materials and much information about education was gained through word-of-mouth within the community.
- The majority of participants had limited knowledge about modern developments in schools education such as more flexible attendance arrangement and opportunities for additional support for learning.
- Families found the differences between local authority education services difficult to negotiate when travelling.

Proposal for how education could be improved

Reflecting on their experiences, participants suggested a range of ways in which the education system could be improved:

- Take measures to prevent and/or manage discrimination and bullying towards Gypsy/Traveller young people in schools, ensuring that they feel safe.
- Respect and represent Gypsy/Traveller culture in all aspects of school life.

- Increase teachers' knowledge and awareness of Gypsy/Traveller culture.
- Ensure that all children can be supported to gain qualifications through local arrangements including schools, community-based programmes, colleges and digital learning.
- Make use of flexible and digital learning approaches for education, communication and information gathering.
- Provide technical and educational support for parents and carers to enable them to support children's education.
- Identify local advocates for education in both schools and Gypsy/Traveller communities to support home-school communication.

Recommendations and conclusion

Recommendations

Based on these findings from the community conversations, it is recommended that policy makers, education leaders and practitioners review how Gypsy/Traveller children and young people are currently included and represented in education policy, guidance and settings. Going forward, a commitment from all stakeholders will be necessary to support improved access, retention and outcomes.

1. Advance Article 4 of the UNCRC by establishing a steering group of key stakeholders to ensure a national, strategic and sustainable response that places Gypsy/Traveller children at the centre of policy and improvement planning.
2. Improve data collection that recognises Gypsy/Traveller minority ethnic status and that is sufficiently granular to inform improvement planning at school, local authority and national levels.
3. Provide a national training programme to raise awareness and prioritise the management of prejudice-based bullying targeted at Gypsy/Traveller children.
4. Provide training for education staff to represent, include and celebrate Gypsy/Traveller culture in all aspects of school life and adopt culturally sustaining teaching and learning approaches.
5. Provide support for staff to facilitate transitions beyond primary school that enable all Gypsy/Traveller children to achieve culturally relevant awards, qualifications and positive destinations.
6. Ensure that Gypsy/Traveller children and young people benefit from flexible, digital learning opportunities and are not disadvantaged due to digital poverty.
7. Appoint Gypsy/Traveller education advocacy and liaison roles in

schools and local communities to improve communication.

8. Ensure Gypsy/Traveller families' participation in planning and decision-making relating to their children's education.

Conclusion

The community conversations revealed that negative attitudes towards schools and education have resulted from generations of exclusion and discrimination. To enable positive change to happen, the education system will need to demonstrate foremost that Gypsy/Traveller communities are valued. Improvements in communications between schools and homes should be a priority and these should reinforce the view that education services are continually improving and can have far-reaching benefits for Gypsy/Traveller communities. Parents will also need to be assured that their children are safe in schools and that they can access support when needed. The recommendations here overlap with several national policy initiatives therefore it will be important that the needs of Gypsy/Traveller children and young people are made explicit in all relevant policy forums. By implementing these recommendations, policy makers and educators will have greater opportunity to influence more inclusive and coherent education services that will result in improved outcomes for children and young people from Gypsy/Traveller communities.

² While aspects of Scottish Gypsy/ Traveller culture can be generalised, it is important to note that this is not a homogenous group but rather, like the many other Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) communities who live in parts of the UK, they are diverse communities, each maintaining different cultural traditions (Davidson, Liinpää Minna, McBride, Virdee, & Clark, 2018).

³ <https://www.gov.scot/collections/school-education-statistics/#achievementofcurriculumforexcellencelevels>

For generations, families from the Gypsy/Traveller communities² in Scotland have claimed to be marginalised from the school system (Gould, 2017; Kiddle, 1999). Recent data substantiates the community position, showing that Gypsy/Traveller young people have the highest rates of exclusion and absence, and poorest attainment of any minority ethnic group³. Additionally, community members have reported feeling unheard and even silenced by those in authority (Lloyd & McCluskey, 2008). A recent 'listening exercise' has gone some way to engage community members in sharing their experiences of public services (Scottish Government, 2019), however, the focus has been predominantly on matters relating to accommodation, social care and health. This report is the result of a series of conversations with community members that focuses entirely on experiences of education.

The aims of this report

This report was commissioned by Scottish Government Directorate for Learning. The research is designed to align specifically with two national outcomes:

- Education, 'We are well educated, skilled and able to contribute to society'
- Human Rights, 'We respect, protect and fulfil human rights and live free from discrimination'

In relation to educational inclusion, the research sought to identify the

barriers that contribute to Gypsy/ Traveller children having the poorest educational outcomes of any minority group. In relation to human rights, the research aimed to gather information to support local authorities in planning equitable education services for Gypsy/ Travellers.

The report findings come from a series of dialogues with community members (participants) with the following aims:

- To understand how participants have experienced education and how this has informed their current perspectives
- To explain how participants' cultural beliefs and values affect their engagement with education
- To learn what participants know about the education system, additional support and children's rights in relation to education
- To generate proposals for how education might be improved based on participants' beliefs and experiences.

The research aims to achieve the following outcomes:

- People from the Gypsy/Traveller community have increased opportunities for participation and engagement in the development of education to meet their needs and they feel that their views are taken into account.

- Local authority education practitioners have increased confidence to engage with people from the Gypsy/Traveller community. They have increased knowledge of culturally sustaining pedagogies and can apply them to improve outcomes for Gypsy/ Traveller children and young people.
- Gypsy/Traveller community perspectives are taken into account in national policy development

Background

Gypsy/Traveller communities

Scottish Gypsy/Travellers are from a tradition of nomadic communities across the UK, which also includes Romani Gypsies, Welsh Travellers and Irish Travellers. Scottish Gypsy/ Traveller communities are recognised as a distinct ethnic group and are therefore afforded legal protection on grounds of their race under the Equality Act, 2010. Within Scotland the communities are diverse and share a rich cultural heritage and a tradition of nomadism. Nowadays, some Gypsy/ Travellers are nomadic all year round, many travel seasonally, while the majority are 'settled' and rarely travel. In Scotland some families rent pitches and live in trailers on local authority or privately-owned sites. Many people now live in houses. Nomadism is regarded by communities as not only the physical act of moving but also as a way of looking at the world, which influences many aspects of their lives (Shubin, 2011).

Societal discrimination has become a part of everyday life for many Gypsy/Travellers and families can face significant social, economic, and political challenges as a result. Public attitudes are strongly influenced by the media (Amnesty International, 2012), indeed, the Equality and Human Rights Commission found that of 1,903 adults, over 40% expressed 'very negative' attitudes towards GRT communities, which was by far the most of any protected characteristic group (2023). In a national survey of prejudice across Britain, 44% of people expressed openly negative feelings towards Gypsies, Roma and Travellers, much higher than other minority ethnic group (Abrams et al., p.5.)

Gypsy/Traveller families and school education

Previous literature has reported that high numbers of young Gypsy/ Travellers in the UK, regardless of nomadic lifestyle, are either not attached or weakly attached to the school system, especially at secondary stage (Bhopal, Gundara, Jones, & Owen, 2000; Derrington & Kendall, 2008; Vanderbeck, 2005). Experiences of racism and discrimination from other children or school staff have been cited as the barriers to engagement (Cemlyn et al., 2009). Gypsy/Traveller families rarely acknowledge the predicted benefits of school in the same way that the dominant, settled culture do (O'Hanlon, 2010). Many in the community hold a view that education

should teach skills that contribute to sustaining the cultural way of life. The failure of education to represent these cultural needs have been a recurring theme in the literature. In an era when traditional cultures and ways of life have been under threat, the role of education has become increasingly important in creating access to a wider range of knowledge and skills that may improve employability (O'Hanlon, 2010). Perhaps ironically, the situation persists at a time when improvements in education are considered to offer a personalised curriculum that meets the needs of every child regardless of ethnic group (Scottish Government, 2010, 2016).

The use of data to improve outcomes for Gypsy/Traveller children

Education data from throughout the United Kingdom suggests that the children and young people from the Gypsy/Traveller communities experience the poorest levels of attainment of any minority ethnic group (UK Parliament, 2017). While this provides an indication of high levels of inequality, in the main, most data relating to nomadic communities is inaccurate. Many people from nomadic communities do not identify to their ethnicities and the overall picture is believed to be even more concerning.

The Scottish Census (2022) found that 3,433 people identified as belonging to the Gypsy/Traveller ethnic group. However, for some time, organisations

working with communities estimate that the figure is closer to 20,000 people (Amnesty International, 2012). More recently, the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) (2023) acknowledged the lack of equality data on Gypsy/Traveller communities due to their small numbers. As one of several measures, the Commission proposed that the Scottish Government should set a national equality outcome to monitor Gypsy/Traveller attainment and exclusion in education:

- National Records of Scotland (NRS) and statistics producers should review their data collection and analysis to produce effective disaggregated analysis for all ethnicities and ensure improvement in data for those groups who often have samples too small for effective analysis, such as Gypsies, Roma and Travellers.
- The Scottish Government should set a NEO to address the lower levels of attainment and higher levels of exclusion experienced by Gypsy/Traveller children in education settings, compared with other ethnic groups. (EHRC, 2023)

Systematic data gathering is a necessary strategy in the improvement of education services. Inaccurate counts can impact on how local authorities and other public agencies include Scottish Gypsy/Travellers in service planning processes (Amnesty International, 2012). It is also important

to monitor the effectiveness of public agencies where they have duties and obligations to provide equitable access to education and other services under domestic laws and international treaties.

A significant finding from the recent data⁴ indicates that many children from Gypsy/Traveller communities do not transition to secondary school. For example, in 2021, 164 children are recorded attending P7 in Scottish schools (Table 1). The data shows that only 102 are recorded in s1 in

secondary schools the following term, suggesting that only around 60% transition between primary and secondary schools. In that same year only 43 Gypsy/Traveller pupils were in school at s5 and 18 at S6. The steep incremental decline in attendance is more pronounced than any other minority ethnic group. Similar to other categories, data provides only an suggestion of the reality as many families will not ascribe to Gypsy/Traveller ethnicity.

⁴ Gypsy Traveller was included as an ethnic group in the 2011 census in Scotland for the first time.

	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	All primary pupils
White – Scottish	38,035	38,750	40,650	41,088	42,576	43,741	43,625	288,465
White – Other British	3,353	3,918	3,700	3,617	4,046	3,855	3,770	26,259
White – Irish	94	91	115	100	127	118	153	798
White – Polish	1,306	1,318	1,491	1,488	1,576	1,562	1,556	10,297
White – Gypsy/Traveller	123	134	172	117	151	148	164	1,009
White – Other	2,101	2,107	2,066	2,021	1,971	1,855	1,903	14,024
Mixed	1,112	1,063	1,049	1,082	937	992	966	7,201
Asian – Indian	723	673	761	690	664	648	593	4,752
Asian – Pakistani	1,086	1,180	1,218	1,167	1,185	1,172	1,175	8,183
Asian – Bangladeshi	117	131	106	120	122	117	112	825
Asian – Chinese	379	396	467	410	492	490	444	3,078
Asian – Other	364	356	381	415	420	379	377	2,692
Caribbean/Black ⁽ⁱ⁾	126	128	120	133	122	108	112	849
African ⁽ⁱ⁾	843	816	868	935	875	899	858	6,094
Arab	330	370	366	372	378	361	368	2,545
Other	395	404	427	400	371	368	368	2,733
Not known	2,109	1,491	1,255	1,011	906	788	741	8,301
Not disclosed	438	388	324	301	268	274	215	2,208
Total	53,034	53,714	55,536	55,467	57,187	57,875	57,500	390,313

(i) Some ethnicity categories have been combined where small pupil numbers would have led to the disclosure of pupils' personal information. 'Caribbean/Black' includes 'Caribbean/Black – Scottish/British' and 'Caribbean/Black – Other'. 'African' includes 'African – Scottish/British' and 'African – Other'.

Table 1 Primary pupil numbers by ethnicity and stage in Scotland, 2021

	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	All second-ary pupils
White – Scottish	43,068	44,131	44,724	44,605	37,329	24,894	238,751
White – Other British	3,776	3,792	3,671	3,625	3,024	1,493	19,381
White – Irish	143	147	123	140	110	76	739
White – Polish	1,536	1,503	1,507	1,232	791	496	7,065
White – Gypsy/Traveller	102	95	86	90	43	18	434
White – Other	2,032	1,941	1,827	1,724	1,538	1,070	10,132
Mixed	944	839	820	777	629	501	4,510
Asian – Indian	601	589	505	530	397	319	2,941
Asian – Pakistani	1,157	1,132	1,155	1,165	1,036	878	6,523
Asian – Bangladeshi	108	98	93	106	86	72	563
Asian – Chinese	454	409	377	326	300	221	2,087
Asian – Other	391	394	381	360	343	288	2,157
Caribbean/Black ⁽¹⁾	107	107	115	103	96	69	597
African ⁽¹⁾	928	834	880	795	779	569	4,785
Arab	366	344	333	267	242	181	1,733
Other	395	406	353	343	328	218	2,043
Not known	730	577	589	571	541	339	3,347
Not disclosed	229	225	298	243	201	149	1,345
Total	57,067	57,563	57,837	57,002	47,813	31,851	309,133
⁽¹⁾ Some ethnicity categories have been combined where small pupil numbers would have led to the disclosure of pupils' personal information. 'Caribbean/Black' includes 'Caribbean/Black – Scottish/British' and 'Caribbean/Black – Other'. 'African' includes 'African – Scottish/British' and 'African – Other'.							

Table 2 Secondary pupils by ethnicity and stage in Scotland, 2022

	1+ at SCQF Level 4 or better		1+ at SCQF Level 5 or better		1+ at SCQF Level 6 or better	
	All pupils	White – Gypsy/ Traveller	All pupils	White – Gypsy/ Traveller	All pupils	White – Gypsy/ Traveller
2020/21 – 2021/22	96%	68%	87%	38%	64%	13%
2014/15 – 2015/16	96%	69%	85%	43%	61%	13%

Table 3 School leaver attainment, proportion with one award or more at SCQF Levels 4, 5 and 6. Gypsy/Traveller and all pupils, 2014/15–2015/16 and 2020/21–2021/22

Data on Gypsy/Traveller children and Additional Support for Learning (ASL)

Over the past decade, there has been a considerable increase in additional support needs identification in Scotland. Between 2007 and 2019 the percentage of children identified as having an additional need rose from 5% to 31%. Figure 1 shows the relatively high percentage of Gypsy/ Travellers recorded as receiving additional support for learning at 54% of pupils compared to 27% for all other ethnicities combined. This compares to 51% and 25% respectively in 2016. Riddell contests the attachment of specific ASN labels to individuals and groups, highlighting the historical

association between categorisation and social exclusion (Florian & McLaughlin, 2008; Riddell, 2012). The data shows a particularly high over-representation of children from Gypsy/Traveller backgrounds in certain categories such as 'interrupted learning' and 'social, emotional and behavioural difficulties' (Fig. 1). The picture is further complicated by the fact that many Gypsy/Traveller parents resist additional support for their children as it can be associated with a degree of social stigma, particularly categories such as social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (Riddell, 2022).

⁵ Source: Summary Statistics for Schools in Scotland, No: 8–2017

Rates of additional support needs (per 1,000 pupils) for most common reasons for support⁵

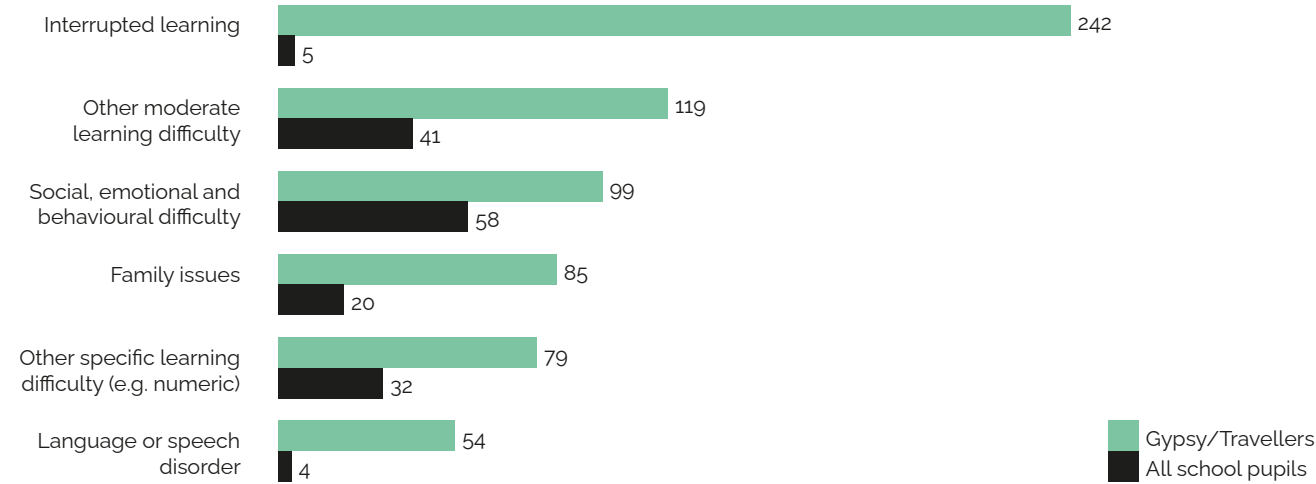


Figure 1 Rates of additional support needs in Scotland comparison between Gypsy/Traveller and all other groups, 2017

⁶ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/evidence-review-accommodation-needs-gypsy-travellers-scotland/pages/14/>

The policy context

Gypsy/Travellers and inclusion

The Scottish Government's Race Equality Action Plan 2017–2021 set out key actions to drive positive change for minority ethnic groups in Scotland. The action plan included a specific section on Gypsy/Travellers, recognising that outcomes remain poor for these communities across all indicators. A Ministerial Working Group, chaired by the Cabinet Secretary for Communities, Social Security and Equalities, was formed, with the aim of determining priorities for action and driving forward the changes required on a range of issues, including education.

The Ministerial Working Group resulted in the Scottish Government and COSLA publishing a joint action plan, *Improving the Lives of Scotland's Gypsy/Travellers 2019–2021*⁶. The plan set out agreed actions to be taken forward across local and national government to ensure that Gypsy/Travellers are treated fairly, have positive experiences of public services, and can access all of their rights and entitlements. The Action Plan was subsequently extended with the latest version continuing until 2026 (The Scottish Government, 2024).

Education policy

Children and young people in Scotland are supported by a range of legislation to support inclusion and equality in education, the most recent of which include:

- Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act
- Equality Act 2010
- Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014
- Education (Scotland) Act 2016.

Children's rights and entitlements are fundamental to Scotland's approach to inclusive education. The legislation is accompanied by key policy drivers including, Curriculum for Excellence, the getting it right for every child approach and the Framework for Professional Standards for teachers. These are underpinned by a set of values aligned to social justice and commitment to inclusive education. Duties and expectations on schools and local authorities ensure that they:

- Deliver an inclusive education for all children and young people
- Support learners to achieve to the best of their ability
- Do not discriminate against those with protected characteristics
- Provide assessments for additional support.

The research methodology

Methods

The thematic focus of the research was centred around each child's right to have an education. In carrying out the research we were mindful of children's capacity to have a voice and to be listened to. The children and their families were consulted on the design of the research conversations, including suggesting the issues to be addressed, designing the structure of sessions, and ensuring that the final research outcomes were reflective of their views.

The collectivist nature of traditional Gypsy/Traveller culture means that the needs and goals of the community as a whole are prioritised over the needs of each individual. In many cases, relationships with other members of the community and the interconnectedness among its people play a central role in each person's identity. As a result, conversations often took place in the presence of other family members. On a number of occasions there was up to eight individuals in the room. This may have led to participant response biases due to the presence of parents and others (Frehill & Dunsmuir, 2015). To address possible issues with different views or confidentiality, participants were each asked if they would prefer to have a more private space. To address possible issues with personal views on subject matter, the interviewer would frame some questions in an impersonal way, for example, "*If someone wanted to...*" rather than "*if you wanted to...*".

Data gathering can be hindered when participants' levels of literacy and education are not considered (Condon et al., 2019). In line with rights-based approaches and recognising the literacy barriers many participants faced, a range of methods were trialled in a pre-study. The most effective methods centred around using visual images as prompts (Annex 1). A three-phased approach was used: at phase 1 participants had time to reflect on the images and respond directly to them; in phase 2, the researcher entered a dialogue building on the participants initial responses; in phase 3 the researcher offered additional knowledge or information about the topic to add depth to the discussion. The approach allowed participants to share their own experience of education and then think critically about the possibilities for improvements in the future. The interviews were recorded and transcribed with strict adherence to the participants' views and use of language. The resulting data was coded using Nvivo, qualitative data analysis software that allows researchers to organise, analyse and find patterns in participants' transcriptions.

The conversations took place in a range of settings. Where participants lived on local authority sites the community portacabin was used. Participants who lived in housed accommodation were asked to suggest where they would feel

comfortable meeting. Selected venues included people's homes, libraries and local cafes.

Participant information

Forty-one adults and children participated in the research. Participants were identified through STEP's work with communities, through TENET , (the Traveller Education Network) and through Mecopp (Minority Ethnic Carers of People Project) health workers. The recruitment process was mindful of potential barriers arising from mistrust, cultural beliefs (particularly in relation to exposure to sensitive health-related topics) or gatekeeping when others make judgments about the capacity of people from diverse groups to participate in research (Bonevski et al., 2014). A *Love2Shop* voucher was offered to compensate for participants' time. The voucher was mentioned by those recruiting to the study, and in advance information, and this information may have influenced take up (Condon et al., 2019).

Thirty-one participants identified as female and 10 as male. Participants were asked to identify within one of three age categories; under 17; 17–40; and over 40. The classifications were selected in relation to: young people's potential to still be at school, potential to be current parents, and potential to be older parents whose children were now beyond school age. Ten participants were still under 17, 21 were aged between 17 and 40 and 10 were over 40 years.

Age of participants	No. of participants (n 41)
Under 17	10
17 – 40 years	21
Over 40	10

The research sample represented a range of living accommodation and travel-related lifestyle.

Home type	No. of participants (n 41)
Local Authority site	15
House or flat	19
Private site	5
Nomadic	2

Mobility pattern	No. of participants (n 41)
Travelled in the past but mostly settled now	21
Travels seasonally	13
Settled	5
Always travel	2

The participants were invited to discuss their own experience of education and, where they were also parents, they were invited to discuss their children's experiences and future plans for education. Fourteen participants had no children, one had 5 children, eleven had 4 children, five had 3 children, eight had 2 children, and two had one child.

Participant engagement with school

Seven of the participants had never attended any school, the majority of these participants were in the 'over 40' category. Most participants (34) had

attended primary school with only eight going on to enrol in secondary. All withdrew from secondary school, mostly within 1–2 years. The two reasons for withdrawing were: frequent interruptions caused by lifestyle factors and being the victim of discrimination. Seven participants received additional support from local authority teachers in community-based settings following primary school. The support ranged from a one-hour session per week to three mornings in a dedicated community venue per week.

Participants' own engagement with education	No. of participants (n 41)
Attended primary school	34
Started secondary but unsuccessful	8
Received ASL support in out-of-school setting following primary school	7
Never attended any school	7

At the time of the interviews twenty-seven participants were parents of school or nursery-aged children. Only two had children who had started secondary school. The majority (19) had not allowed children to attend secondary school or did not plan to. Two participants planned for children to attend secondary school and four had yet to decide.

Participants' children's engagement with secondary education	No. of parents (n 27)
Will not/did not attend secondary	19
Started secondary	2
Plan to attend secondary/will decide later	6

Ethics/Researcher bias

Ethical consent was obtained through University of Edinburgh ethics committee. The research took a rights-based approach which was used to shape the research, focus on the role of ethics, and the nature of power within the research process (Bessell et al., 2017). Most of the conversations were conducted by the main researcher who shared that they had no personal, lived experience of Gypsy/Traveller culture. Five conversations were led by local educators who were known to, and trusted by, participants. To address communication barriers appropriate methodology and methods were used. Participants were informed about how the research would be used to inform policy and practice.

The 'voices' of the Gypsy/Traveller community form the basis of this work. In the 'Research Findings' section they appear verbatim and are in the main uninterpreted. The discussion section makes connections between the community voices, the literature and some of the current policy context.

The findings evolved from the key research aims: to understand community experiences of school, community views on how cultural beliefs and values affect attitudes towards education, and community perspectives on how the education system might be improved to support community development.

Experiences of school

First reactions

Conversations began with participants being asked to share the first words that came to mind when they thought about their own school education. Many responses related to feelings of discrimination—participants used words such as: 'scared', 'frightened' and 'bullied'. Several referenced the learning they had experienced saying that it was: 'boring', 'irrelevant', and 'a waste of time'. Some acknowledged not feeling included: 'being singled out', 'outsider', 'nothing for us', and 'not accepted'. Two responses suggested a fear of identifying as a Gypsy/Traveller through the terms: 'just hiding' and 'keeping quiet'.

Only three initial responses were positive and they came from younger parents (17–40 years). All had children in primary school and they suggested improvements since their own experiences: 'it's better now', 'more helpful headteachers now', and 'they get us better'. Further conversations revealed that each of the positive responses came from participants who had formed trusting relationships with individual school staff members.

Past and present

Recent experiences of primary schools were generally positive. Participants who were parents of very young children felt that primary schools had improved since their own childhood. Most drew comparisons with a more negative past and the majority felt respected and listened to now. They spoke positively about how they, and their children, were treated nowadays. All agreed that if they had a problem they would feel comfortable approaching a staff member.

His teacher is really nice. She's approachable. Not like the ones in my time.

Female, 17–40

I would feel confident coming up to the school. And every time I've ever had something where I've had to come – it's been fixed and resolved quickly.

Female, 17–40

However, many were unable to forget about their own negative school experiences and much of this dominated the initial stages of the interviews. Many felt that even although children were not experiencing similar levels of discrimination, it still existed. The following section outlines the participants' own experiences when they were at school.

Relationships with peers

Many participants described the isolation and non-acceptance that

they had felt at school. Some drew attention to the relative safety of the classroom compared with increased feelings of vulnerability during non-structured times such as during breaks in the playground.

In the classroom you could be normal because you're just doing your work. But then you go outside and everybody was, you know, in their wee cliques and groups. And it's like, where do you fit in?

Female, under 17

Several participants described their attempts to be included. Feelings of isolation and rejection were common. Others described a range of strategies that were employed when striving to be accepted.

And then obviously, because we're so used to being in ours [groups], it's difficult to just go up there and get involved when you're just yourself. It's about having the confidence and not fear of rejection. I would try and speak to them and then, you know they'd say, you're a Traveller so that you don't want to try that again.

Female, 17–40

I remember being at school and talking with an accent like the rest of the kids to fit in. And then I would come home and the accent would be left at school.

Male, 17–40

My son was brilliant at school and he had to draw a picture of his home and he drew a picture of these

beautiful big bungalows. And he lived on a site with a trailer and a van and he drew something to make him feel the same as the person sitting next to him with a house and a garden.

Male, 17–40

One participant, a mother of two young children, responded emotionally to an image of a crowded playground. She shared her anxiety describing how the image prompted her to relive her own feelings of loneliness and isolation when she was at school:

It's a daunting feeling just looking at it (image of crowded playground). It's like anxiety for me, you know, going up to a corner, just waiting for the time to pass to get back inside. I'd be heartbroken to see my wean go through what I went through because it was hard. You know, it's really hard. You don't realise it, and obviously, I mean, when I was at school, it wasn't normalised – it's becoming a bit more common to see Travellers in schools but I was really singled out.

Female, under 17

During follow-on conversations, participants were asked why they thought non-Gypsy/Traveller children treated them differently. Some said that non-Traveller children were misinformed about their culture and several felt it was caused by misconceptions in the media. Some described an overarching ethos in the school that was anti-Gypsy/Traveller and that school staff did little to help:

Most people don't really want to talk to us or hate us. It's more about distrust or if they're feeling a bit of unease and nervous when they're around us because of what they've heard instead of actually coming to us and actually having a talk with us themselves.

Female, 17–40

I think it's about fear of the unknown, like not knowing what to expect. What are they (Gypsy/Travellers) like? I mean, I'm not saying all Travellers are good, far from it, but it's the same as any culture. There's good and bad in everybody. And I think, you know, it's like, we do get like, 'Oh, let's just paint them all with the same brush'.

Female, 17–40

Negative relationships with staff

As well as experiencing discrimination from other pupils, a number of participants shared anecdotes of discrimination by teachers. Similar to the previous section, parents' own experiences affected their attitudes to their own children's and grandchildren's education even though they may have happened 20 years previously. Where there was felt to be discrimination by staff, most parents said that they would remove their children from schools to protect them:

In the primary school there was a teacher, and my mother ended up going up (to the school) - it was the teacher who was bullying me. And,

you know, every time she'd put me outside the classroom to do my work because she said I was illiterate, but I was the same level as everybody else. And she was singling us out to make me feel so small and worthless. And my mother went to the Headteacher numerous times. My mother said, 'You're not going to treat my child like that. But it should never have got to that. I'd hate to think, you know, of being in that predicament with my child, getting treated like that. I know that if I was faced with that I would remove my child. But to something else - I would home school him.

Female, under 17

Participants described their appreciation when a teacher took an interest in their culture, 'the one who got us'. Unfortunately, most said that this was the exception rather than the norm.

So I mean, I did have a really good experience with teachers at [child's] nursery. They were brilliant with him and they were sad to see him go. And they gave him wee packs to take with him over the holidays. They showed an interest in our culture, which I really loved. You know, his teacher, the main one that looked after him, she always asked him, "Did you have a good time away up north. Did you have a good time in the trailer?" She just made it acceptable.

Female, 17–40

It was common for parents' own experiences to inform the ways

they engaged with their children's schools. One mother recalled her own experience of 'taking the blame' and being punished for late arrival when she was younger. She was keen to mitigate against similar experiences for her child:

When my child started school, I said, "I will always try to have them there on time. If something happens, it's not his fault. Let me know and speak to me about it, and I'll explain the reason why".

Female, 17–40

School management of bullying and discrimination

Stories of bullying were common. One mother described the bullying and discrimination her children were experiencing from other children, how it reached extremes and how she received no support from the school staff.

They started to get hassle at school. Over time it escalated. My son was attacked. I didn't know anything about it because he wouldn't say. First I knew, the police came out to arrest my son. I asked if there were surveillance cameras. They came back and apologised. They saw that it was only when his head was pressed against the wall that he retaliated. He went back (to school) and I then got a call from school and he was still getting hassle. I went down and I got no help and I took him out of school.

Female, over 40

Some participants felt that the reason school staff made no effort to resolve issues was because of their ethnicity. In one case a head teacher suggested that the young person could be educated at home:

My daughter was getting bullied in the high school because they knew she came from the camp. And I went down to the school - she was crying every day. They said they'd deal with it but they didn't. So I went back and said, "Do you know I've told her to hit back?" He said, "Oh we can't have that. Do you know you have the option to home school?" Now he would never have said that to the settled community.

Female, over 40

There were a number of accounts where teachers failed to follow up on discriminatory incidents:

It was kind of like they said it was [the bullying was being dealt with], but it was like hush hush. And then like within two days, it went back to as it was before.

Female, 17–40

One young person suggested that teachers were often unaware of their own role in discrimination. The participant described a conversation with a teacher some time after leaving school due to bullying.

So I did actually speak with Miss J about that [the discrimination]. Well, it was probably about a year after... and we were talking about like some

experiences I had had and I told her how people were calling me 'pikey' and like making racist comments and, like, all Miss J would say, was, "We wouldn't allow that in our school, you should have told me". And I said, "But I did and you told me you were too busy".

Female, 17–40

Feeling undervalued

Many participants felt that teachers had lower expectations for Gypsy/Traveller children because of their ethnicity. One participant described her exclusion and being given meaningless tasks while others learned.

They weren't really caring. They didn't really care for teaching me... like I said, when you're a kid, you don't care that much. When you get older, you start to actually think to yourself, oh, wait a minute. I actually remember that the teacher put me at the very corner of the classroom with a colouring book. And I was drawing pictures thinking to myself as a child that I was just having fun while everyone around me was sitting at their tables doing maths. So, while I was basically still acting as a child, everyone else was actually, you know, learning and progressing with their school education. And I wasn't actually progressing in anything. In fact, I was kind of basically just the kid in the corner.

Female, under 17

Many participants left school without basic literacy and numeracy skills. Of the 41 participants in the study only 10 felt confident about their own literacy levels.

I'm not the best person to talk to when it comes to the actual whole education thing. I can barely read. And as for my writing that's non-existent for me. I can partially read and can't write. As for like dealing with equations or maths, you know, that just goes over my head because I never actually received any of that in education at the time.

Male, under 17

Positive experiences around nursery education

Where participants' descriptions were positive, they generally related to pre-school and early primary school. None of the parent participants had attended nursery and there was a lingering cultural belief that mothers should look after their own children. Women in the older age group felt that they would have been letting themselves down in their maternal duties. However, five young families from the cohort had recently taken up the offer of nursery. Some recognised the educational benefits for their children:

I thought it [nursery] was just somewhere to look after your children and it was about being a bad parent. Honest opinion, once I actually knew the benefits of nursery by speaking to the nursery teachers and coming

to the school, it opened up my eyes and I saw the potential for my (child) to move into education and to help build the confidence he needs.

Female, 17–40

It's good how they can go in and out when they want because [child] loves outdoors. He would live outside, and they change the classroom about quite a lot, which I think is really good for the children as well.

Female, 17–40

Yeah, it's brilliant. I was really hesitant about putting any of mine to nursery, but I love it and it actually is helping them come on a lot quicker and better. Plus, I get peace and quiet for a bit [laughs] but no, it's really good. Although it's just play, they still learn a lot.

Female, 17–40

Several adults were involved in the Scottish Government-funded STEP Starter Sack programme which provided learning materials with the aim of making connections between nurseries and homes for Gypsy/Traveller families.

I would put my child to nursery now – I wouldn't have before. I visited the nursery and felt very comfortable and everyone was very nice and polite. I wouldn't have done it before the Starter Sacks and I wouldn't have gone if you [Local Authority staff member] hadn't been there too. It gives [child] a chance to see what he wants to do and mix with other kids. I would say school is better nowadays.

It looks like Traveller kids get on better. I didn't take to school myself, I preferred being at home.

Male, 17–40

One mother, who lived in a flat with her family, remarked on the social and educational benefits.

It helped them kind of communicate a little bit as well because my kids don't communicate with a lot of people.

Female, 17

Summary

- Gypsy/Traveller children and adults feel that they are treated differently in schools. Many do not feel included particularly when there is an absence of positive relationships with staff and other pupils. School staff frequently overlook bullying against Gypsy/Traveller children.
- Staff assumptions about educational potential are frequently based on Gypsy/Traveller ethnicity and cultural factors and result in low expectations for children.
- Children often experience discomfort sharing their Gypsy/Traveller identities in schools. They frequently feel the need to shift their identities to feel included when moving between home and school environments.
- The absence of Gypsy/Traveller culture in schools and the curriculum contributes to feelings of exclusion.

The influence of cultural beliefs on school engagement

The following section is based on how participants felt that their cultural beliefs and values affected their engagement with education.

Negative attitudes towards secondary education shared across generations

The importance of maintaining Gypsy/Traveller traditional values was a dominant theme running through many conversations. Participants held fears about the threat of cultural dilution if children attended secondary schools. Some were concerned about children being exposed to alcohol, drugs or sexually inappropriate behaviours through peer relationships. Concerns for children's safety due to ethnicity-based violence and discrimination also featured highly. These attitudes and concerns were shared across each of the three age categories

The secondary school thing is a problem. We see it so much because we know so many people, not Travellers, and we see what happens through the secondary. The language, you know, I've got to be blunt, the only way I can say is, like young girls giving their personal thing over. We don't believe in it. They get married first. There's a lot that's going on there [in schools]. They are things we keep back from them.

Male, over 40

It was noticeable that most participants' attitudes to secondary schools

were strongly held. Few were willing to engage when more positive information about schools was shared by the researcher.

I just really can't see it – you know people saying, "Right, that's them finished primary now they're going to go to secondary."

Female, over 40

One parent described how he would rather relocate than have his children attend secondary schools.

It'll never happen, to try and get them or me to put them in there [secondary school], they just won't do it. I had teachers at me and the police would come in but I told them I can just pack up and go, and I had a house. I said, "Well, do you know what, when it comes to my children's safety, I would just give the house to a lawyer and tell him to sell it and we would move".

Male, over 40

One parent suggested that there may be differences in attitudes between those who lived in bricks and mortar accommodation compared with those on sites who had preserved more traditional views.

It depends on how they've been brought up. If they've already been brought up amongst non Gypsy/Travellers they might be up for going [to secondary school]. But if you get the ones that have been brought up like here [on a council-run site], it won't happen.

Female, over 40

One father stressed the importance of adapting to change and for young people to sustain businesses. However, the majority remained resistant to secondary school. There was an expectation that children would bypass secondary school and attend college.

Travelling ways have kind of changed a bit since I was younger, but obviously, like high school, that still applies, like I wouldn't put my kids to high school. But I still want them to get further education.

Male, 17–40

But when they get older they can go to college. They're married then so it turns out for them. Like someone who wants to have a business, especially nowadays, everything is about business, paying your taxes. We know that's the system we're now in.

Male, 17–40

Shared attitudes towards gender roles and expectations

Participants from all generations and both sexes held traditional gender-based expectations for young people. Many talked about 'the Traveller way', where boys were expected to leave school around 11 years to start to work within the family while at the same age girls would begin to learn about keeping a home with older female members of the community.

I think it's fine for girls to stay at home. I'm not a mum yet, so I don't personally know. But I feel like if

that's what the mothers want for themselves and if that's what their gut is telling them then I understand, especially those that come from the sites—it's hard for them to let them [the children] go. They stay in the family.

Female, 17–40

He's not really interested in education. The boys know that they're going to work and they look forward to it. I try to make sure they can read and write though because you need it for all sorts of things like the driving theory.

Male, over 40

One mother had atypical expectations for her children.

Obviously, education is important for anybody but, like years ago, what it was like for Travellers—you'd get married, you'd cook and you'd clean. You'd have kids. That was the women's life. But I don't want that for my girls. I want them to get an education and enjoy their life a little bit. They don't need a man to provide for them. They can do it themselves. Obviously, eventually get married, yes. I just don't want that to be their life plan.

Female, 17–40

Returning to education

Although no women expressed regret at missing secondary education a few reflected on the future and shared aspirations for career development or to return to education. Some recognised alternative approaches

while remaining within the communities:

Definitely, once [child] is at school I am gonna try and do something. Yeah, I always wanted to be a neonatal nurse actually.

Female, 17–40

Times are changing they need education. Like I think years ago, Traveller women didn't really work and that, but they do now. Like a lot of them do go to college and it's silly things. Normally, like hair and beauty and stuff like that, but they're still working and they're doing something. So, yeah, I think women, Traveller women get a little bit more independence now.

Female, over 40

Finding ways to maintain community and religious beliefs

Participants described the importance of community and maintaining family connections. While travelling and camping regulations restricted traditional travelling patterns to family events, attending religious missions had offered new opportunities to get together in recent years. Many of the participants described themselves as bible-believing Christians and regularly attended services and meetings in local churches with other family members. One participant described the benefits beyond religion of being part of very large community gatherings.

Forget about the religious side of things it [the church] appeals to lots of Travellers because that old fashioned side of the culture comes alive again. The missions are absolutely organised and a lot of people travel because they get to connect. When my granny died we still had trailers and they came from miles around and camped up – everywhere all around the area. The difference when my mother died – the people that came got an awful lot of hassle. But it's part of the culture – that's what we do.

Female, over 40

Religious beliefs had resulted in concerns over the Relationships, Sexual Health and Parenthood (RSHP) curriculum for many parents of school-age children. Several participants approached teachers about their concerns and two mothers considered removing children from primary school. Most had gained information about the RSHP curriculum by word of mouth through other members of the community.

My children, they won't have something put in their heads by a book, by a teacher, or whatever, because this is what the government states what should be getting learned. Well, I don't want them to know things that we shouldn't have to know before the right age.

Male, over 40

Intergenerational learning

Some participants from the 'over 40' category questioned the value

of school learning over traditional learning within families. One group suggested that primary school had limited value and secondary school had no value whatsoever. Families valued learning skills passed from one generation to the next. Many men felt strongly that the most important education took place within the community:

Where Travellers learn is your father and mother. You learn more there than you did when you were at school.

Male, over 40

Concerns about the future and economic survival.

In many conversations there was a tension between maintaining cultural traditions, fear of the school and curriculum, and recognition of the growing need for education to support families economically.

Surely there's a way to learn the new things that we need without going to the secondary schools. Surely we can learn to use technology. We need to keep up with modern times.

Male, over 40

Some participants shared a sense of frustration at unfulfilled potentials.

My laddie, sometimes he'll go out and do odd jobs but he's not got the qualifications to get into anything (at college).

Male, over 40

Several parents described the social stigma associated with not being able

to read and write. This was felt most strongly when they were unable to support their children at school.

It's not an option any more really, it's necessary [literacy]. I'm ashamed in the school when I've got forms to fill and I need to say to them I can't do it. And I can't help him [child] with all his homework and then he doesn't understand.

Female, 17–40

Another parent reflected on the humiliation they had faced in a post office as a result of never having been educated in a school.

I've never had an education, and I feel terrible. It's embarrassing when you go somewhere and people hand you forms, and you're standing there looking around and the people are looking at you and you're so embarrassed to tell them. And once I said, "I can't read or write, is there any chance you maybe could help me?" and she said, "Well, it's not my problem that you can't read and write, I'm sorry, you'll have to take it home and get someone else". It was in the post office.

Female, 17–40

One parent felt strongly that their own opportunities has been limited by their family. As a result, they had strong expectations for their own child to engage fully in education. The father understood education as necessary to his child's having future opportunities in life.

I want my child to go to university. I'll tell you how important education is to me and my family. It's vital. It's a lifeline. I want my child to know that. So I also believe in children having voices and opinions. My child is very opinionated. They know they have rights as a child. He knows that he has rights within his home and he knows that he has rights and boundaries too. But the main thing is my child has an opinion. He is part of the choice making. And its only education can give him those opportunities because to him in this world it is his. No one else's, it is his. He can do whatever he wants because of education.

Male, 17–40

Family loyalty

While many younger participants valued the tradition of learning and working within the family, some described how family loyalty could come at the expense of education:

I wish I could be better [at writing]. But it would have stopped me from being what I am today and what I needed to support my father.

Female, 17–40

I was so determined to leave school and travel with my dad. I was determined I wanted to be off. I'm happy I did what I did because it's made me a proud Traveller but I regret not getting qualifications. I'm even thinking about how I could do that now and I've got four kids.

Female, over 40

Different views within families

In many cases there were differences in views within families. Age difference and different experiences of school went some way to explain the different attitudes. One young woman, however, described the differences in attitudes to education between her and her sister:

I mean, with my sister, we were both brought up the same way but we've got different views on things. She prefers to have them [the children] home with her. I'm not like that. I like the fact of them mixing. I don't want [child] to grow up and be like, 'Oh no, that's a country man (a non-Gypsy/Traveller)—I don't want to speak to him'. We had that and I don't want that. I want to build bridges and for him to know that that child is the same as him. They're both happy, healthy wee boys and they're both getting on in life. I don't want something in the middle.

Female, 18–40

My brother's wife home educates. She gets a tutor and she does it herself but I think it's a struggle. I don't. I think she feels she can't give them all that they need. I don't think she would ask for help, she's not that kind.

Female, 17

Summary

- Negative experiences of school impacted strongly on participants' attitudes to education and their subsequent engagement with schools for their own children.

- Primary school and nursery were frequently described positively. A deep-rooted fear relating to children attending secondary schools runs across generations. The two main concerns are fear of cultural dilution and children's safety—there were numerous accounts of bullying being ignored by staff.
- Family members felt excluded from education settings because Gypsy/Traveller cultural practices and sensitivities were not respected. Many self-excluded because they did not feel valued by school staff.
- Most families had expectations for children to live and work as part of the community. Economic survival was a shared concern and most saw the role of education as important to the future. However, they felt that the school curriculum did not prepare children for Gypsy/Traveller lives.
- Participants held different views on education but most were keen to find flexible ways to participate in education beyond primary school stage. Most preferred community-based programmes but college and digital learning were considered good alternatives.

Knowledge about school education and additional support

Many people said they knew very little about education. Frequently they described the differences in services when they moved between local

authorities. In some areas they were supported with a Gypsy/Traveller education service while in others they felt that they were vulnerable to being reported to social services because they did not have appropriate plans for schooling their children. Mothers of all ages were misinformed about the policy and legislative frameworks. They described a fear of social services removing their children from them:

I live in fear of them [social services] turning up at the door. I think they can do that. It makes us closed off. We keep ourselves to ourselves but we've got nothing to hide [laughs].

Female, 21–40

The need for privacy driven by fear of authority was a recurrent theme and affected how families gained knowledge and engaged with school staff. Several parents wanted to limit contact and did not attend meetings. They saw any engagement as a potential threat to their privacy.

We like to keep ourselves to ourselves. We're very private. I wouldn't go to the school because I don't really know them, you know. I think we've got a fear of them.

Female, over 40

For most adults, knowledge was based on their own experiences of school, which were now outdated. As a result, some participants knew very little about the breadth of the modern school curriculum.

I didn't know that they could learn that kind of thing [in response to an image of a technical classroom in a secondary school]. The boys would really enjoy that and it would be useful to them.

Female, over 40

During conversations parents heard about opportunities for flexible and personalised learning programmes, some of which could take place out of school. Most could not image the scenario described and some continued to have concerns about their children being tracked or put under pressure to attend full time.

Well, I mean that all sounds ideal. I think a lot of Travellers don't know about that. Do they still have to enroll in the secondary school though? I think that would put a lot of Travellers off.

Male, 21–40

Families had limited knowledge about their children's entitlement to support for learning. When asked if they felt that their children would benefit from additional support for learning, most suggested that they would not. For most, there was a stigma around a child getting additional support and there was a fear of them to being singled out.

She [the teacher] asked to have a conversation with [child] on his own to find out where he is at. There's no need for that. He's no different from the rest.

Male, 21–40

In one case, the family were so fearful they moved away from the area.

When [child] was wee, they wanted to do a special test but we just went away.

Female, over 40

Two parents described how their children could not read —both made an assumption that their children were dyslexic. Neither of the children had been tested for dyslexia.

We think the reason he's not really reading is because of dyslexia—his dad's got dyslexia.

Female, 21–40

Communication between schools and parents

Poor communication between schools and families has been cited previously as a barrier to engagement in education. Participants were asked about the nature and level of communication between their family and their schools. Responses showed that there was no consistency between authorities and schools.

I mean in one place you're getting letters every day and they're phoning you up and in other places you're invisible. I think some of them just wait until we disappear.

Female, 17–40

A few parents suggested that they were happy with the amount of communication that came from schools.

We get a lot of newsletters, personal emails for the kids, or just talking to the teachers in person.

Female, 17–40

Several mothers shared that some communication methods were more effective than others and that their own literacy levels could inhibit their ability to communicate.

They send out an email and for me that's good but a lot of Travellers don't read.

Male, 17–40

One mother relied on conversations with other parents on the Gypsy/ Traveller site for information. People living on sites were better connected as they shared information with each other:

I don't read and I don't have much contact. I suppose we speak to each other.

Female, 17–40

A few mothers were surprised when they heard about the range of support that might be available through schools. Several proposed the need for someone to take on a communication role between schools and communities.

Nobody mentioned anything to me (about getting help). I think there should be someone who explains things – like to the parents – you know to tell us more. We miss out because we don't know very much.

Female, under 21

Enacting rights

Participants learned about their rights to education and support through the conversations. Most were asked whether they would feel comfortable enacting their rights and approaching school staff. Some parents said that they would like to know more and two women gave examples of how they felt empowered.

I had a meeting with the school because I was scared that he (child) was going to be singled out. Yeah, I was scared that it was going to be, 'That's the wee Gypsy or that's the wee Traveller child'. And it comes from historical things—you know, I'm terrified honestly thinking of social work. So, I explained to them, obviously, we will be away I am going to be taking him out. We are going to be travelling. So, I wanted to get everything upfront and say, I want him in nursery and ready for school and I want him to have the same opportunity as every child. But at the same time, he needs to have an opportunity to have his culture and that needs to be linked. If you don't feel as a school, you can provide this and work with me then I'm happy home schooling him.

Female, 17–40

Another young mother described how she saw the value of understanding her rights.

And you know, (when I take the wee one out) I've done my research first because, you know, I'm allowed to

take him out for six months of the year because that was my cultural rights. He's not just off as an absence, it's a consensual absence. The head teacher was quite taken aback. I think I took her by surprise. But she knew that I knew what I was talking about. And if they think you know what you're talking about you get listened to.

Female, 17–40

Summary

- Poor communication between schools and families was seen as a barrier to participation. Some people had difficulty with written materials.
- The need for privacy, driven by fear of authority, was a recurrent theme and affected how families gained knowledge and communicated with school staff.
- Most information about education was gained through word-of-mouth within the community.
- The majority of participants had limited knowledge about modern developments in schools education such as more flexible attendance arrangement and opportunities for additional support for learning..
- Families found the differences between local authority education services difficult to negotiate.

Proposals for how education can be improved

Participants were invited to discuss how the education system might be

improved to support their families and communities.

End discrimination and bullying

The majority of participants suggested that in order for education to improve, discrimination against the communities would first need to be addressed at school and policy levels. Many suggested that schools needed to find ways to reduce and manage racist incidents.

Racism against our culture should be like racism against all the other cultures. They come at us, and nothing is done. It's the same in schools. If Travellers thought that they were treated the same they would go to schools more often. I'm sure there's a policy or a law that is ignored for us.

Female, over 40

Increase representation of Gypsy/ Traveller culture in schools

Many people described how they did not feel that they belonged to the school community and that their culture was largely ignored. One woman acknowledged the recent work by Scottish Government but challenged why policy was not enacted in practice.

I think the Scottish Government is really trying. There's no doubt—it's not them. So how do we break that down? I think personally it's the schools. The main thing is who's making the decisions about teaching different cultures and religions in school? And why are Gypsy/

Travellers not brought into it? We're not talking something new here. This is my father and his father—we're going back hundreds of years.

Female, over 40

Increase community involvement

Some parents suggested a range of ways in which the community could inform the development of the curriculum. In this way it would be sensitive to cultural practices and more relevant to Gypsy/Traveller lives.

And I think a lot of it is going to be about teachers listening to what's happening because there's going to be certain things where parents will not want the kids taught? And I think instead of saying no this is happening, they need understanding because I think there's a lack of understanding.

Female, over 40

Travelling children have got so much potential - but the schools don't see it. They're only interested in doctors and lawyers.

Female, over 40

Increase teachers' knowledge of Gypsy/Traveller culture

Participants noticed that they also felt excluded because teaching staff knew very little about their everyday lives, resulting in a lack of interest and support for their children:

My son comes home and he colours all these different pictures of homes and houses and they're learning all about these different cultures but yet

there's still nothing to include him. Where does he see himself in that classroom? It's just about who he is. Maybe one day they could colour in a caravan. Or they could put up a picture up of a site.

Male, 17–40

Several of the participants noted that Gypsy/Travellers were one of the few cultures not represented in school staff. One participant suggested that there should be efforts to help young Gypsy/Travellers to train as school teachers. She also felt that non-representation was central to discrimination and that all children should learn about Gypsy/Traveller culture.

Even if they [schools] don't have Gypsy/Travellers working there, for this to be understood in the [settled] community it still needs to be in education from the bottom up. It's no disrespect to any other religion or culture or whatever, but Gypsy/ Travellers—even although we are born here—it seems as though we're not in existence. People try to hide you away. That's how they made camps away out of towns near dumps.

Female, over 40

Provide flexible and digital learning

Every participant described the importance of education to themselves or their family and all were keen for community members to have opportunities to achieve qualifications. Most felt that to do so should not compromise their culture

and community. Flexible and digital learning were viewed as positive solutions for the future.

We're not asking for a lot — just to have our children educated and to carry on with our way of life. Surely that's not too hard—can they not get a wee bit of help?

Female, 17–40

All participants were positive about the potential for learning offered by digital technology in recent times and its capacity to fit around nomadic lifestyles.

We were fine with learning in the trailer, to be honest. I mean, obviously, when I was young there wasn't as much Internet, you couldn't just take Wi-Fi with you. But it's all different now – it's all is possible.

Male, 21–40

One participant who was unable to read or write depended on an iPad that he had received through a funded education programme as his main way of communicating and learning.

Yes, I do [know how to use accessibility features in the iPad]. You know, I do that, it's actually my common way of communicating with people. If somebody sends me a message, I just copy and paste it in and take it to Google Translator. Yeah, and then the Google tells me what they said. Then when I want to send a message, I just press the little microphone, and I just say it.

Male, 17–40

Participants also suggested that plans for digital futures also needed to also recognise the challenges faced by many Gypsy/Traveller families. Digital poverty was prominent in several families. Participants living on both sites and houses described issues with connectivity and affordability. Only five participants had access to a working laptop or computer at home. Almost all used their phone devices to communicate with friends, family and education staff.

Participants suggested that low parental confidence in digital skills and literacy were major barriers to education. And would need to be addressed. One woman with low literacy described her challenge supporting her children with web-based school work. Asked if she would like support to improve her own literacy she shared that she would struggle to go to classes due to her lack of confidence.

I don't have a computer at home - money is not the easiest these days. I can't read myself so I can't help the children. I've got severe confidence problems, so I'd rather do something in my own home. If I got something wrong, I would hate it.

Female, 17–40

One participant suggested that staff should be sensitive to Gypsy/Traveller children's lack of connectivity. She described the challenge of staff making assumptions that she had digital access at home.

When I was at school they would say, 'Research this and research that'. Often my mother ended up in tears and we would have to go to the library.

Female, under 17

Participants suggested that technical support would need to accompany digital learning. One young participant described challenges with maintenance and support after they had received devices through funded projects.

Well I liked that it was mine. I took it home and I took it to [education support services]. I could do what I wanted with it but it got broken and that was it.

Female, under 17

Finally, most younger participants suggested the need for a digital teacher. They were concerned that they would need regular support from someone that they knew and trusted.

Yes, its great for playing games but we still need teaching. I mean I can't put myself through the exams. And I'm looking and thinking there's nobody can help me here. And I'm quite bright. I did well when I was at school.

Female, under 17

If we're going to learn at home we need it to be like when we got work in the portacabin. It needs to be every week and somebody who knows us. That would be good.

Female, under 17

Appoint key staff contact in schools and education support contact for communities

Many families describe the administrative barriers they face when trying to participate in education. One mother described moving her children between authorities to stay closer to her family. While trying to find a house she stayed with her parents on a private site. She faced a barrier when staff suggested that she would not be able to enrol her child in nursery until she could show a council tax bill.

Many community members suggested that they would appreciate help from someone within the school who was known to the community. Some described a fear of calling the school because they did not know who to ask for.

Many women felt that there was a gulf between the two cultures of home and school. To address this, they suggested the need for someone who could act as a go between. The role would be knowledgeable about both Gypsy/Traveller culture and education.

Should there be like a support worker, but maybe like, a community person in the school so that we can chat anonymously like, maybe sometimes confidentially and they can go in and say, you know, is there any updates for such and such or anything going on that we can share with the community or even the site manager. You know this, he's already on the

council. He can put up information and let everybody know. Have a coffee morning - about changes in school. Not specific to one child but for everybody.

Female, 18–40

Summary

- Take measures to prevent and/or manage discrimination and bullying towards Gypsy/Traveller young people in schools, ensuring that they feel safe.
- Respect and represent Gypsy/Traveller culture in all aspects of school life, including staff.
- Increase teachers' knowledge and awareness of Gypsy/Traveller culture.
- Ensure that all children are supported to gain qualifications through local arrangements including in schools, community-based programmes and colleges.
- Make use of flexible and digital learning approaches for education, communication and information gathering.
- Provide technical and educational support for parents and carers to enable them to support children's education.
- Identify local advocates for education in both schools and Gypsy/Traveller communities to support home-school communication.

Discussion

It's not fair. In education they talk about no child slipping through the net. Well they've got a net and it's only the Traveller bairns they are letting slip through it.

Female, over 40

The community conversations provided evidence that, while the Scottish education system has been developing via a range of policies and legislation over the past two decades, little has changed for the children and young people from Gypsy/Traveller families. The findings show that this group continues to experience overt and subtle forms of discrimination from peers, teachers and education leaders. As a result, most Gypsy/Traveller children will continue the cultural practice of severing all links with education by the age of 11. Unfortunately, national data capture does not share information on follow-on destinations for these children and, more worryingly, we know that there are numbers of children who never attend any school and for whom there is no data. These are issues that will need to be addressed by those with policy and leadership responsibilities.

There is a need for a national approach to addressing the barriers to engagement described in this research. As the communities have experienced decades of educational discrimination, changes in their own cultural attitudes are unlikely to happen overnight. However, the education system can initiate changes, in recognition of cultural barriers described in the report.

This would signal to communities that the Gypsy/Traveller culture and its children and young people, are valued and respected.

The key barriers

This section of the report draws on the research findings to discuss some of the key barriers preventing Gypsy/Traveller children and their families from participating fully in the Scottish education system. It takes account of the research participants' experiences, attitudes and values, knowledge, and suggestions for change. The discussion is framed by drawing on policy and academic literature. The section is arranged under the headings:

1. Education policy and practice do not align for Gypsy/Traveller children
2. Children and families experience persistent racism and discrimination in education
3. Gypsy/Traveller culture is not represented or understood in school environments
4. Gypsy/Travellers are fearful of secondary schools
5. Gypsy/Traveller children experience high levels of digital poverty
6. Communication between schools and families is ineffective

Barrier 1: Education policy does not align with practice for Gypsy/ Traveller children

The research findings demonstrate that there are marked inconsistencies in the provision of services for Gypsy/ Traveller children in schools across Scotland. Participants felt excluded from education in a range of ways, they rarely felt supported, and they suggested that staff took little account of their culture or way of life when making decisions about education. Bhopal stresses the necessity of schools' decision-making processes being informed by policy to avoid ad hoc judgements which may be based on stereotypical assumptions about Gypsy/ Traveller children (2000). However, anecdotal evidence in the research suggested that inclusion policies were rarely being implemented where Gypsy/ Traveller children were concerned.

In Scots Law and educational policy there are a range of rights and duties that should support and protect children to ensure that their minority ethnic status does not equate to exclusion, underachievement or disengagement. Unfortunately, there is an absence of clear guidance relating to the implementation of policies to support Gypsy/ Traveller children. Given that Gypsy/ Traveller children and young people are the minority ethnic group who experience the worst outcomes in Scottish education, it is vital that the connection between policy and practice is explicit.

Research participants described differences between education provision across schools and authorities. In some areas there was no support, while others offered dedicated outreach and additional support services. Legal requirements, as set out by the Equality Act 2010 and public sector equality duty (PSED), demand that local authorities should evaluate and revise all policies and practices which will impact, directly or indirectly, on the education of Gypsy/ Traveller children and young people. Additionally, an education authority has a duty to secure suitable and efficient provision of education in their area for all children and families (see section 1 of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980, Standards in Scotland's Schools etc. Act 2000).

The research points to the need for a national approach showing clear leadership responsibilities to ensure that relevant policy and legislation impacts at all stages of the education system to achieve improvements for Gypsy/ Traveller children.

Gypsy/ Traveller children are protected by specific rights that relate to this research (Articles 3, 8, 12, 28, 29 of the UNCRC, for example). Additionally, Article 4 of the UNCRC states that countries should 'undertake all appropriate legislative, administrative, and other measures for the implementation of the rights recognised in the present Convention'. Article 4 of the UNCRC should be advanced by establishing a steering

group of key education stakeholders to ensure a national, strategic, and sustainable response that places Gypsy/ Traveller children at the centre of policy and resulting practice.

Barrier 2: Children and families experience persistent racism and discrimination

Participants reported experiencing wide discrimination in a variety of education settings. For some children, it took place in the immediate environment, for example in relationships with peers through racist name calling and bullying in the playground. For others, it was experienced more subtly when staff failed to recognise and manage racist incidents. Non-recognition of racism towards Gypsy/ Traveller children has persisted for generations. Over ten years ago Bhopal wrote that it was common for the perpetrators of bullying and racism to be adult staff members as well as peers (2011).

Gypsy/ Traveller children adopt a range of coping strategies to respond to social pressures and challenges. In a study by the Anti-Bullying Alliance, young people spoke about responding to bullying by physically retaliating, not attending school, or by playing down aspects of their culture and background (2020). Usually, Gypsy/ Traveller children will be in the minority in school settings. Power imbalance along with lack of teacher knowledge and support can result in racist incidents that are overlooked or ignored.

The General Teaching Council for Scotland's (GTCS) Professional Standards were refreshed in 2021, with requirements for teachers to commit to principles of social justice and respect across a range of protected characteristics (General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS), 2021). However, according to research on bullying in Scottish schools, teachers reported a lack of confidence in teaching and talking about prejudice related to Gypsy/ Traveller children, and prejudice against this group was stated as one of the protected characteristics that educators had the least confidence in addressing (Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2015). Where schools have been successful, they have adopted holistic approaches towards the Gypsy/ Traveller community, which includes policies, leadership and clear, observable displays of multicultural respect (Myers & Bhopal, 2009)⁷. A notable feature has been school leaders who implemented good practice within senior management that extended across the entire staff team.

Similar challenges in aligning legislation with practice are being faced in the English context. Research by The Traveller Movement (2020) found high levels of unaddressed racist bullying and, in line with Equality Legislation, they recommended that all policies must be Equality Impact Assessed from Gypsy/ Traveller perspectives. They also suggested that policymakers should engage with external

⁷ <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1111/j.1467-8527.2009.00442.x>

stakeholders and representatives of ethnic minority groups so that policies can be co-created.

Barrier 3: Gypsy/Traveller culture is not represented or understood in schools

While the research showed the range of different perspectives within and between Gypsy/Traveller communities it also drew attention to patterns of beliefs and values that were common to many. A fear of cultural dilution and commitment to traditional values straddled all age groups and influenced decisions about education. Many participants commented on the school staff's lack of knowledge about their culture and the values that were important to them. Additionally, all participants reported that the Gypsy/Traveller culture was neither represented in the school environment nor the curriculum with one parent saying, *"We don't see ourselves there"*.

Discussions about curriculum content surfaced a community position that much of the school curriculum was irrelevant to family concepts of success and the lives many Gypsy/Traveller children would lead. This, in turn, can affect children's engagement, resulting in social and pedagogical self-exclusion (Kiddle, 1999, O'Hanlon 2010). Tensions between Gypsy/Traveller cultural values and curriculum content occurred frequently, particularly the *Relationships, Sexual Health and Parenthood* (RSH) aspects, resulting in children being removed from primary

schools. The perception of a culturally-irrelevant curriculum was also a key contributing factor to children's failure to transition to secondary schools.

Inclusive practice is a central principle in Scottish education, which aims to achieve excellence and equity for every child and young person. Four key features which are used to set expectations and evaluate inclusive education practice are: present, participating, achieving and supported (Scottish Government, 2019a). The research showed that the key expectations of the model achieve little for Gypsy/Traveller children. For example, an expectation of 'present' is that all children receive a full-time education with flexible approaches that meet their needs— a feature which is rarely reported. 'Participating' suggests that all children and young people should be enabled and supported to participate in their learning—Gypsy/Traveller children rarely participate in meaningful ways. An expectation of 'Achieving' is that all children and young people should reach their full potential and that they should have access to a varied curriculum tailored to meet their needs—the majority of participants saw limited value in what was learned in schools. Finally, 'supported' expects that children and young people can access help to overcome barriers to learning and achieve their full potential. Morgan (2020) recommends that all children with ASN must be proactively and fully considered in policy making (3.2.1). However, research participants

described less access to support for Gypsy/Travellers compared with other children. It is significant that Gypsy/Traveller children's support needs often result from a range of interconnected social, emotional, cultural and educational factors and not because of their Gypsy/Traveller ethnicity. However, there is evidence to suggest that one of the key barriers to their inclusion in the education system is stereotypical perceptions of their abilities due to their ethnicity.

Throughout the world most countries will have traditionally nomadic or indigenous communities. Many recognise how the richness of the nomadic traditions can contribute to their societies and some have established community education development programmes that include culturally sustaining pedagogy (CSP) — an approach to teaching and learning that centres and sustains indigenous and minority communities (Alim, Paris and Wong 2020). CSP allows educators to recognise the fallacy of measuring the young people in our diverse communities exclusively against White middle-class norms of knowing and ways of being that can dominate notions of educational achievement (Alim & Paris, 2017, p. 1). The approach is based on the assumption that when knowledge and skills are situated within students' lived experiences and frames of reference, the content is more personally meaningful, interest driven. In this way children and young people from the Gypsy/

Traveller community will be more likely to achieve and succeed. The approach is also shown to be positively correlated with educational outcomes including engagement, attendance and performance on traditional academic indicators (Alim & Paris, 2017). In Scotland the infrastructure is already in place for a CSP approach. Curriculum for Excellence and the recent proposals for more flexible content and recognition of achievement (Hayward, 2023) offer a secure basis and a strategy for including Gypsy/Travellers in this way.

Barrier 4: Gypsy/Traveller parents are fearful of secondary schools

Almost all participants described being fearful of secondary schools. Few adults had attended and few planned to send children in the future. Some suggested that the irrelevance of the curriculum was the main reason but for the majority it was a fear of cultural dilution or bullying. An additional factor lies in the fact that, in Scotland, there is no legal requirement for children to attend secondary school if they are not enrolled, although once registered, parents must seek permission to withdraw (1980 Act). It is for this reason that many parents find it easier for children to leave education after primary school. Information about parents' responsibilities should be improved. Parents should be aware of the duty on the parent of a school age child to provide efficient education suitable to the child's age, etc to their child, by causing the child's regular

attendance at a public school or by other means. Therefore, where a child does not go to school, parents retain the duty to provide suitable education (section 30, 1980 Act). Schools should also recognise that particular sensitivity should be given to children or young people in Gypsy/Traveller families as described in Section 5.4 of Included, Engaged and Involved Part 1. (Scottish Government, 2019b).

Positive transitions ensure quality in education settings and are central to meeting children's rights to an education. Transitions from primary to secondary, to further education, and employment constitute a key priority as set out in legislation, policy and guidance in Scotland (Education Scotland, 2008, 2014; Scottish Government, 2022, 2019b). Working within these frameworks there is a need for clear communication, resources and practices to support positive transitions in partnership with families. Inclusive provision beyond primary school should include:

- Establishing clear leadership arrangements such as identifying a staff member responsible for each child and/or a national support service that manages transitions.
- Involving, advising and supporting Gypsy/Traveller families while children are at primary school.
- Working closely with secondary schools and local agencies to explore flexible options for education (including blended and

digital learning – see Barrier 5 below).

- Exploring the role of SEEMiS in managing and maintaining children's records when flexible arrangements are in place.

Barrier 5: Gypsy/Traveller children and young people experience high levels of digital poverty

While the majority of participants were resistant to secondary school, all wanted their children to continue to learn and achieve success. Many proposed the use of digital technology as part of a solution. The routines and ways of learning in Gypsy/Traveller communities are often at odds with the normative education model, where the focus is on physical attendance, and structured terms and timetables (Danaher, 2007). Often high mobility coupled with ineffective distance learning results in significant interruptions to children's education (Padfield, 2008).

The literature raises the challenges of providing a more equitable education model through digital flexible learning. Digital poverty including low family literacy levels, low digital confidence and connectivity issues all contribute (Padfield, 2008; Townsend et al., 2020). The research cohort confirmed this position with many experiencing connectivity issues, limited access to hardware and challenges with maintenance. Parents also suggested that they lacked the skills and confidence to support their children's digital learning.

In the case of Gypsy/Traveller education, democratising education will require levelling the playing field by providing equitable access to the education system. In many ways, this can be achieved by addressing digital exclusion. Resources and processes which facilitate nomadic communities to use digital technology for education effectively, actively, and autonomously are needed. A digital flexible learning model has the potential to mitigate against the barriers to education that students from Gypsy/Traveller communities face. STEP's research has already shown the extent to which Gypsy/Traveller communities can be empowered and become socially included because of increased digital engagement (Finn & Duncan, 2022).

Barrier 6: Communication between families and education is ineffective

The research conversations invited participants to share what they knew about Additional Support for Learning (ASL), Curriculum for Excellence, and children's rights to education. The majority from each of the age groups suggested that they knew very little about education matters. Some had a negative view of additional support for learning, believing that their children are stigmatised through the process. For them, additional support was associated with being singled out and removed from classrooms. This was one of several attitudes that had been passed from previous generations but that continue to inform current behaviours.

Multiple factors can influence communication between school staff and families (O'Toole et al., 2019). Family attitudes will be influenced by previous experiences of discrimination and education staff may be influenced by the media and broader societal attitudes towards the Gypsy/Traveller culture. Gypsy/Traveller parents should understand that ASL can be time-limited and has a significant impact on children's achievement often allowing them to participate fully without support.

Schools and local authorities must work together with parents to develop effective communication. The research revealed that parents felt that they were at the mercy of social services, and this affected their engagement with education, *"It makes us closed off"*. Effective communication would enable parents to understand that they can be partners in planning their children's education. Knowledge about their rights and developments in education would enable families to be involved in decision-making processes such as arrangements relating to qualifications, attendance, transitions, and additional support. Parents would also be able to take a role in ensuring that Gypsy/Traveller culture is reflected in schools and curriculum.

Schools should be sensitive to how rights-based approaches are understood by the Gypsy/Traveller community. Although some research participants described knowing their rights to education, they did not

separate the child's right from the community position. With increasing attention on children's rights, society takes a view of childhood where a child is an individual right holder with their own agency, protected by legislation (UNCRC) and whose voice should be included in decision making about their own lives. However, from the Gypsy/Traveller cultural perspective, the child is viewed as a part of a collectivist community where the goals and values of the community can take precedence over the individual. Connections between people in the group play a central role in the child's identity.

Lundy and colleagues warn against an overly simplified interpretation of young children's rights (although the position also applies to older children) and propose a more holistic rights-based approach. A key concern is that Article 12(1), which gives every child who is 'capable of forming a view' the right to express it and a right to have that view given 'due weight in accordance with age and maturity' is one of the most cited but least understood of all the rights in the Convention (Lundy et al., 2024). They suggest that there is a need to read Article 12 along with children's other human rights, including the right to an education (Article 29), one that protects them from harm, both physically and psychologically (Article 19) and one that allows parents and caregivers to advise and guide them as they exercise their rights

(Article 5). Crosscutting all of this is a requirement to ensure that adult decision-makers—rightly influential in young children's lives—have children's best interests as a priority (Article 3(1)). This holistic view of children's rights supports staff to understand the complexities involved in enacting Gypsy/Traveller children's rights.

Conclusion and recommendations

Once Traveller parents see the children can go to high school, that things can be done properly, it will change. It's too late to change high schools just now. We need to start at the bottom and work our way up. Bring our culture into primary schools and leave it for a few years. Train the teachers...and before long it won't be such a big thing.
Female, over 40

This report provides an overview of Gypsy/Travellers community members' experiences, attitudes and knowledge of the education system in Scotland. A series of conversations revealed that the communities' negative attitudes towards schools and education have resulted from generations of exclusion and discrimination. Addressing the many concerns will be complex and will require sustained effort at all levels of education leadership. To enable positive change to happen, the education system will need to demonstrate foremost that Gypsy/Traveller communities are valued. Improvements in communication between schools and homes should be a priority. A key message should be that education is continually changing and improving and it can have far reaching benefits for the future of Gypsy/Traveller communities. Parents will also need to know that their children are safe in schools and that they can access support to achieve their full potential when needed.

Recommendations

The recommendations here overlap with several national policy initiatives therefore it will be important that the needs of Gypsy/Traveller children and young people are made explicit in all relevant policy forums.

- 1. Advance Article 4 of the UNCRC by establishing a steering group of key stakeholders to ensure a national, strategic, and sustainable response that places Gypsy/Traveller children at the centre of policy and improvement planning.**
 - 1.1. Consideration and inclusion of Gypsy/Travellers in legislative and policy developments and implementation
 - 1.2. Identify a national approach for the leadership and management of Gypsy/Traveller children's education. The education service should ensure continuity in planning and assessing learning, maintaining and sharing records, and signposting to flexible access, support and positive destinations.
 - 1.3. Engage with external stakeholders and representatives of Gypsy/Traveller groups so that policies can be co-created and enacted.

2. Prioritise data collection.

- 2.1. Gather education data that recognises Gypsy/Traveller minority ethnic status and that is sufficiently granular to inform improvement planning at school, local authority and national levels.
- 2.2. Identify performance indicators to align with data that reflect Gypsy/Traveller culture and education aspirations.
- 2.3. Ensure that Gypsy/Traveller family members feel safe participating in data sharing and recognise the benefits.

3. Provide a national training programme to raise awareness and prioritise the management of prejudice-based bullying targeted at Gypsy/Traveller children.

- 3.1. Recognise the nature of Gypsy/Traveller discrimination and the systemic failures to address it. Share information on the management of race-related bullying with staff and families.
- 3.2. Establish processes to record and account for action taken against discriminatory incidents
- 3.3. Create safe spaces with identified staff members with whom Gypsy/Traveller children and parents can confide when incidents occur.

4. Provide training for education staff to represent, include and celebrate Gypsy/Traveller culture in all aspects of school life and adopt culturally sustaining teaching and learning approaches.

- 4.1. Provide training on culturally sustaining teaching practices, including strategies for creating inclusive learning environments, addressing cultural bias, and building positive relationships with Gypsy/Traveller students and families.
- 4.2. Foster a sense of belonging for children and families in education settings through positive relationships, inclusive school spaces and curricula.
- 4.3. Involve community members, academics and educators to develop curriculum that integrate Gypsy/Traveller history, traditions, and cultural perspectives.
- 4.4. Showcase success stories and positive examples of educational inclusion and excellence within Gypsy/Traveller communities to inspire and motivate and to challenge stereotypes and misconceptions.

5. Provide support for staff to facilitate transitions into and beyond primary school that enable all Gypsy/Traveller children to achieve culturally relevant awards, qualifications and positive destinations.

- 5.1. Provide training for staff to identify and address the academic, social-emotional, and behavioural support needs of Gypsy/Traveller children.
- 5.2. Prioritise transitions into and beyond primary schools using targeted interventions. Provide clear leadership and involve families at the earliest stage.
- 5.3. Identify local resources and partnerships (colleges, schools, employers, third sector organisations) to help Gypsy/Traveller students succeed.
- 5.4. Collaborate with local community-based organisations to signpost support services.
- 5.5. In line with Recommendations 8 and 10 of the Hayward Review, deliver on the entitlement to education through personal pathways and a project approach that recognises social, cultural economic and wellbeing aspects.

6. Ensure that Gypsy/Traveller children and young people benefit from flexible, digital learning opportunities and are not disadvantaged due to digital poverty.

- 6.1. Offer digital and flexible learning opportunities that reflect modern nomadic lifestyles and ensure Gypsy/Traveller children and their families are not educationally disadvantaged by limited digital literacy and access.

7. Improve communication between homes and education providers.

- 7.1. Appoint Gypsy/Traveller education advocacy and liaison roles in schools and local areas.
- 7.2. Adopt interagency approaches ensuring staff from Community Learning and Development, Health, Childcare, Accommodation and other relevant agencies collaborate to provide information about education services.

8. Ensure Gypsy/Traveller families' participation in planning and decision-making relating to their children's education.

- 8.1. Develop culturally appropriate approaches to participation through consultation with Gypsy/Traveller parents.
- 8.2. Avoid overly simplified interpretations of children's rights by recognising children as part of a collectivist culture with the right to have their voices heard, to result in safe, inclusive, culturally sustaining and coherent educational experiences.

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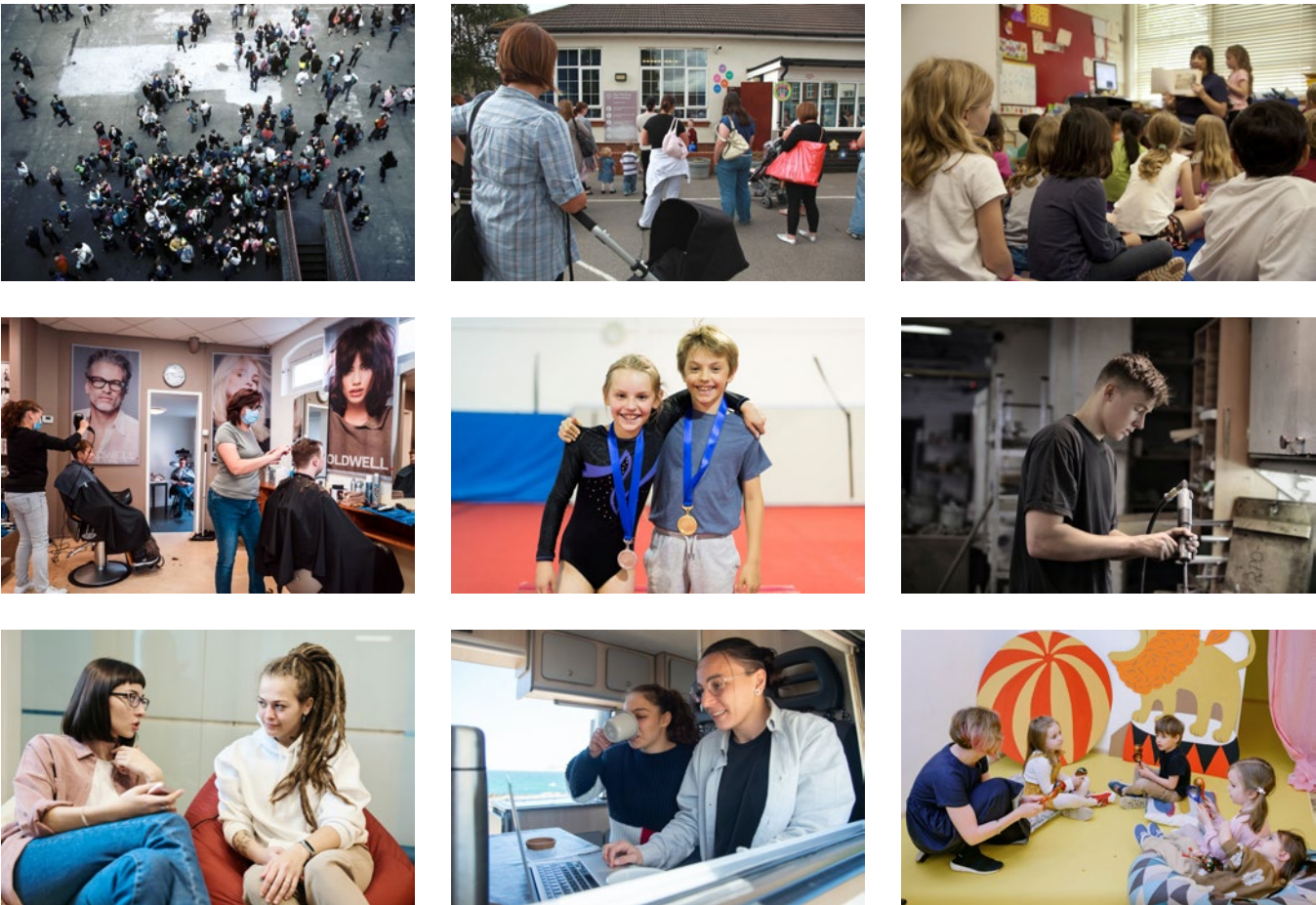
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Annex 1

Visual prompts used in community conversation

The images on this page were shared with participants using paper copies and Powerpoint displays.



Annex 2

Draft framework for improvement

Children and families	Raised awareness of children's rights Raised awareness of opportunities available through education Awareness of flexible education models Awareness of children's ongoing educational needs, for example, minimum expectations for school and home-based learning, including time commitment, access to resources, consideration of who children can learn from, activities that engage the child based on their interests and opportunities to socialise with other children while learning. Mediation within families Mental health support Communication with families that is accessible and reflects cultural needs
School staff	Training and resources: Connecting inclusion policy with practice Raised expectations through effective use of data, planning and accountability. Cultural awareness raising and professional values Managing learning between home and school (digital) Managing family involvement and support Partnership working for enhanced transitions with third sector, employers and colleges Support digital engagement and flexible education options Culturally sustaining learning and teaching Digital cultural pedagogies Culturally relevant qualifications and awards Racial literacy relating to the Gypsy/Traveller community
Leadership	Equality impact assessment Data collection, analysis and reporting for improvement (LA/SG) Representation in policy, naming communities and incorporating case studies in guidance Planning for, and driving, improvement Staff development A national leadership model

Annex 3

Participant information

Why have you been invited to take part?

You have been invited to take part in the conversations because your experience of being a Scottish Gypsy/Traveller can help educators to see things from your point of view. This will also help Scottish Government to understand the strengths and weaknesses of the education system so that they can develop future policy and plans to improve educational outcomes for children from Gypsy/Traveller families.

Do you have to take part?

Taking part in this conversation is voluntary and if you are not happy you can stop at any point without the need to provide an explanation.

Consent

- I confirm that I have understood the information provided about the project and that Maureen has answered any queries to my satisfaction.
- I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am also free to withdraw my consent to use my data for reporting without having to give a reason and without any consequences.
- I agree to the data being used in the government report and for educational purposes such as in teachers' materials, conference papers and journal articles.
- I understand that any information recorded in the conversation will remain confidential and no information that identifies me or my family will be made publicly available.
- I agree to take part in the conversation.
- I consent to being audio recorded as part of the conversation.

What happens to the information from the conversations?

- The conversations will be audio recorded so that the useful information can be transcribed into writing. This is the data that will be used. Maureen will not use the audio or your voice as it satnds and there will be no video recording.
- Maureen will keep the data secure. A family code name will be used in the collection and analysis of the data but not the reporting.
- As a second stage Maureen may come back to share parts of the data with you to get your feedback on what she has written.
- The results of the conversation will be collected and shared in a report for Scottish Government. The data may also be used in education publications, such as journal articles and in conference presentations to let other educators know about Gypsy/Traveller experiences. At the end of a two-year period all data from the project will be securely destroyed. You will be able to ask to see the government report.
- Your information will never be shared with anyone else or any other organisation.

Do you have any other questions about how we use the information you share with us?

STEP

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