



LIMERICK  
TRAVELLER  
NETWORK

"Giving Travellers A  
Voice"

EXCHANGE HOUSE IRELAND  
National Families Service

# Traveller Education Change Project Report

If we all come together we can all make a change for  
the future of our children's education



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TRAVELLER EDUCATION CHANGE PROJECT is a Participatory Action Research project of the Limerick Traveller Network developed and implemented with the support of Exchange House Ireland National Travellers Service. The project was guided and approved by Maynooth University.



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# Foreword by Peer Researchers

This project would have not taken place without the Limerick Traveller Network (LTN). This is a Network of Traveller representatives from all Traveller sites and areas in Limerick City. The Network was set up by Olive O' Reilly and Margaret O'Brien who went to every Traveller family in Limerick and asked them to work together. As LTN representatives from our areas we discussed what changes were needed for our community. Education was one of our priorities and this led to the set-up of the Traveller Education Change Project. **This report is the result of our work as Peer researchers of the Limerick Traveller Network, from March 2023 to October 2024.**

We are asking that this report is read carefully, to understand and listen to voice and experience of Traveller children and parents.

It is a report for politicians, the government and government agencies to understand that the education system that we have now it is not working for our children. It is a report for schools, schools boards and anyone working with Traveller children to better understand our ways and how to support our children better.

This report is also for Traveller families, to give them hope. We are hoping this report will help ensuring that Traveller children will have the same education outcomes and opportunities that everyone else has, that Traveller culture will become a normal part of schools, and Travellers equal partners of the school system as students, parents and employees.

We want to thank those that worked with us: Maria Carnicer from Exchange House Ireland National Travellers Service and Dr. Camilla Fitzsimons from Maynooth University, and all that supported and listened to us, in special Greg Dillon for all his support and video work, Mary Immaculate College for hosting our launch and the members of the Report Launch organising committee (Ruth Bourke, Áine Lyne, Lorraine McIlrath and David Studer), as well as thank the many people that came to our team to talk to us and that opened their doors when we visited them.

We want to mention our funders Community Foundation Ireland - RTE Toy Show Appeal that gave us the opportunity to carry out this research. We also we want thank and encourage all the schools and teachers that are going out of their way to support our children.

Finally, we want to especially thank all Traveller families and children that took part in this research, answering our questions and coming to focus groups.

Traveller children education is important, children are our future. This reports' findings show that Traveller education needs to be a national priority. If we all come together we can all make a change for the future of our children's education.

Amanda McCarthy, Ciara Lynch, Mary Ann O' Reilly, Crystal O'Reilly, Kathleen O' Reilly, Ellen O' Reilly, Margaret Connors, Linda Killeen, Kathleen Casey, Bridget Casey, Ellen Casey, Noreen Casey. **(Limerick Traveller Network)**





# Introduction

**Irish Travellers, a recognised indigenous ethnic minority, face significant barriers in accessing and succeeding in education. Despite their distinct cultural identity and resilience, decades of systemic discrimination and marginalisation have entrenched educational inequalities for Traveller children. These disparities persist across all levels of the education system, from early childhood to higher education, resulting in limited opportunities and diminished outcomes for many Traveller families.**

Historically, education policies have failed to recognise the uniqueness of Traveller students and, often promoting assimilation rather than inclusion. Segregated schooling, low expectations, and a lack of cultural representation have compounded these challenges, creating a cycle of disengagement and academic underachievement. Despite positive changes to state policy and the recognition of Traveller ethnicity, Traveller children remain disproportionately excluded from higher levels of education, with low retention rates and limited access to diverse educational pathways.

This report analyses the educational challenges faced by Travellers in Limerick city, offering both quantitative and qualitative insights into their experiences. It highlights the systemic factors contributing to educational disadvantage and introduces a community-led, participatory approach that empowers Traveller voices in research and advocacy to shape solutions for their educational needs.

Through collaboration with Traveller families, educators, and stakeholders, this research identifies barriers and explores practical, culturally informed strategies to overcome them. The report makes recommendations for implementing Traveller education strategies and policies, highlighting areas for further action and suggesting local activities to address these issues. Our findings emphasise the need to foster an inclusive educational environment where Traveller culture is respected, Travellers are integral to the education system (as students, parents, and educators), Traveller children are supported to reach their potential, and systemic inequities are dismantled.

By placing Traveller voices at the heart of this work, we seek to challenge the status quo and advocate for transformative change in the education system—ensuring that every Traveller child has the opportunity to thrive.



St. Augustine's  
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# Traveller Education in Context

The challenges facing young Traveller students in Ireland stem from centuries of discrimination and systemic disenfranchisement. Historically, public policy has failed to acknowledge the rights of the Traveller community and the significance of their culture, leaving a legacy of exclusion. This section outlines the historical and sociological factors shaping the educational landscape for Travellers today, highlighting key challenges and potential paths forward.

## About Irish Travellers

Irish Travellers are an indigenous minority with a distinct cultural identity, marked by shared history, language, customs, and traditions. Nomadism, a key aspect of their culture, differentiates them from the sedentary (settled) population. 32,949 Irish Travellers lived in Ireland in 2022 – a 6% increase from 2016. Irish Travellers make up just 0.64% of the population: 6 out of every 1,000 people in the State are Irish travellers.<sup>1</sup> This small minority group has faced significant levels of prejudice and exclusion in Irish society, contributing to broader socioeconomic inequalities.

## Demographics

Travellers represent a younger demographic than the general Irish population, with an average age of 27 compared to 39. This youthfulness is influenced by relatively higher fertility rates and lower life expectancy, reflective of broader social and health disparities.<sup>2</sup> Children under 15 account for 36% of Travellers, compared to 20% of the total population, underscoring the significance of this community's youthfulness for educational and social policy. However, the stark contrast in longevity is evident, with only 5% of Travellers

<sup>1</sup> Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth. "Traveller and Roma Education Strategy, 2024 - 2030." Government of Ireland, July 17, 2024. <https://assets.gov.ie/299047/fb05ed48-5f86-4b50-a410-98b44cf101d5.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth. "National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy II." Government of Ireland, July 31, 2024. <https://www.gov.ie/en/press-release/f8425-minister-roderic-ogorman-announces-publication-of-the-new-national-traveller-and-roma-inclusion-strategy-2024-2028-ntris-ii/>.

aged 65 or older, compared to 15% in the general population. These differences are exacerbated by systemic issues, including limited access to healthcare and the cumulative effects of marginalization, which significantly impact life expectancy and overall well-being.

Irish Traveller representation is higher in the West and Midlands: In Galway, 21 out of every 1,000 people were Irish Travellers, compared with 20 in Longford and 14 in Offaly. In Limerick, where this project was conducted, 9 out of every 1,000 people were Irish Travellers.<sup>3</sup>

## Recognition and Culture

Travellers, as individuals and as a group, experience a high level of prejudice and exclusion in Irish society. Travellers were formally recognised as an ethnic group by the Irish state on March 1, 2017, after decades of advocacy by Traveller activists and organisations. Traveller identity encompasses a shared set of beliefs, attitudes, values, norms, and language that define their unique culture. Traveller culture is dynamic, constantly evolving with a blend of tradition and emerging new ideas.

Legislative changes, such as Trespass legislation, laws governing market trading, and regulations covering horse ownership, have severely impacted traditional aspects of Traveller culture by criminalising nomadism and restricting cultural practices. Despite these challenges, Travellers continue to identify with and take pride in their heritage, demonstrating resilience in the face of adversity.

## Overview of Traveller Educational Issues

Education is fundamental to societal progress, yet Traveller students in Ireland encounter systemic barriers and societal prejudices that sustain an achievement gap compared to their settled peers. As a key human right and social determinant of health, education impacts many aspects of life, and addressing the educational disparities faced by Travellers is essential to reducing broader societal inequalities.

## Historical Barriers to Education

Historically, the relationship between the State education system and the Traveller community in Ireland has been fraught with challenges. For centuries, Travellers were educated within family settings, learning trades and cultural knowledge passed down through generations. The establishment of a public education system in 1830 brought little change to this practice, as Traveller engagement with formal schooling remained minimal until the late 1970s. For example, in 1963, the Commission on Itinerancy Report found only 160 Traveller children enrolled in schools nationwide.

<sup>3</sup> Central Statistics Office. "Irish Travellers." *Census 2022 Profile 5 - Diversity, Migration, Ethnicity, Irish Travellers & Religion*, October 26, 2023. <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-cpp5/census2022profile5-diversitymigrationethnicityirishtravellersreligion/irishtravellers/>.

State-led efforts to integrate Traveller children into formal education began as early as the 1940s, gaining momentum with the Commission on Itinerancy's recommendations in the 1960s. However, these efforts were rooted in assimilationist policies that sought to erase Traveller culture, which was perceived as "backward" and incompatible with modern Ireland. Education was framed as the solution to transform Travellers into "civilized citizens." This approach, however, promoted segregation, with separate schools and classrooms established to address what the State labelled as the "special education needs" of Travellers.

A 1970 government report on Traveller education exemplifies these discriminatory attitudes. It suggested that in cases where there were not enough Traveller children to justify a separate class, they could instead be placed in classes for "educationally retarded children" or provided remedial teaching.<sup>4</sup> This practice reinforced the marginalization of Travellers within the education system.

By 1988, approximately 4,000 Traveller children (75% of this population) were enrolled in primary education, but 65% of them attended segregated schools or classes. Traveller-only schools were not phased out until well into the 21st century: the last secondary school for Travellers closed in 2018 and one Special School for Traveller children in Bray remains operational.<sup>5</sup>

This segregation had long-lasting consequences for Irish society. Denying children from both Traveller and settled communities the opportunity to learn and grow together reinforced mistrust and prejudice. The lack of interaction and understanding has hindered efforts to build a more inclusive and diverse society.

Peer researchers in the Traveller Education Change (TEC) Project have highlighted how education for many Travellers has been a degrading experience. Discriminatory practices within the school system have left a lasting impression on the collective and personal memory of the Traveller community, serving as a painful reminder of societal exclusion. These experiences have had grave consequences, deepening social divides and perpetuating inequalities for generations.

## Ongoing Educational Disparities

Studies broadly demonstrate that Traveller students have consistently worse academic outcomes and poorer retention than their peers from Settled communities. Retention is a particularly important challenge, as school completion is linked to stronger economic and social outcomes after graduation. According to the 2022 Census, 6 in 10 male Travellers had no formal education or were educated to primary level at most.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Department of Education. 1970. *Committee Report: Educational Facilities for the Children of Itinerants*. Dublin: Stationery Office.

<sup>5</sup> Ní Aodha, Gráinne. "The Last Traveller Secondary School in the Country Told It's to Shut down in June." *The Journal*, April 18, 2018. <https://www.the-journal.ie/traveller-school-in-dublin-closes-3962487-Apr2018/>.

<sup>6</sup> Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth. "National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy II." Government of Ireland, July 31, 2024. <https://www.gov.ie/en/press-release/f8425-minister-roderic-ogorman-announces-publication-of-the-new-national-traveller-and-roma-inclusion-strategy-2024-2028-ntris-ii/>.

## Early Education

Traveller children face challenges from the start of their educational journey. In the 2022/2023 school year, only 74% of Traveller children transitioned from preschool to junior infants, compared to 92.3% of the general population. Early education can have profound impact on a student's ability to succeed throughout the educational journey, making this gap in retention particularly startling.<sup>7</sup>

## Post-Primary Retention

Evidence suggests that the Traveller community grows less engaged with the educational system as they age. While Travellers had once transitioned from primary to post-primary at rates similar to the national average, the Traveller transition rate fell to 82.7% in 2023/2024, significantly below the national average of 95.6%.<sup>8</sup> This drop comes after Traveller education resources faced drastic cuts. Between 2008 and 2012, State funding for Traveller-specific educational supports was cut by 86.6%, compared to an overall government spending reduction of 4.3%.<sup>9</sup>

Once students arrived in Secondary school, retention remained a challenge: In the 2016 entry cohort, only 31.4% of Traveller students completed the Leaving Certificate, compared to 91.7% of their peers.<sup>10</sup> Relatively few Traveller students make it beyond Secondary school: In 2022, 40.4% of Travellers had ceased full time education by the age of 16 or younger.<sup>11</sup>

## Higher Education

Although third-level attainment among Travellers is improving, the disparity remains stark and underscores long-term inequities. In 2022, only 4.7% of Travellers held third-level qualifications, compared to 47.7% of the general population (See Figure 1). The number of Travellers pursuing higher education has significantly increased from just 89 in 2011 to 312 in 2022, demonstrating progress but highlighting the need for sustained, specific interventions. While participation in further education is higher—1,415 Travellers were enrolled in 2022—it predominantly focuses on vocational training rather than academic pathways.<sup>12</sup> This reflects broader systemic issues, including financial constraints, limited access to career guidance, and pervasive societal bias that undermines aspirations for higher academic achievement.

<sup>7</sup> Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth. "Traveller and Roma Education Strategy, 2024 - 2030." Government of Ireland, July 17, 2024. <https://assets.gov.ie/299047/fb05ed48-5f86-4b50-a410-98b44cf101d5.pdf>.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

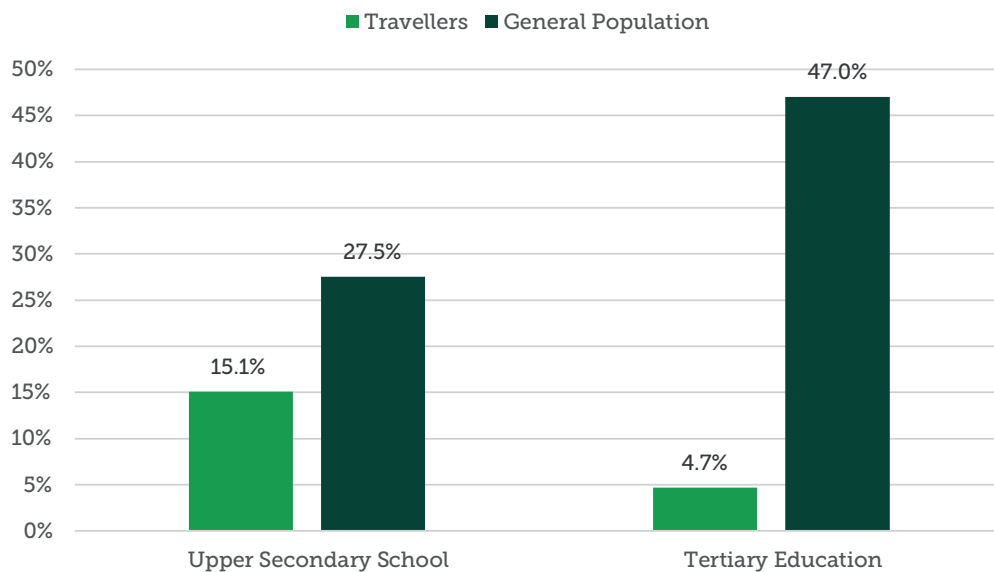
<sup>9</sup> Pavee Point, "Submission to the Special Joint Committee on key issues affecting the Traveller Community: Education." November 2019. [https://www.paveepoint.ie/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/Pavee-Point\\_Submission-to-the-Special-Joint-Committee-on-key-issues-affecting-the-Traveller-Community-Education-1.pdf](https://www.paveepoint.ie/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/Pavee-Point_Submission-to-the-Special-Joint-Committee-on-key-issues-affecting-the-Traveller-Community-Education-1.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth. "Traveller and Roma Education Strategy, 2024 - 2030." Government of Ireland, July 17, 2024. <https://assets.gov.ie/299047/fb05ed48-5f86-4b50-a410-98b44cf101d5.pdf>.

<sup>11</sup> Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth. "National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy II." Government of Ireland, July 31, 2024. <https://www.gov.ie/en/press-release/f8425-minister-roderic-ogorman-announces-publication-of-the-new-national-traveller-and-roma-inclusion-strategy-2024-2028-ntris-ii/>.

<sup>12</sup> Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth. "Traveller and Roma Education Strategy, 2024 - 2030." Government of Ireland, July 17, 2024. <https://assets.gov.ie/299047/fb05ed48-5f86-4b50-a410-98b44cf101d5.pdf>.

Figure 1: School Completion Rates, 2022



Source: National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy II - 2024-2028

## Contributing Factors

### *Discrimination and Bullying*

Discrimination within schools exacerbates educational disengagement among Travellers.<sup>13</sup> According to a 2020 EU Fundamental Rights Agency survey, 27% of Traveller parents reported their children being bullied due to their ethnicity. Hostile school environments contribute to early school leaving, with many young Travellers perceiving education as irrelevant or unattainable due to systemic bias.

### *Societal Prejudice*

The 2017 National Traveller Community Survey revealed that discrimination against Travellers in Ireland remains pervasive, with 77% of respondents reporting experiences of discrimination in the past year. Travellers and Roma recorded the highest negative acceptance rates among minority groups across various social domains, including friendship, kinship, employment, and neighbourhood relations.<sup>14</sup>

These high levels of discrimination exacerbate key social determinants for Travellers—such as health, employment, and accommodation—leading to overcrowded living conditions, financial strain, and a deepened sense of hopelessness. These pressures contribute significantly to the community's elevated rates of mental health issues and suicide. Alarming, 82% of Traveller families reported being affected by suicide. Improving educational outcomes is essential for reducing exclusion and promoting the well-being of the Traveller community.

<sup>13</sup> Watson, Dorothy, Oona Kenny, Frances McGinnity, and Helen Russell. *A Social Portrait of Travellers in Ireland, January 17, 2017*. <https://doi.org/10.26504/rs56>.

<sup>14</sup> O'Mahony, J. *Behaviour & Attitudes (2017) National Traveller Community Survey*. The National Traveller Data and Steering Group and Community Foundation of Ireland.



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# Organisational and Project Background

This section outlines the key organisations driving this initiative and the foundational principles guiding the project. Central to this work is the Limerick Traveller Network (LTN), a Traveller-led initiative committed to advocating for the educational rights of Traveller children in Limerick. Supported by Exchange House Ireland National Travellers Service (EHINTS), LTN leverages its deep connections within the community to amplify Traveller voices and foster collective action.

The project's vision is informed by participatory and inclusive values, aiming to understand the educational barriers faced by Traveller children while challenging systemic inequalities. Through collaborative efforts with families, schools, and policymakers, the project seeks to redefine Traveller education, ensuring it becomes a pathway to empowerment and opportunity rather than exclusion and disadvantage.

## Who We Are

### *Limerick Traveller Network*

LTN is a Traveller led initiative set up to give a voice to the Traveller community in Limerick city. It is based on a Network of most of Limerick city's Traveller specific sites and housing areas of residency. LTN is represented by 14 Traveller women. Of the roughly 150 Traveller families living in Limerick, 130 have consented to representation in the Limerick Traveller Network.



LTN is funded by the Department of Community and Rural Development under the governance of EHINTS. It currently employs a support team of 1 co-ordinator and 2 Network leadership workers. LTN is seeking to become an independent organisation in the coming years.

### *Exchange House Ireland National Travellers Service*

EHINTS is a national Traveller organisation set up in 1980. It provides multi-disciplinary frontline service provider offering Education and Training Services, Children and Young People Services, Family Support and Crisis Intervention Services, Addiction Services and the National Traveller Mental Health Service. It also works in partnership with other organisations, locally, regionally and nationally. In Limerick, it has supported the development of LTN and the Traveller Education Change (TEC) Project.

## Project Development

In its formation, the LTN identified Education, Accommodation, Discrimination, and Mental Health as key priority areas. The Traveller Education Change (TEC) Project specifically addresses concerns regarding the poor educational outcomes for Traveller children in Limerick city, as raised by LTN.

To develop targeted action programmes, the project sought to identify the factors contributing to these poor outcomes and build Traveller expertise to drive change. This led to the creation of a Participatory Action Research proposal, which secured funding from the RTÉ Toy Show Appeal, managed by the Community Foundation Ireland.

The funding enabled EHINTS, the governance body for LTN, to employ 12 Traveller Peer Researchers (working 8 hours weekly from March 2023 to October 2024) and a part-time project coordinator. EHINTS also partnered with Maynooth University, which provided monthly project supervision and approval for the research.

## Vision and values

Peer researchers worked to reflect and develop a common vision for education that would guide the research process. International models of education were explored through watching filmed material and discussed to compare to personal knowledge and experience.

## Traveller Education Change (TEC) Project Beliefs

The TEC project is grounded in the belief that Traveller children are just as capable as any other children and deserve to be treated equally. Every Traveller child should have the opportunity to be whatever they aspire to be, and schools should foster an environment that supports and values their culture. Education should be a positive experience where children feel happy, comfortable, and excited to learn.



## How TEC defines a “good education”:

- **A good teacher:** One who understands and respects Traveller culture.
- **Good attendance:** Schools should create welcoming spaces that encourage attendance.
- **Being yourself:** Children should feel safe to be themselves and express their identity.
- **Personalisation:** Education should cater to students’ interests and strengths.
- **Learning things that are of benefit:** Practical, useful knowledge that applies to their future.
- **Communication:** Children should learn to express themselves and understand others.
- **Socializing:** Education should teach children how to interact with, learn from, and collaborate with others.



## Why is a good education important?

- **Opportunities and choices:** Education opens doors to various paths in life, giving children options for their future.
- **Understanding the world:** It helps children become part of society and understand how it works.
- **Independence:** Education empowers children to rely on themselves, making them less dependent on others.
- **Empowerment:** It allows children to develop their own perspectives, fostering personal growth and independence in thinking.

The project’s vision is for an inclusive, respectful, and empowering educational system where Traveller children thrive and build positive, fulfilling futures.

## Project Aims

**The core objectives of this research are twofold:**

- To create expertise within the Traveller community, equipping members with the knowledge and tools to address their own challenges.
- To develop projects and pilot initiatives in direct collaboration with key stakeholders, ensuring the insights generated from this research translate into concrete actions.





# An Inclusive Methodology: Re-Centring Traveller Perspectives through Participatory Action Research

The Traveller community has long felt over-researched, a sentiment stemming from decades of external researchers conducting studies with little meaningful impact on their lived realities. This repeated research often serves as a painful reminder of their ongoing struggles, reinforcing a narrative that solutions are beyond their control. When research lacks tangible links to action or visible outcomes, it risks further perpetuating feelings of disempowerment and frustration.

Our approach prioritizes not just data collection, but a methodology that builds capacity within the Traveller community itself, fostering agency and encouraging self-driven change. This effort is crucial in shifting from the traditional top-down research paradigm toward a participatory model that empowers those who are most affected.

## Developing Community Research Capacity through Participatory Action Research

**Participatory Action Research (PAR)** is a collaborative and inclusive method that centres the voices of marginalised communities as co-researchers. In this context, PAR ensures Travellers play an active role in identifying and addressing challenges in education, making their lived experiences central to the process.

The PAR method involves an ongoing process of action and reflection, incorporating activities such as reflective analysis and the redefinition of actions or inputs. This iterative process not only drives the research forward but also fosters participants' personal development and the creation of a collective narrative. In this case, the collective narrative serves as a powerful tool for communicating with stakeholders, bridging the gap between community experiences and systemic change.

The project also incorporates **cooperative inquiry**, where participants collectively explore shared interests. This ensures Travellers are fully involved in all stages of research, from determining questions to interpreting findings and formulating solutions.

## Benefits of Inclusive Research Approaches

Re-centring Traveller voices in the research process brings a range of benefits that traditional, top-down research methods have failed to deliver:

- **Relevance and Accuracy:** Community members bring lived experience and cultural understanding, ensuring research questions and methods are grounded in real-world challenges. This produces more meaningful and accurate findings, avoiding the misrepresentation of Traveller culture.
- **Trust and Engagement:** Research led or guided by members of the Traveller community fosters trust and reduces scepticism. When participants see their peers involved, they are more likely to engage openly, leading to richer and more reliable data with higher participation rates.
- **Empowerment and Capacity Building:** Training community members as researchers builds skills in data collection, analysis, and advocacy. This not only benefits the research process but also empowers Travellers to address issues independently in the future.
- **Challenging Inequalities:** Traditional research often reinforces top-down power structures, imposing external solutions that may not work. By involving Travellers directly, the process actively dismantles these structures, ensuring that solutions reflect the community's priorities and lived realities.
- **Sustainability of Solutions:** When Travellers play a central role in designing and implementing research, the outcomes are more likely to resonate with the community and to last. Traveller-led projects are naturally better aligned with the needs and aspirations of the community.
- **Engagement with Stakeholders:** Peer researchers play a vital role in bridging the gap and improving communication between the Traveller community and stakeholders such as schools, policymakers, and NGOs.

## Limits of Participatory Action Research

A key limitation of Participatory Action Research in this context is its time and resource-intensive nature. Building trust and fostering meaningful participation require sustained effort, which may not always align with funding or institutional timelines. Additionally, the outcomes of PAR are largely focused on local environments. While this provides insights to the specific context, it limits generalisability.

## Project Stages

### *Step 1: Peer researcher Recruitment & Framing the Project*

The recruitment of Traveller Peer Researchers began in January 2023. An information sheet, job description, and application form were distributed to LTN sites and families, and the positions were publicly advertised. Thirty-four applications were received, and candidates were selected based on essential and desirable criteria, including knowledge of Traveller issues, teamwork, community engagement, motivation for change, relevant qualifications, and research experience. Participation in LTN meetings and facilitation skills were also considered. Twelve candidates were selected, and a panel of five was created to fill any vacancies.

For many Peer Researchers, this was their first contract of employment. The initial two weeks focused on induction, including reading and signing contracts, obtaining Garda vetting, and reviewing EHINTS's Employee Handbook.

Except for one, all Peer Researchers had previously been involved with LTN, attending meetings, training, and conducting community surveys to propose the establishment of an independent Traveller organisation in Limerick city.

The first group sessions revisited LTN's key priorities and concerns, with analysis of personal and community experiences shaping the research question: *Why do Traveller children have poorer educational outcomes?* The research's standpoint was defined as structural inequality.

### *Step 2: Peer Researcher Training*

To ensure the success of the peer researchers, the project prioritised the development of strong research skills through training and expert-led sessions, while also promoting team growth and knowledge. Training covered several key areas:

- **Conceptual Frameworks:** Understanding structural inequality, equality, discrimination, equity, positive action, statutory human rights agencies (Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission, and the Office of the Ombudsman for Children), bias, unconscious bias, and the Irish political system.
- **Research Skills:** Introduction to research types, methodologies, ethics, and tools, including peer interviewing, focus groups, and training on interviewing, recording, and listening skills.
- **Guest Speakers and Research Exposure:** Sessions included talks with researchers from the National Suicide Research Foundation and the North Cork Travellers' research on Education, as well as participation in consultative forums for developing National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy (NTRIS) and Traveller and Roma Education Strategy (TRES).

- **Education and Development:** Exploring child development, cultural influences on education, and key learning concepts (e.g., Barbara Rogoff’s work on “learning by observing and pitching in”), restorative practices in schools, and Traveller cultural resources for learning (Kids Own Publishing).
- **Trauma-Informed Care and Child Protection:** Specific training in trauma-informed care and child protection.
- **Progression to 3rd Level Education:** Insights into progression routes to higher education and supports for Traveller retention, with meetings with Traveller Access officers at Technical University of Shannon (TUS) and University of Limerick (UL) and the Traveller Apprenticeship Incentivisation Programme.

**Peer researchers also held conversations with professionals in education, including:**

- School Completion Programme Coordinator
- Special Education Needs Organiser (Limerick Team)
- Education Welfare Officer Co-ordinator (Limerick)
- Limerick Childcare Committee
- Transforming Education Through Dialogue Project at Mary Immaculate College

The researchers’ motivation and interest led to strong engagement and self-directed learning, incorporating insights from various sources into their work and personal lives. Sessions enabled the researchers to connect personal experiences with theoretical concepts, while group reflections fostered individual and collective growth. This process led to increased confidence in their roles as experts in Traveller education and representatives of LTN.

### **Key Insights from Training**

Education challenges faced by Limerick Travellers are widespread across Ireland. There is an inequitable allocation of educational resources, with geographic criteria excluding Travellers outside DEIS-designated schools. Access programmes were insufficiently connected to schools attended by young Travellers, particularly at the secondary level.

Despite the presence of motivated professionals, there are significant outreach gaps and disconnection between current proposals and the Traveller community. Improving communication and involving Traveller adults in the education system is needed to align proposals with the community’s needs and social dynamics.

### *Step 3: Field Visits to Traveller Specific Education Projects*

Peer researchers visited two independently funded Traveller Education Projects in **Galway** and **Tipperary**, as well as two Traveller STAR projects funded through NTRIS in Cork and Tuam. The independently managed projects, led by Traveller organisations, demonstrated a holistic approach that integrates child development, educational progress, and Traveller identity. These projects emphasised cultural elements, such as the transmission of learning within the community, with older Travellers teaching younger ones cultural traditions, including Cant. They also focused on creating their own cultural materials and resources while fostering leadership skills in younger Travellers.

These projects were flexible and adapted well to the needs of Travellers, combining after-school activities with education or community-based settings, such as libraries. Their advocacy and innovative capacity allowed them to independently explore and influence internal community changes while building personal and collective capacities. However, their success depended heavily on strong links and collaboration with education stakeholders, requiring sustained engagement and “buy-in” from schools. Funding and ongoing support from these stakeholders also posed significant challenges.

In contrast, NTRIS-funded projects were more closely tied to the education system, with teams comprising both Travellers and non-Traveller education professionals. While these projects aimed to improve school attendance and foster Traveller engagement with the school system, peer researchers noted that the Traveller perspective and agency were often less prominent. Such projects tended to focus on community efforts to engage with schools rather than advocating for broader systemic changes to make education more inclusive of Traveller culture and needs.

Across all projects, whether independently managed or NTRIS-funded, the willingness and flexibility of schools to collaborate were critical. Peer researchers found that participation in Traveller-specific programmes or actions was not mandatory for primary or secondary schools, leaving the success of these initiatives dependent on individual schools' interest and commitment.

These visits were complemented with a conversation with Anne Burke of Cork Traveller Education Unit to learn about their model.

#### **Other field visits that took place were:**

- EHINTS - Traveller specific LTI
- LCETB Youthreach (Kilmallock Campus)
- Attendance to Thomond College Secondary School Traveller Ethnicity Day.



## Case Study 1: The Traveller Family Learning Programme (TRTP)

The Traveller Family Learning Programme is managed by the Tipperary Rural Traveller Project (TRTP), an independent NGO dedicated to supporting the Traveller community. TRTP works to address key issues such as health, employment, discrimination, accommodation, and the promotion of Traveller culture. In recent years, the organization has also focused on mental health within the Traveller community.

The Family Learning Programme was initially conceived with the idea of Traveller Education Peer Workers working alongside a qualified Teacher on after school education support for Traveller children. In its formative years the group size of children attending and funding for this project were small, however a successful application to Social Innovation Fund Ireland (SIFI) for their year-long Engage and Educate Award, transformed this project to a year round programme that saw numbers of attending children balloon from 8 children once a week to 30 children on a 2 day a week basis.

The Family Learning Programme uses a holistic model that combines educational support with activities designed to foster child development, promote Traveller culture, and encourage community engagement. A key aspect of this approach is helping children develop pride and confidence in their Traveller identity, including learning the Traveller language.

The Programme works with children aged 4 to 14. It has also been successful in involving Traveller parents, achieving high rates of parental engagement. Some of the initial participants who joined as members of the homework club have gone on to train as youth workers. They are now employed in paid roles as youth leaders, further strengthening the Programme's impact.

The Traveller Family Learning Programme works in collaboration with local agencies and educational institutions, including TUS.



## Case Study 2: Cork Traveller Education Unit

The work of the Southern Traveller Health Network (STHN) highlighted the importance of prevention and improving educational outcomes as key factors in promoting better health. This led to the commissioning of a report to assess educational needs, which ultimately resulted in the establishment of the Cork Traveller Education Unit.

The Cork Traveller Education Unit is a collaborative initiative, with Traveller representatives working alongside key education stakeholders. The unit has developed a comprehensive strategy for Cork and is currently focused on implementing three main actions:

1. **Training and Employment of Traveller Education Workers:** A team of Traveller Education Workers has been recruited, with participants completing a Leadership in the Community Course, which was co-delivered by STHN and the Adult and Community Department in UCC and supported by Traveller projects in Cork and Kerry, Traveller Health Unit and UCC Access Programme, as well as a specialized 15-week Mentoring Course (also delivered by UCC). Initially, the team is prioritizing support for Traveller children transitioning from primary to secondary school. Currently, they work three hours a week with a group of 15 children, their parents, and schools.
2. **Co-development of Teacher Training Modules:** In collaboration with Cork University College, the unit has co-developed a module designed to prepare teachers for delivering Traveller History and Culture. The objective of the module is to enhance critical understandings of Traveller exclusion in education and its intergenerational impacts on the Traveller community within the Irish school system. Students will develop a trauma informed recognition of the challenges that Traveller young people and their families have faced and continue to face in the education system and consider ways to interrogate and radically transform institutional policy and practice in the pursuit of social justice. These modules will also be taught by Traveller educators, in anticipation of the upcoming Education Bill.
3. **Further Research into Traveller Education:** The unit is investing in additional research to better understand the needs of Traveller students and inform future initiatives. The research will have a particular focus on transition points (primary to post-primary, junior cert to leaving cert, leaving cert and beyond).

These actions aim to improve educational opportunities for Traveller children and support their integration into the wider education system.

### *Step 4: Field Work*

In Limerick City, peer researchers surveyed Traveller families with children aged 3 to 17, achieving a strong response rate of approximately 62% through our questionnaires. This high engagement reflects the community's interest in tackling educational challenges, provided they are part of the solution.

## **Designing and Delivering the Questionnaire**

The team dedicated significant effort to designing a questionnaire for families, focusing on key areas necessary to address the main research question about the school experiences of Traveller children. Discussions among team members highlighted personal educational experiences, leading to a list of relevant topics shaped by their community insights as former students, parents, and guardians.

The research aimed to centre on school experiences rather than the broader social determinants affecting Traveller communities. Consequently, the team narrowed their focus to specific areas, including:

- Traveller children in schools
- Parents' perspectives on schools
- Schools that Traveller children attended
- Traveller culture in relation to education

They opted for a mixed-method questionnaire that included both quantitative data on each enrolled child and qualitative questions seeking parents' opinions about their relationships with schools. A filter question determined whether a child was enrolled, while demographic information was collected for children aged 3 to 18.

The team held extensive discussions to carefully craft specific questions for each area, aiming to gather comprehensive information while respecting interview time limits to ensure thoughtful responses. All questions were directed to parents, with one parent or guardian answering on behalf of each child for each school the children were attending. Key themes emerged for each area of questioning:

- **In relation to children:** happiness and satisfaction, academic performance, education supports in schools, timetable reduction, languages learnt in school, assessment of education needs, and experiences of isolation or discrimination.
- **In relation to parents:** involvement, membership of school boards and parents associations, information levels, relationships with schools, and expectations.
- **In relation to schools:** enrolment, communication and terminology, and the importance and presence of Traveller culture.

Ensuring clear understanding and sensitivity to the privacy of Traveller parents was crucial, leading to careful consideration of question phrasing to avoid intrusiveness. Multiple versions of the questionnaire were trialled within the group, with peer researchers providing feedback on clarity and relevance. The final version was then submitted to Maynooth University for oversight and approval.

Initial responses from the questionnaires revealed the need for further clarification on specific topics, such as school support systems and financial models. Peer researchers noted gaps in parents' knowledge regarding existing support structures, leading to further inquiries about school governance and parental participation. Some issues discussed, like social segregation among Traveller children, were intentionally left open-ended for parents to address in additional comments.

#### DEVELOPMENT OF ETHICS AND CONSENT FORMS

Peer researchers develop ethic statements and Information forms for Traveller parents that were submitted for approval to Maynooth University ethics committee. This process allowed Peer researchers to further understand research ethics and make a commitment with their own community about honesty, transparency and confidentiality.

#### DATA COLLECTION

The data collection process was structured around the existing structure of the Limerick Traveller Network, which comprises peer researchers who also serve as representatives for various Traveller communities across the city. These representatives focus on specific areas where Travellers live, and the research was organised based on these divisions. The areas included in the study were Castletroy, Groovy, Childers Road, Rebogue, Ballysimon, Carew Park, Toppings Field, Ballynacurra-Weston, Southill, Clonlong, Ennis Road, Caherdavin, Thomond, and Long Pavement.

The research targeted 130 families who consented to be represented by the Network, focusing on 91 families with children aged 3 to 18. This amounts to roughly 87% of all Traveller families living in Limerick City.

Throughout the fieldwork, the team met regularly to debrief and discuss emerging issues. Overall, access to families was positive due to the established relationships between peer researchers and the communities. However, some families faced personal challenges that hindered their participation, and as anticipated, trust issues arose. Some interviewees expressed discomfort with certain questions, particularly those related to assessments. Peer researchers noted variability in engagement quality, with some respondents appearing cautious or minimising their answers. There were also indications that some parents, wary of having their responses recorded on paper, held back from expressing their full concerns. In contrast, other parents were more open and eager to discuss the educational challenges they faced.

To foster a comfortable and non-intrusive environment, data collection was primarily conducted in pairs. However, some peer researchers also approached families individually to create a more relaxed atmosphere. While the overall fieldwork experience was positive, concerns about trust and discomfort among families remained a significant challenge. During review sessions, peer researchers worked to develop graphical representations to communicate the findings back to the Traveller families. An unexpected finding emerged when researchers noticed discrepancies between positive feedback from parents about schools and the actual support needs identified in the data. This trend, common in research involving marginalised communities, prompted the team to explore strategies for improving communication and engagement with parents, reassuring them about the confidentiality and anonymity of the research.

As the project advanced through a cycle of action and reflection, the team decided to expand the scope of the research by including the perspectives of children through focus groups. This required additional ethical approvals and training. Reflecting on the data gathered so far raised new questions regarding individualised support in schools and its impact on children's confidence and readiness for secondary education, further guiding the project's direction.



### *Step 5: Focus Groups*

To gain deeper insights into the experiences and challenges faced by children, focus groups were organized with two separate cohorts, each participating in two sessions. The first group included children aged 6-12, representing 3 different schools. The second group included children aged 13-17, representing 5 different schools. The sessions were co-facilitated by peer researchers, who were particularly interested in exploring the following areas:

- **School Experience:** Children were asked to express their feelings about school through creative activities like drawing themselves in class.
- **Confidence in Learning:** Discussions focused on how confident the children felt about their ability to learn.
- **Preparation for Secondary School:** Participants reflected on their readiness for secondary school and their experiences during the transition.
- **Future Aspirations:** Children shared their thoughts on their interests and goals for the future.

Most peer researchers had previously obtained certificates in Advanced Facilitation Skills, and they refreshed their knowledge on group dynamics and effective participation techniques. Additionally, they participated in a focus group facilitated by Maynooth University to further explore their personal experiences of education while becoming familiar with the process and recording requirements.

#### **Preparation for the focus groups included:**

- Developing consent and information forms for ethical approval.
- Deciding on the configuration of focus groups based on numbers, areas, and ages.
- Providing information and consent forms to parents and children.
- Brainstorming suitable activities to encourage participation and formalising session structure. For the younger children, art-based sessions using drawing and role play were employed to express their school experiences, while the older age group participated in a combination of video discussions, small group questions, and larger group discussions.

The focus groups, held in the evenings at the LCETB Kilmallock Rd. Campus and Southill Hub, lasted two hours with a meal break. To reward participation, a fun group activity was organised for the children involved.

The focus groups were effective. For younger children, facilitators used games, role plays, and drawing to create a positive atmosphere, encouraging participation and open conversation. In the older group, a relaxed, conversational approach, using

familiar language and humour, helped children feel at ease and comfortable expressing themselves. They felt heard and understood, saying, “It is good to get it out of our chest.”

Overall, the supportive environment fostered openness and honesty among the children.

### *Step 6: Dissemination*

**The dissemination of emerging findings involved several key activities, including:**

- **Information Leaflet for Traveller Parents:** Delivered in person by Peer Researchers to families who participated in the fieldwork, answering questionnaires. Parents appreciated the in-person delivery and were grateful for the project’s focus on advocating for better Traveller education outcomes.
- **Community Information Sharing:** Organised information sessions for Traveller parents on secondary school progression and apprenticeships. These sessions had low attendance, highlighting internal barriers to participation and the need for culturally appropriate outreach supports.
- **Video Summary:** A video was created to summarise the project’s process, key findings, and recommendations, with additional materials such as photos, interviews, and graphics developed to complement the presentation. Video link: <https://youtu.be/7UQM8SW6TS8>
- **Peer Researcher Presentations:** Peer researchers presented preliminary findings to all staff at EHINTS.
- **Formal Presentations:**
  - Limerick School Attendance Conference (CYPSC): Peer researchers presented the TEC Project Video to an audience of 200, receiving a positive response.
  - Children of Prisoners Europe Equality Forum (Berlin): Three peer researchers presented their findings at the organisations’ annual forum.
  - Maynooth University: Peer researchers presented to teaching staff including the Access programme for primary school teaching and secondary education. Presentation was attended by notable figures, including Professor Kathleen Lynch and Pavee Point representatives.

These presentations not only recognised the peer researchers for their work and personal development but also highlighted the challenges faced by Traveller children in education, enhancing their presentation skills and experience in academic forums.

### *Step 7: Pilot Actions*

The preparation of action pilot projects involved a series of meetings and discussions centred around several key initiatives.

- **Creation of Traveller Educational Materials:** Development of a proposal in collaboration with Kids' Own Publishing Partnership.
- **Pathways for Older Children:** Establishing pathways for children over the age of 16 who lack sufficient skills for further education or employment, involving meetings with Technical University of Shannon (TUS) and Limerick Clare Education Training Board (LCETB).
- **Information activities for Traveller Parents:** Organisation of information sessions for Traveller parents about education pathways for children of secondary school age including Apprenticeships Programmes. Discussions with Thomond College about setting up Traveller parents information mornings.
- **Afterschool Project in Castletroy:** Developing an independent afterschool proposal.
- **Sports Programme for Traveller Children:** Conducting a community survey to 120 children for the development of a Sports Afterschool Program in collaboration with Limerick Sports Partnership. Piloting the collaboration with a Sports Day that included activities for 47 Traveller children age 5 to 13 in 3 different venues across Limerick City.
- **Final Conference:** Planning a conference to present findings and the final report in collaboration with Mary Immaculate College, .

Pilot actions will be further developed and implemented as part of the overall Strategic Plan for Limerick Traveller Network due for completion in 2025.





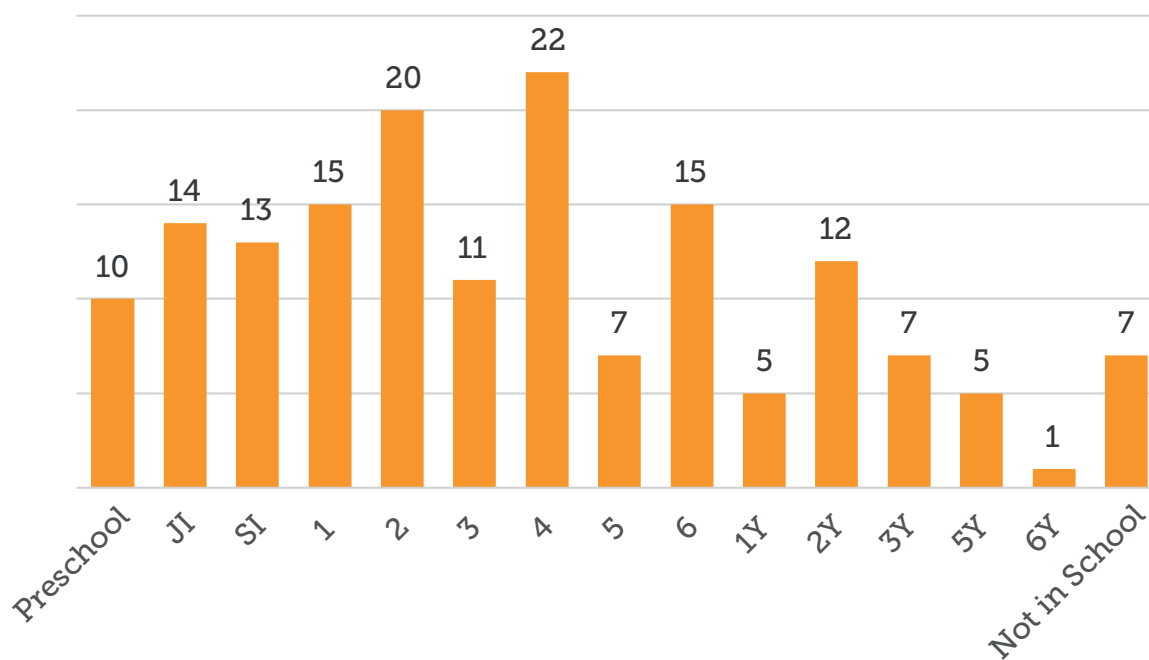
# Findings and Analysis

Research conducted in Limerick City provides a snapshot of larger structural challenges facing Traveller students across Ireland. By placing community members at the centre of the approach, this project ensures cultural inclusiveness, trust, and representation. The high survey response rate (62%) illustrates the effectiveness of community-led research techniques.

In Limerick city, data was collected for a total of 164 Traveller children aged 3 to 17. Out of these, 157 are enrolled in at least 17 different primary schools and at least 8 secondary schools (See Figure 2). Dispersing Traveller students across a large number of schools makes it challenging to identify pervasive trends, making the large-scale research undertaken in the Traveller Education Change Project especially critical.

The analysis concludes that the current support system is not functioning effectively for Traveller children and that the school system reinforces structural inequalities. There is a pressing need to listen to and incorporate the voices of Traveller Peer researchers in discussions about educational supports.

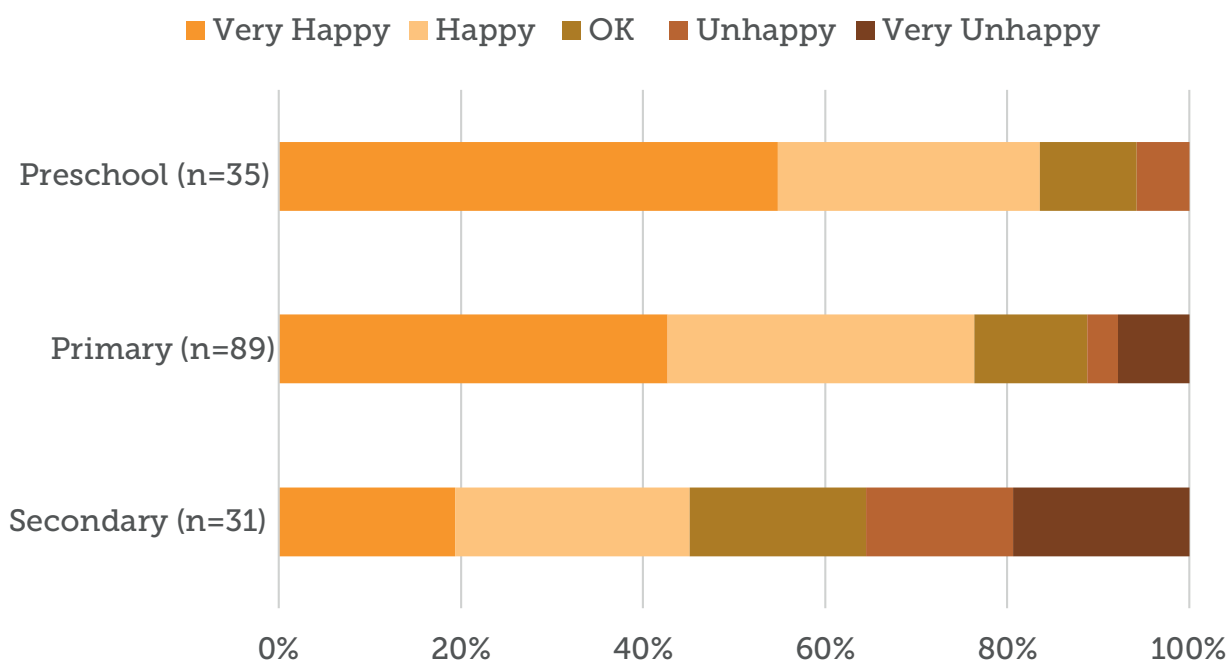
Figure 2: Breakdown of students studied, by grade level



## The Widening Gap for Traveller Children in Education

From early childhood through to secondary school, Traveller children progressively fall further behind their peers: While the early years provide a foundation of enjoyment and participation, by the end of Primary school 65% of all parents interviewed report that their children are behind their peers. By secondary school, the gap becomes insurmountable for many. As school progresses, students become increasingly unhappy (See Figure 3).

Figure 3: Reported happiness of Traveller students, by educational stage



This pattern highlights a structural failure to meet the unique needs and potential of Traveller children, emphasising the urgent need for resourced reforms to achieve equitable educational outcomes.

### Pre-School: Laying Foundations for Success

The educational experiences of Traveller children often start positively, with young children (aged 3-8) enjoying their time in early education settings. Many parents report satisfaction during this stage, appreciating that their children are allowed to play, explore, and be children. For the youngest children, this period is viewed as essential for their development.

However, even in these early years, some parents notice disparities. Issues such as schools being overly strict about lunches or uniforms, or children being removed from class and feeling lost upon returning, create early signs of exclusion. Additionally, there is a perception that insufficient attention is paid to ensuring children thrive academically. For instance, one parent shared that a child diagnosed with learning difficulties at age four only received follow-up support at age eight, highlighting significant delays in addressing educational needs.

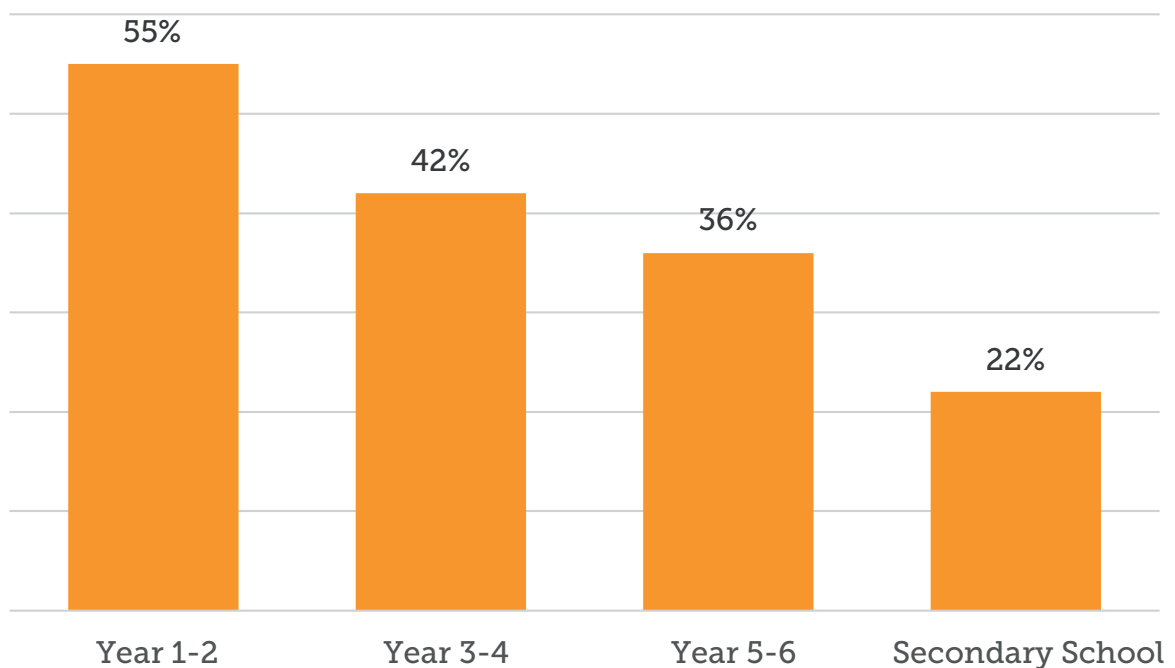
For some families, decisions about pre-schooling are influenced by external pressures, such as recommendations from social workers. While some parents feel pre-school disrupts children's opportunity to remain connected to their culture and family, others face barriers accessing pre-schools, particularly in areas without community-based options. Discrimination in private pre-schools and a lack of affordable childcare also pose challenges, especially for parents trying to continue their education or training.

### Primary School: Early Challenges Masked by Comfort

As Traveller students advance through their schooling, they are more likely to fall behind their peers. Over half of parents of 1-2 class Traveller students report their children are at the same level as their peers. By 3-4 class, just 44% of parents say their children are at the same level as their peers. In 5-6 class, only 35% of parents say their children are at the same level as their peers. In 5-6 class, only 35% of parents say their children are at the same level as their peers (See Figure 4).

This disparity leads most Traveller students academically unprepared to enter secondary school, setting them up for longer-term educational challenges.

**Figure 4: Percent of Traveller students whose parents reported them to be on-level with their peers**



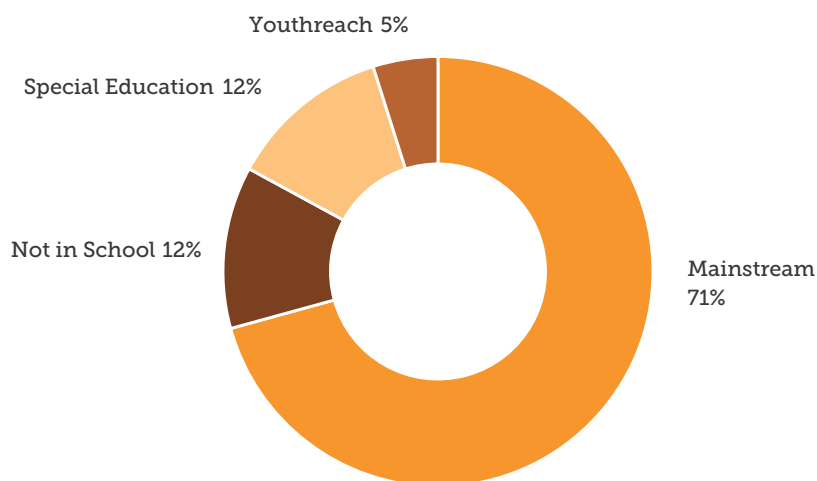
Despite their hopes for their children's success, many Traveller parents express feeling let down by the system. They observe their children falling behind academically, particularly in primary school, where low expectations often mask underlying educational gaps. As their children grow older, parents feel increasingly unable to provide support, noticing a decline in their children's engagement with education and preparation for secondary school or future opportunities (See Figure 4).

## Secondary School: A Critical Drop Off Point

The transition to secondary school represents a major turning point for many Traveller children. Parents observe that their children are often unprepared, beginning at a lower level than their peers and lacking the foundational skills necessary to succeed (See Figure 4). Starting secondary school already behind academically, they face significant challenges adapting to the more demanding environment.

Traveller students and parents reported limited subject options (i.e. no Traveller student was learning a second language) and learning at foundational level. These systemic shortcomings convey low expectations, damaging students' self-esteem and motivation. These factors contribute to a high drop-out rate for Traveller students. 12% of Limerick Traveller students over the age of 13 have discontinued their education (See Figure 5).<sup>15</sup>

**Figure 5: Enrolment by school type, Age 13-17**



As a result, many Traveller children struggle to stay engaged and to identify with the school system as part of their present and future life. The absence of sufficient and tailored resources to support their inclusion, progression and development-coupled with low expectations, leaves them feeling lost and disconnected.

All children attending secondary school and participating in focus groups, except one, expressed unhappiness with school, feeling misunderstood, and singled out. All but one, felt that school's perception of Travellers was negative, placing low value on them as students and as Travellers.

Our survey found that Traveller students who have remained in school until 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> year were more likely to report receiving praise and rewards from instructors, but their overall happiness in school was uneven.

<sup>15</sup> This figure highlights a challenge in data collection, which may be due to the constraints of methods that primarily focus on families at schools. Nationally, 40.4% of Travellers had stopped full-time education by the age of 16 (in 2022 Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth. "National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy II." Government of Ireland, July 31, 2024. <https://www.gov.ie/en/press-release/f8425-minister-roderic-ogorman-announces-publication-of-the-new-national-traveller-and-roma-inclusion-strategy-2024-2028-ntris-ii/>.)

## Special Education Support Systems and Traveller Inclusion

Data from Traveller parents reveals that 67% of all Traveller children in primary school and 75.9 % of Traveller children enrolled in secondary school, receive special education supports. 70.1% of these supports are group based outside mainstream class.(See Figures 6 & 7). Traveller children attend many different schools, often representing only a small number of pupils in each, which masks the broader scale of the issue. Children participating in focus groups sessions expressed enjoying school when they were outside their main class in special education support groups or activities, working alongside other Traveller children.

In these settings children expressed being at ease, comfortable and with “nicer” teachers. There was a sense of normality about being outside their main class on a regular basis, and a stronger feeling of belonging to the group of peers from the Special Education class. Parents report a lack of awareness about protocols or processes leading to the allocation of special education resources, not being aware if clear plans, aims and timelines for interventions exist, or having been part of making decisions about the allocation of supports. Only 30.9% of parents report that special education supports effectively meet their children’s needs.

While these placements aim to provide additional help, the figures and data collected in this research indicate that the current provision of special education supports does not enhance Traveller progression in education but the opposite, it retains Traveller children on a “low track” reinforcing low expectations and preventing Traveller children from full inclusion, perpetuating disadvantage.



Figure 6: Presence of educational supports for Traveller students

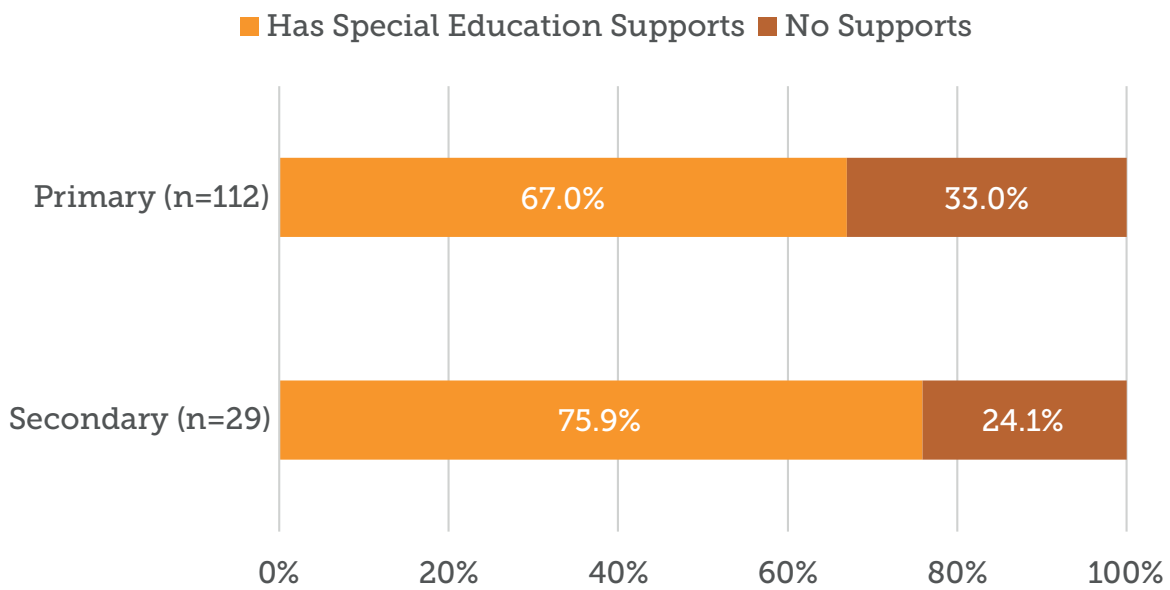
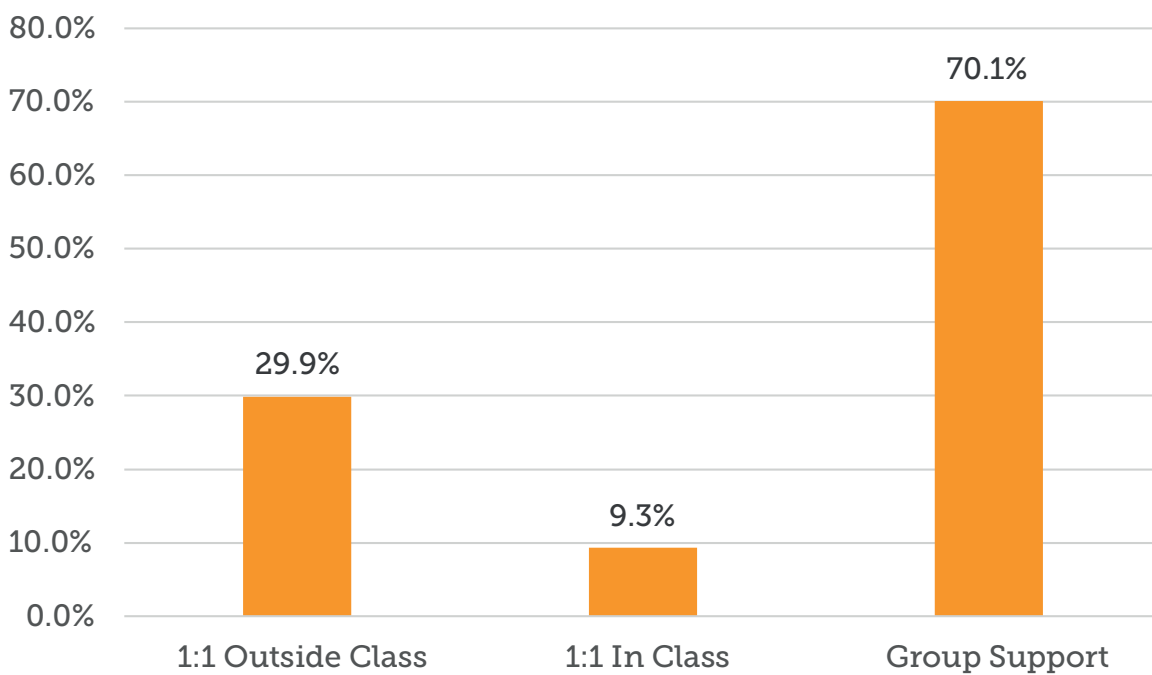


Figure 7: Use of educational supports, all Traveller students



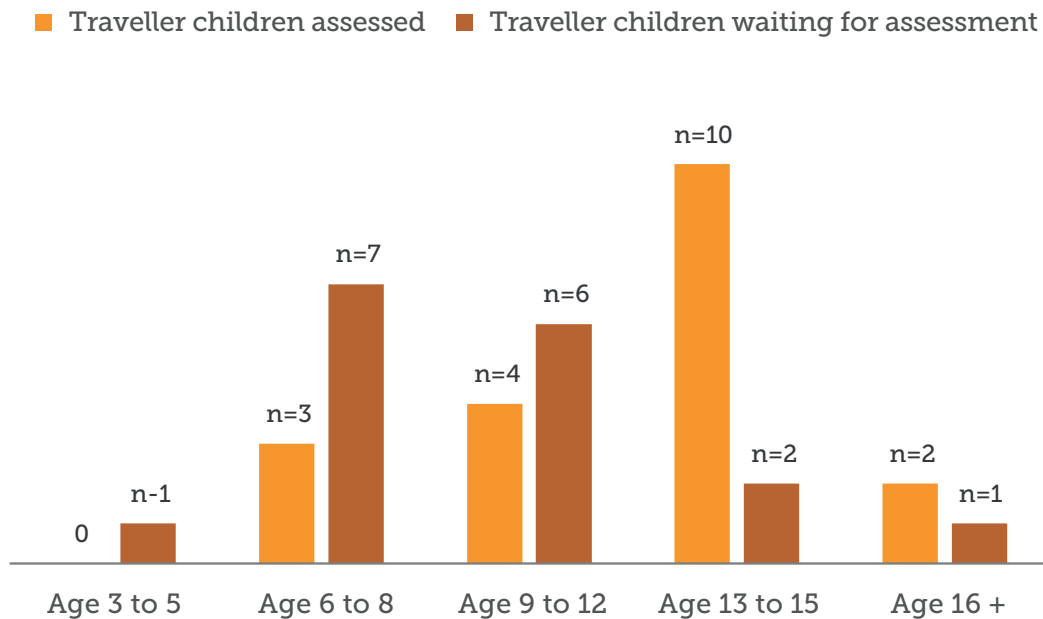
Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive review of the support system to better meet Traveller children’s diverse needs. Key actions could include timely assessments, adherence to protocols, improved resource allocation, and effective communication with parents. By focusing on systemic reform, the education sector can promote equitable access and genuine inclusion for all students.

### Assessments

Parents reported a total of 19 children that had completed an assessment with the Health Service Executive or the National Education Psychology Service (NEPS), representing 12.1% of all Traveller children enrolled. A further 17 children (10.83%) were waiting for an assessment. A total of 22.93% of Traveller children enrolled in education were either assessed or waiting to be assessed by an agency. These percentages contrast highly with the number of children placed in Special Education Supports (67% in Primary education and 75.9% in Secondary education).

Numbers of children waiting to be assessed were concentrated in younger age groups, while the highest number of children assessed was within the group aged 13 to 15 (See Figure 8). Overall these figures indicate insufficient and delayed assessments, and a disparity with the allocation of special education supports.

Figure 8: Is this child been assessed\*?



\* (HSE-CAMHS or NEPS)

## Irish Language

Overall, parents noted very few children learning Irish. In some cases, children would be taken out of Irish classes without parental awareness or approval. Traveller students were exempted or not present in Irish classes at far higher rates than the general population: 54 % of Traveller children in Limerick's Primary Schools (1-6 class) and 83% of Traveller children in Limerick's Secondary Schools (1-3 Year) were not learning Irish. In comparison, national exemption rates in 2016 were 0.98% for Primary and 9% for Secondary.<sup>16</sup> The reasons why students were not learning Irish were unclear. Overall, this study results suggest that Irish participation could be an indicator of broader academic success: Limerick Traveller students who did participate in Irish tended to be happier and were less likely to experience discrimination than students who did not study Irish.

## Low Expectations: A Self-Fulfilling Prophecy

In this study Traveller parents reported instances where teachers and principals expressed low expectations regarding their children's academic potential, progression, and school completion.

**Low expectations can be reinforced by factors highlighted in this research such as:**

- Placing Traveller children in special education supports throughout their schooling without clear plans, reinforcing underperformance and limiting opportunities.
- Undetected challenges created by cultural differences between children's Traveller environment and school's mainstream environment.
- Internalisation of low expectations resulting in lower self-esteem and performance.
- Delayed assessments.

The school system largely favours a specific type of learner, undervaluing practical or alternative learning approaches that could better suit some Traveller children's strengths and culture. As a result, many are unprepared for academic benchmarks, reinforcing their reliance on remedial supports. By secondary school, the disparity becomes more evident, with limited subject choices and a tendency to direct Traveller children toward courses like the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA), which restricts access to higher education.

Some Traveller children, including 9.7% in this study, experience unofficial "reduced timetables," deepening disengagement and further marginalising them. This perpetuates a cycle of low expectations, limited options, and early school leaving.

<sup>16</sup> Department of Education and Skills. "Review of Policy and Practice in Relation to Exemptions from the Study of Irish." Department of Education and Skills, July 2018. <https://assets.gov.ie/30515/68a5644a015c4ee18fab3c9ed8a8ff0d.pdf>.

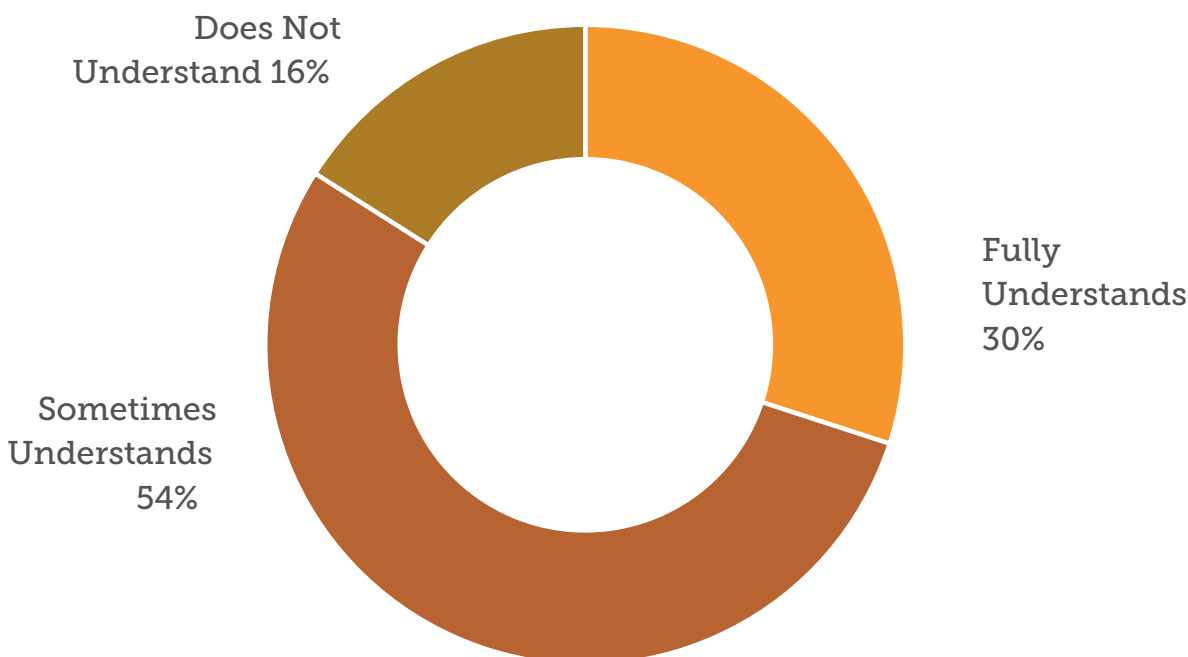
## Communication & Parental Engagement

Traveller parents value education and want their children to succeed, but they face significant barriers in engaging with schools. Answering the question “How can we work together with schools and parents to make changes?” Traveller parents identified communication as one of the key factors that needs improvement.

While schools use various communication methods, such as email, apps, notes, and parent-teacher meetings, Traveller parents report receiving information but often struggle to fully understand it (See Figure 9). Parent-teacher meetings, in particular, can be intimidating, with many parents feeling isolated and disempowered, as if decisions about their children have already been made.

Effective communication is key to fostering positive relationships between parents, students, and schools. However, inadequate communication has numerous repercussions, including misperceptions of Traveller parents and students and limits parental engagement.

Figure 9: Parental Understanding of School Communications



Due to difficulties understanding the school system and language used, negative and brief experiences with the education system and the fear of being judged or mistreated (either themselves or their children), Traveller families often remain disengaged.

No Traveller parent in this study is serving on school boards or a member of parent associations.

Some parents expressed feeling judged or misunderstood, especially when voicing concerns about their children's struggles, which schools may interpret as anger. This miscommunication further alienates parents and erodes trust. The lack of effective communication leaves Traveller parents unaware and unable to fully participate.

### Educational Pathways and Opportunities

The findings indicate that Traveller children need clearer information about available educational pathways to envision their futures. The Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) is available at level 4 but does not facilitate access to college, while the QQI level 5 qualification is specifically tailored for desired career paths. However, obtaining QQI level 5 support is often contingent on children already being out of school or at risk of dropping out. There are some opportunities for third-level studies, such as Equine Studies at level 7, but these remain underutilized.

Traveller children are often placed on limited educational pathways that do not align with their interests or aspirations. While programs like the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) and QQI Level 5 qualifications exist, they are poorly communicated and underutilised. For many Traveller children, access to these pathways only becomes available when they are already disengaged or at risk of dropping out.

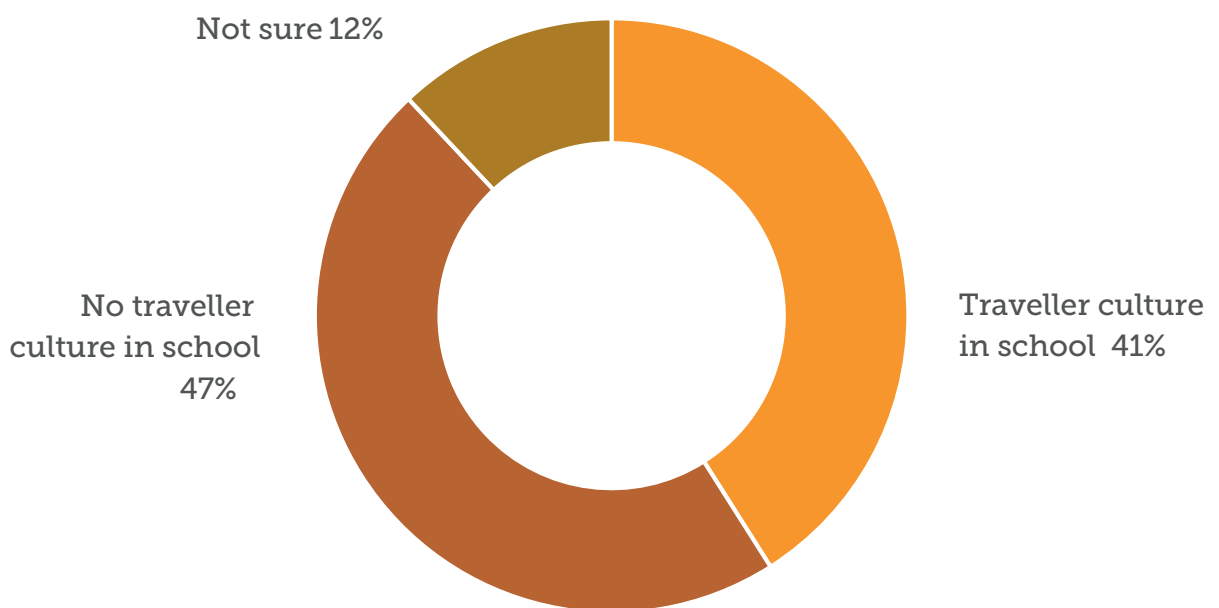
Without exposure to diverse educational options or role models, many Traveller children struggle to envision future possibilities beyond early school leaving. Parents emphasise the need for structured programs that introduce children to a wider range of career paths and aspirations, such as taster workshops, visits to third-level institutions, or mentoring by successful members of the Traveller community. These initiatives should be developed in consultation with young Travellers, meeting them where they are at, making them feel heard and supported.



## Traveller Culture in Schools

Traveller culture holds deep significance for parents. Parents are unsure of how much teachers understand about Traveller life or where their knowledge comes from. This uncertainty fosters a sense of exclusion, as Traveller culture is frequently treated as foreign and grouped with other ethnic minorities, leaving many Travellers feeling that their Irish identity is dismissed. 47% of parents responded that Traveller culture was not present in their school. 12% were not sure (See Figure 10). Traveller parents identified a better understanding of Traveller culture as a key element for improving communication and the relationship between Travellers and schools.

Figure 10: Reported presence of Traveller culture in schools



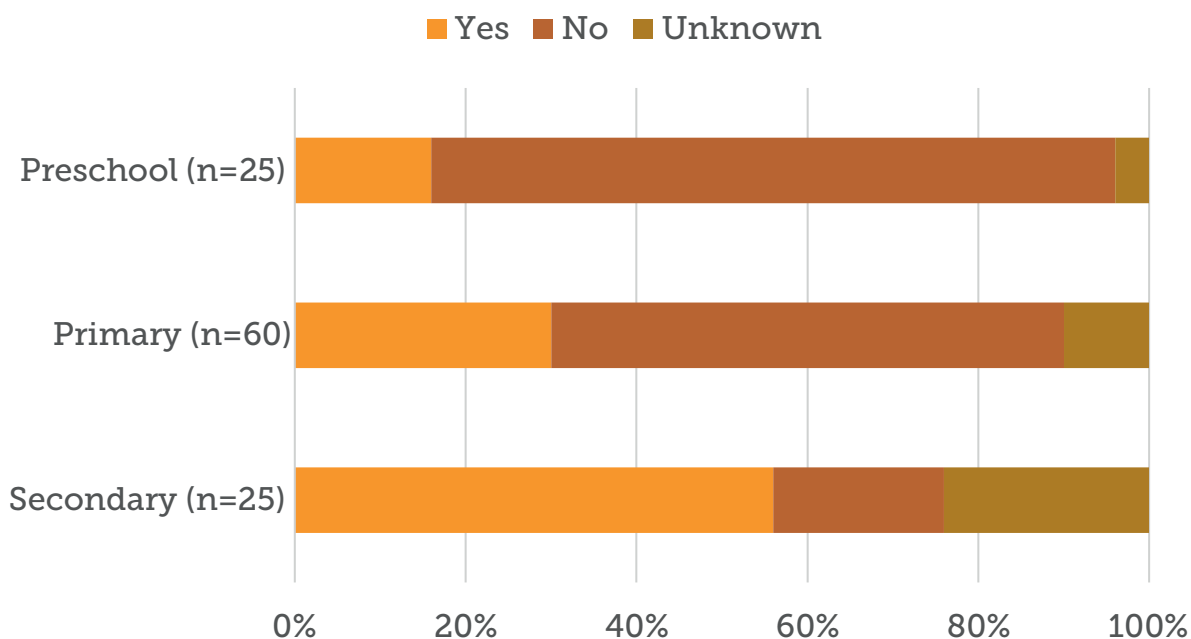
Traveller children have distinct ways of speaking, learning, and interacting, which are not always understood by teachers. Teachers can misinterpret Traveller children's behaviour. Parents express frustration when teachers remove children from class instead of addressing these cultural differences constructively. As one parent explained, "This is how we talk and interact with one another." Many families believe that improved teacher training on Traveller culture is essential to fostering inclusion and respect, and that there is a need to understand better how Traveller children learn.

Parents also feel that little progress has been made since their own school days. Their experiences of secondary school were often marked by discrimination and segregation, memories that continue to shape their perceptions of the education system. One parent recalled being denied work experience during Transition Year, realising that her education was seen as worthless by many employers.

Past experiences of discrimination, combined with ongoing challenges, leave many Traveller families feeling judged and misunderstood about their cultural practices. “We celebrate life differently, to organise a big family event everyone pull in together to pay for it”. Travellers frequently feel treated with prejudice and generalised stereotypes, as reflected in comments like, “We are held back in every way” and “Paint us all with the same brush.” Despite putting on a brave front, many carry the burden of limited education, few prospects, and lingering memories of exclusion. This ongoing pressure impacts their mental health and fuels their determination to seek better opportunities for their children. As one parent noted, “We all have issues, memories of being left out or let down. We are a bit scared, and we don’t want that for our children.”

Despite teachers’ efforts to foster inclusivity, many Traveller families report experiences of discrimination (See Figure 11). Nearly one-third of families surveyed reported instances of discrimination. The problem becomes more pronounced in secondary school, where 56% of students report discrimination, compared to 30% in primary school and 16% in preschool. Discrimination significantly undermines students’ educational experiences—71% of those who reported being unhappy or very unhappy with school also reported experiencing discrimination. Training aimed at reducing implicit and explicit biases among educators could help mitigate these issues.

Figure 11: Have you experienced discrimination at school?



Encouragingly, 41% of parents reported some cultural presence in schools, indicating that certain schools are taking proactive steps to acknowledge Traveller culture (See Figure 10). Valuing, celebrating, and visibly incorporating Traveller culture can foster trust, create positive engagement, and support better communication between schools and Traveller families.

## Interest in Education

Despite the challenges, Traveller children demonstrate a keen interest in their education and aspire to succeed. Similarly, Traveller parents are invested in their children's educational journeys and want them to excel.

Younger children participating in focus groups had great aspirations and were unaware of limitations. Children participating in focus groups for the age 13-17 also were very interested in learning and developing skills but their views had been impacted by a negative experience of education, and an awareness of Traveller social stigmatisation, with some Young Travellers perceiving themselves as “slow”.

Examples were given of how being a Traveller was a barrier and affected self-confidence: *“Travellers are very talented, as if you look on a char you see a lot of them singing but you do not see many on X-Factor, because they would probably be ashamed they would never be accepted”.*

All participants in focus groups were interested in being part of a Traveller Youth Group highlighting the need for dedicated initiatives where Young Travellers could reinforce their cultural identity and self-esteem.

## Empowerment of Traveller Community

Throughout the project, Traveller Peer Researchers have grown both personally and professionally, gaining confidence, a broader perspective, and a deeper understanding of the challenges affecting their community.

They have also developed greater awareness of education rights and how the school system operates. This growth has influenced their self-perception, relationships, and expectations regarding their children's education and schools. Moreover, it highlights the potential of Travellers as agents of positive change.

One Peer Researcher shared: *“Working on this education research has changed me as a person and as a mother. I now see my children's education differently. I'm more engaged with what's happening in schools, and I approach teachers to discuss supports and identify what works and what doesn't. I've learned so much.”*

This project underscores the value of investing in the development of Travellers, demonstrating how such initiatives can foster their meaningful inclusion and active participation in education—whether as educators, youth and community workers, education support staff, students, or parents and advisors.





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# Recommendations

The findings from this report align with the 2024-2030 Traveller and Roma Education Strategy (TRES). The publication of this strategy provides a new opportunity to address historical challenges and create changes to achieve Traveller education equality of outcomes. The strategy also provides a framework for this report's recommendations.

**TRES categorizes these deficits into 10 key themes:**

1. Racism and Discrimination
2. Lack of Knowledge of Traveller Culture
3. Parental Involvement and Support
4. Low Expectations
5. Enhanced Cultural Awareness and Representation
6. Community Engagement and Empowerment
7. Mental Health and Well-being Support
8. Educational Pathways and Guidance
9. Monitoring and Evaluation
10. Dedicated Supports



In its development, TRES also considered national and international policies, human rights recommendations, directives, and strategies aimed at achieving social equality, including the recommendations from the Joint Committee of the Oireachtas on Key Issues Affecting the Traveller Community.

**TRES adopts following core-values to guide its decision-making:**

- **Learner-Centered:** Include Traveller children's views in decision-making.
- **Collaborative:** Foster cooperation across departments, agencies, and Traveller communities.
- **Inclusive and Respectful:** Address racism and support positive Traveller engagement.
- **Accessible:** Promote the full development of Traveller children.
- **Positive Outcomes:** Focus on measurable, positive outcomes.
- **Accountable:** Ensure transparency and responsibility in implementation.

The two areas of strategic impact for TRES are the **experience** of the Traveller and Roma learner and the **success** of the Traveller and Roma learner. To guide action, TRES provides a framework of 4 strategic pillars:

- 1. Participation and experience:** Improve the learning experience of Travellers and Roma at all levels of the education system
- 2. Access and outcomes:** Ensure equity of access, opportunity and outcome for Travellers and Roma to fulfil their potential through our education system
- 3. Partnership:** Working together across the system and with the Traveller and Roma communities, including Traveller and Roma organisations, to support the delivery of this strategy
- 4. Delivering change:** Drive the implementation of this strategy and implementation plan, monitor progress and evaluate

Building on the TEC Project's comprehensive community analysis and using the framework outlined by TRES, this report emphasizes areas where strategies should concentrate their efforts. It advocates for the harnessing of localised measures and actions to ensure the successful implementation of national and local policies and strategies for Traveller children. Scaffolded by national policies such as TRES, this report advocates for investment in localised collaborative responses where schools and education stakeholders alongside local communities can create a more equitable and inclusive environment, enabling Traveller youth to reach their full potential.

## Participation and Experience (Pillar 1)

### *Early Childhood Education*

Traveller children and their families face discrimination in accessing inclusive, supportive pre-schools. There is also a lack of cultural representation and insufficient childcare options.

#### **Recommendations:**

- **Additional Resources for Timely Early Assessment and Follow-Up:** Ensure that Traveller children receive early developmental assessments that are culturally competent, followed by timely interventions to address any needs before school entry.
- **Improved Childcare Access:** Expand community-based, affordable, and full-time childcare options for Traveller families, especially those seeking to continue education or employment. This should apply regardless of their area of residence and include support for Traveller organizations to establish Early Learning and Care (ELC) and School-Age Care (SAC) services.

- **Non-Biased Support for Preschool Decisions:** Provide impartial, culturally aware guidance for parents considering whether to send their children to preschool or pursue a home-based cultural upbringing.
- **Strengthening Culturally Inclusive Pre-schools and Schools:**
  - Ensure that staff in ELC and SAC services working with Traveller children are trained in culturally inclusive education practices.
  - Adequately resource ELC and SAC services that cater to Traveller children, enabling them to acquire culturally inclusive materials, incorporate relevant activities, and allocate time for professional development.
  - Employ and train members of the Traveller community in specific roles, such as link workers in the Early Childhood Education sector (including Childcare Committees), to support Traveller parents, children, and non-Traveller staff.

## Curriculum and Extracurricular Activities

The lack of Traveller representation in curricula and extracurricular programmes diminishes engagement and reinforces feelings of exclusion.

- **Culturally Inclusive Curricula:** Incorporate Traveller history and contributions into teaching materials as part of Irish heritage, not as a foreign ethnicity.
- **Co-creation and Co-delivery of Traveller History and Culture Training:** Following existing models of Traveller specific cultural awareness programmes and using inclusive methodologies build up local capacity to co-create activities and modules to train education professionals and students, and develop educational material, collecting elements of local history and culture and enhancing Traveller internal knowledge and expertise.
- **After-School Programmes:** Establish culturally relevant after-school programmes, co-designed with Traveller youth, to support their identity, interests, and self-esteem. These programmes should go beyond homework assistance and English language support, incorporating applied learning activities with a strong emphasis on personal development, reinforcing self-esteem, and nurturing cultural identity, as recommended in the Report of the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Key Issues Affecting the Traveller Community.<sup>17</sup>
- **Sports and Leadership Opportunities:** Develop sports programmes where Traveller teenagers can participate and become trainers, promoting both health and leadership skills.

<sup>17</sup> Houses of the Oireachtas. "Final Report of the Joint Committee on Key Issues Affecting the Traveller Community." Houses of the Oireachtas, November 2021. [https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/committee/dail/33/joint\\_committee\\_on\\_key\\_issues\\_affecting\\_the\\_traveller\\_community/reports/2021/2021-12-01\\_final-report-of-the-joint-committee-on-key-issues-affecting-the-traveller-community\\_en.pdf](https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/committee/dail/33/joint_committee_on_key_issues_affecting_the_traveller_community/reports/2021/2021-12-01_final-report-of-the-joint-committee-on-key-issues-affecting-the-traveller-community_en.pdf).

## Access and Outcomes (Pillar 2)

### *Primary and Secondary Education*

Traveller children often leave primary school underprepared for secondary education due to disparities in expectations, late diagnoses, and limited academic options, creating barriers to retention and progression. Strong emphasis should be placed on ensuring that children leave primary school fully prepared for the next stage. Additional actions are required to make sure that support allocations for Traveller children in schools are effective. Research and best practices in intercultural education should inform the following:

- **Review Special Education Supports:** Assess current practices for Traveller children to ensure they are working effectively.
- **Holistic Academic Supports:** Develop support plans that are time-bound, goal-oriented, and co-designed with parents.
- **Universal Traveller support in schools and after-schools:** Ensure that all Traveller children have access to education supports (even if not living in a DEIS designated area) and that they have the option of availing of Afterschool programmes that are developed with and employ Travellers, and support Traveller children personal and educational development and Traveller identity.
- **Programmes for Personal Well-being:** Introduce programmes focused on enhancing Traveller children's self-esteem, identity, and personal well-being.
- **Expanded Curriculum Choices:** Make Irish and other second languages accessible to Traveller students, addressing systemic biases that limit their academic options.
- **School Completion Programmes:** Implement tailored school completion initiatives in all primary and secondary schools with Traveller enrolments, regardless of DEIS status.
- **Preparation for Secondary Education:** Ensure that Traveller children transition to secondary school on par with their peers by addressing learning gaps and providing targeted interventions.
- **Diversify Learning Pathways:** Introduce vocational and interest-based subjects alongside academic tracks to engage Traveller students.
- **Employment of Traveller Community Members in Education:** Promote and prepare specific roles to employ members of the Traveller community in primary education and related supports.
- **Pathways to Further Education:** Develop specific transition programmes to guide Traveller students from primary to secondary school and beyond. These programmes should expose them to higher education and career opportunities, based on co-production methods that incorporate the voices and interests of young Travellers, meet the community where it is, and empower them in shaping their future pathways.

## Cross-Pillar Recommendations

### *Communication and Parental Engagement*

Many Traveller parents feel excluded from their children's education due to limited communication, cultural misunderstandings, and systemic barriers. To address this, the following actions are recommended:

- **Clear and Accessible Communication:** While using diverse and culturally adapted communication channels is crucial, it's equally important to ensure these messages are effective and build trust. Schools should establish a team of Traveller Educators to bridge the gap between schools and the community. These educators would empower parents by helping them navigate the school system, foster trust, and ensure clear, effective communication, ultimately strengthening relationships and promoting mutual understanding.
- **Parent Training and Empowerment:** Develop programmes to train Traveller parents as advocates, school board members, and active participants in their children's education and school communities.
- **Liaison Roles:** Create Traveller-specific liaison roles and employ members of the Traveller community as support workers to strengthen the relationship between parents and schools, fostering collaboration and mutual understanding.
- **Celebration of Traveller Culture:** Organise cultural events and activities where parents can participate, reinforcing their role in the school community, creating positive visibility, and validating the identities of Traveller students.

### **Addressing Discrimination and Isolation**

Traveller children often face marginalisation in schools due to low expectations, segregation, and a lack of cultural understanding among teachers. The following strategies can help address these issues:

- **Inclusive Classroom Practices:** Prioritise keeping Traveller children in mainstream classrooms and integrate necessary supports to prevent feelings of segregation.
- **Combat Bias and Stereotyping:** Include training on the historical legacy of discrimination against the Traveller community, and its impact on education today. Teachers should be trained to recognise and challenge biases, promoting equitable treatment for Traveller students.
- **Peer Support Networks:** Create in-school and community-based peer groups to provide Traveller children with a sense of belonging and a safe space to express themselves.
- **Highlight Achievements:** Actively celebrate the academic and personal accomplishments of Traveller children to build self-esteem and challenge stereotypes.

## Promoting Traveller Employment in Education

For the successful implementation of policies addressing systemic deficits in Traveller education, it is essential to integrate Travellers into the education workforce. This includes roles that support Traveller engagement and development, as well as positions in mainstream education systems, after-school settings, and family support services.

### Additional measures to facilitate Traveller employment should include:

- **Tailored Programmes:** Introduce locally tailored programmes in secondary school and community settings, in consultation with students and the Traveller community. These should reflect local skills, strengths, and interests, encouraging the uptake of apprenticeships and work experiences that can lead to mainstream employment (in sectors such as childcare, special needs, youth work, sports, community work, and health). These pathways should also support access to third-level education and qualification programs, such as those based on the Teaching Transforms initiative.
- **Support Programmes:** Implement additional support to assist Traveller employees in mainstream settings, overcoming social prejudice and historical biases.
- **Mentorship and Supervision:** Provide specific mentoring and supervision spaces for Traveller employees.
- **Incentivise Work Experience:** Promote Traveller work experience and employment in both private and community-led services.
- **Prepare Mainstream Settings for Diversity:** Ensure mainstream settings are ready to diversify their staff by promoting anti-racism and intercultural capacity.



## Inclusive Research and Documenting Methodologies

The TRES and other policies recommend the inclusion of Traveller community members as peer researchers. The TEC project has demonstrated the effectiveness of methodologies that centre those most affected by issues, using processes of action and reflection. These methods empower participants, develop internal knowledge, and result in higher engagement rates.

## Local Education Strategic Plans

It is crucial to incorporate the above actions into Local Strategic Education Plans that are:

**Traveller-Led:** Developed in collaboration with local agencies, education stakeholders, and the local community, including young Travellers. These plans should reflect the community's knowledge of local dynamics, skills, strengths, and interests, and align with Traveller values and family life.

**Progressive:** Structured in short, medium, and long-term phases, progressing from the specific realities of each local setting.

**Enhancing Existing Initiatives:** Reinforce successful local initiatives, while incorporating pilot projects that promote innovation and effective collaborations.

**Local Monitoring and Evaluation:** Ensure close, ongoing local monitoring and evaluation of programmes to adapt them to the evolving needs of Traveller students.

## Evaluating and Adapting Programmes

Regularly review and refine the effectiveness of support programmes to meet the changing needs of Traveller students. Collect and share successful case studies to guide other schools in implementing inclusive practices.





# Conclusion

**The Limerick Traveller community strongly believes that education is crucial for Traveller children to fulfil their potential, a sentiment echoed consistently by Traveller parents involved in this research.**

While there has been a marked improvement in Traveller children's school attendance over the past 25 years—particularly at the primary level—inequalities persist. Today, most Traveller children attend school from ages 3 to 16, a significant leap from previous years. However, despite this progress, Traveller families continue to face challenges in retaining children through the later stages of secondary school. A stark disparity remains, with 40.4% of Traveller children leaving formal education by age 16, compared to just 11.2% of the general population. Furthermore, only 4.7% of Travellers hold a third-level qualification, in stark contrast to 47.7% of the wider population.

This disparity echoes the concerns of Limerick's Traveller Network, which aligns with national Traveller advocacy, underscoring the importance of this research question: *Why are Traveller children's educational outcomes so disproportionately poor?* This question highlights the imperative need for educational equity for Travellers.

The findings from this research point to systemic failures, rather than isolated issues within individual schools or educators, that reinforce structural inequality. These findings stress the urgent need for systemic reforms to provide equitable educational opportunities for Traveller children. While previous policies and strategies, such as those laid out by the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Key Issues Affecting the Traveller Community, have made some gains, they have largely failed to deliver the necessary systemic changes.

The recent 2024-2030 Traveller and Roma Education Strategy (TRES) also identifies systemic failures and outlines strategic goals that mirror the analysis in the TEC Project. These challenges faced by Irish Traveller children—rooted in historical discrimination, systemic exclusion, and persistent biases—demand meaningful action. The strategic actions within TRES can do much to scaffold and provide structural, resourced support for the development of localised, collaborative, community-led responses. While remaining aligned to the over-arching strategic actions in TRES, the local diversity of settings and circumstances and promotion of existing local initiatives informed by Traveller knowledge should be key priorities in achieving sustainable positive change for Irish Traveller children's education.

This report recommends the inclusion of additional measures to ensure greater outreach to the Traveller community, promote Traveller inclusion in the education sector workforce, and employ inclusive methodologies for research and evaluation.

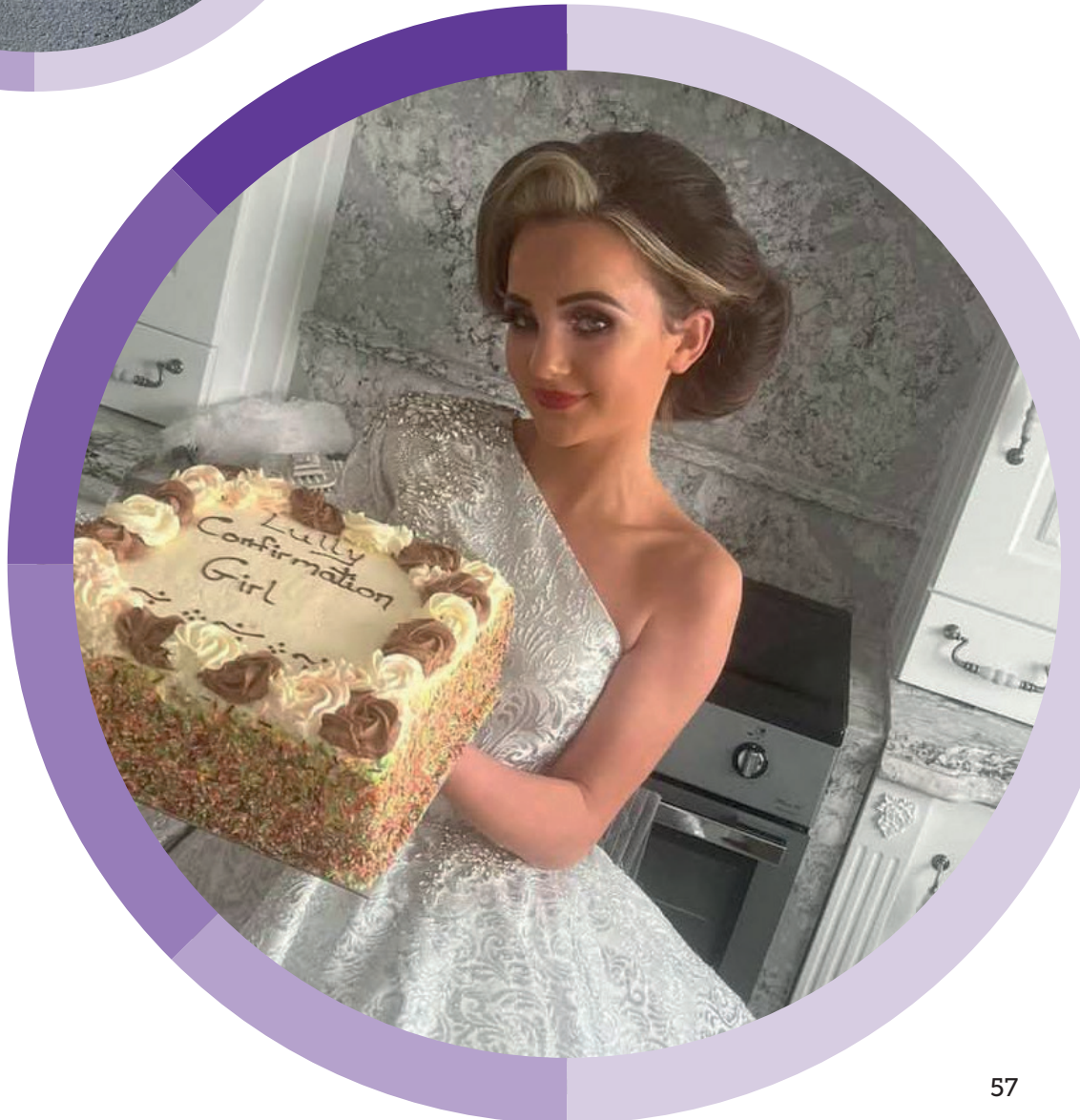
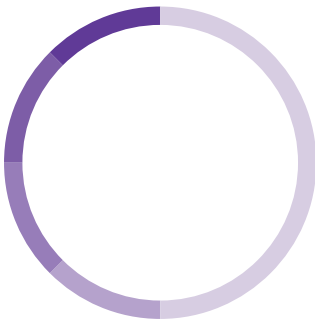
The findings of the TEC Project underscore the need for a strong, resource commitment to invest in Traveller development through a community-led approach.

**To address these gaps, the following actions are required:**

- A review of support systems for Traveller children to ensure adequate preparation to successfully transition from primary to secondary school; enabling Traveller children for further progression.
- The adoption of school practices that are non-biased and based on high expectations and validation of Traveller students.
- A model of communication that acknowledges the legacy of historical discriminatory practices and policies of assimilation in the education system and its impact on the Traveller community, and that enables Traveller parents to participate and make decisions.
- Teacher training in Intercultural competence and anti-racism.
- Incorporation of Travellers and Traveller culture as part of the education system, including the supported incorporation of Travellers as staff.
- A specific holistic model for Traveller development that integrates the education system with other community supports to foster Traveller children development, wellbeing and identity, ensures access for all Traveller children to educational supports including after-school supports.
- Promoting and supporting Traveller employment in the education sector, both in mainstream roles and in specifically developed roles to support Traveller education.
- Network and supports for the development of local education strategies and initiatives that are Traveller led.

Despite these barriers, Traveller families remain resilient, advocating for their children's rights to education and cultural recognition. Through the TEC project, peer researchers have encountered open doors, listening ears, and have identified examples of good practice in dialogue with many education professionals motivated to support Traveller education and social change.

These interactions have shown that professionals and initiatives with capacity and interest require further resources to address today's challenges and create the conditions necessary for equality. The experiences have provided hope and optimism, demonstrating that working in collaboration, as equal partners, is possible. They have also revealed the knowledge, experience, and capacity within both Traveller and non-Traveller communities to foster positive change. Maximising this potential for transformation through the development of local strategies and support networks is crucial to enhancing the development of an inclusive education system.





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# Appendix

## Timeline of Traveller Education in Ireland

### *Legal Exclusion and Initial Neglect (1800–1926)*

- 1830: Schools for children begin in Ireland, but Travellers are not included.
- 1846–48: Irish Famine forces many to the roads; some join Travellers. Many emigrate to the USA and UK, including some Travellers.
- 1908 Children's Act: Introduces penalties for individuals who habitually wandered and took children over the age of five with them, deeming such people unfit to care for the child and fining them up to twenty shillings. Although passed by the Westminster government, this law had minimal impact on Irish Travellers, as the British were more focused on other Irish issues. While some records show Traveller children attending English schools in winter, there were no such records for Ireland, and the law failed to compel Traveller children to attend school there.
- 1922: Irish Independence from the UK.
- 1926 School Attendance Act: Mandates school attendance for all children, but no efforts were made to include Traveller children.

### *Emerging Anti-Traveller Sentiment and Government Action (1937–1960)*

- 1937: Irish Constitution passed, establishing Ireland's first set of independent laws.
- 1940s: Anti-Traveller sentiment grew within political circles. One TD argued that Traveller children did not attend school, remained illiterate, and were predisposed to crime due to their living conditions. This sparked discussions among politicians about potentially separating Traveller children from their parents to educate them in Industrial schools, similar to policies used against Indigenous peoples in Australia and America.
- 1960: Fianna Fáil government established a Commission to investigate and make recommendations. The 11-member Commission, advised by farming organisations, aimed to examine the presence of Travellers and promote their assimilation into mainstream society. Until this absorption was achieved, the goal was to minimise any perceived negative impact of their itinerant lifestyle on both Travellers and the broader community.

### *Government Policies of Assimilation (1960–1980)*

Rather than recognising the Traveller way of life as a distinct culture with its own values, history, and skills, the Irish government viewed it as backward and problematic for Ireland, believing that education could resolve these issues.

- **1963:** The Commission on Itinerancy found only 160 Traveller children enrolled in schools nationwide and made no mention of mental health issues. The Commission set very low expectations for Traveller children's education, recommending only basic arithmetic. It suggested that educational policies should target those leaving the itinerant lifestyle, promoting assimilation. The report also proposed that separating Traveller children from their parents would help them grow up outside their cultural lifestyle, with the goal of eliminating the itinerant community within a generation.
- **1970 Report on Educational Facilities for the Children of Itinerants:** Recommends special schools and classes for Traveller children. Five special schools are opened, but Travellers often remain invisible within the mainstream school system.
- **1980:** First Traveller Visiting Teachers are introduced to bridge cultural gaps between Traveller homes and schools.

### *Increased Access and Ongoing Challenges (1988–2000)*

- **1988:** 4,000 Traveller children are attending primary school (75% of the total Traveller population). Only 35% are fully integrated into mainstream classes, with the rest in special classes or receiving additional support.
- **1998:** The Education Act 1998 is introduced, marking a significant step towards inclusive education in Ireland, with a focus on non-discrimination and the integration of minority groups, including Travellers, into mainstream education.

### *Recognition of Traveller Distinctiveness and Cultural Inclusiveness in the Irish Education System (2000–2024)*

Emphasis on attendance, pre-school enrolment, and irregular funding allocation.

- **2000:** Equal Status Act includes a definition of the Traveller Community as "the community of people who are commonly called Travellers and who are identified (both by themselves and by others) as people with a shared history, culture, and traditions including, historically, a nomadic way of life on the island of Ireland" and prohibits discrimination on the grounds of membership of the Traveller community.
- **2000–2004:** The Education (Welfare) Acts are enacted to oversee and address school attendance, requiring schools to report absenteeism.

- **2002–2024:** The Irish State develops numerous national Traveller-specific strategies, policies, and guidelines to promote Traveller inclusion and progression:
  - **2002:** The Department of Education and Science (DES) publishes Guidelines on Traveller Education for Primary Schools and Guidelines on Traveller Education in Second Level Schools.
  - **2005:** NCCA publishes Guidelines on Intercultural Education in the Primary School.
  - **2006:** The Report and Recommendations for a Traveller Education Strategy calls for the integration of Travellers and non-Travellers in pre-schools, the end of segregated provision in primary schools, and the phasing out of segregated secondary schools for Travellers.
- **2010–2015:** Intercultural Education Strategy is launched.
- **2016:** Diversity, Equality and Inclusion Charter and Guidelines for Early Childhood Care and Education is published by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA).
- **2017:** Recognition of Traveller Ethnicity.
- **2021:** Report of the Joint Committee of the Oireachtas on Key Issues Affecting the Traveller Community examines the inequalities of opportunity and outcomes faced by the Traveller community in the areas of health, education, employment, and accommodation and makes policy recommendations.
- **2017–2021:** National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy (NTRIS I) is implemented, followed by NTRIS II (2024–2028).
- **2024:** National Traveller and Roma Education Strategy is introduced.
- **Traveller Culture and History in Education Bill 2018:** Pending enactment.



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