

A Stronger Foundation

“Research has found that the most effective way to promote the achievement of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children is to ensure they are able to gain early access to education during the foundation stage.”

Aiming High: Raising the Achievement of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Children – A Guide to Good Practice
Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2003

Under The Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000ⁱ, all early years’ settings that are run or maintained by the local authority have a legal duty to promote race equality. Save the Children believes that since Gypsy, Roma and Travellers are recognised ethnic groups, early years settings should be doing more to include their culture, by providing culturally reflective resources, an inclusive curriculum and, as well as, ensuring effective monitoring and evaluation policies.

Why is this important?

- Studies have also shown that early years’ education can impact positively on children’s primary school performance and can also increase the likelihood of their leaving secondary school with qualificationsⁱⁱ.
- Few of the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils currently in schools have had the opportunity to attend any form of pre-school or early years settingⁱⁱⁱ.
- Children from these communities are the group most at risk of failure in the education system.^{iv}
- Parents have told us that the lack of culturally reflective provision and

understanding of their culture are the main barriers to not accessing early years provision

Our position is endorsed by the key principles of the Early Years Foundation Stage Duty (2008):

“Settings must promote positive attitudes to diversity and difference within all children. In doing this you will help them to learn to value different aspects of their own and other people’s lives.”^v

It is also rooted in Children’s Rights. Article 29 of The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989)^{vi} explicitly calls for ethnic minorities’ needs to be fully considered when education provision is planned and implemented.

Save the Children’s Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller Early Years Project

In 2004, Save the Children UK launched a national Early Years Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Project aimed at ensuring effective inclusive practice and a greater representation of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller culture in early years’ settings.

We wanted to improve communication and networking opportunities between early years' practitioners to share good models of working. We also wanted to support settings to remove some of the barriers that Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children and families were experiencing, in order to ensure that every child has the chance to gain a strong educational foundation.

Parents have told us that there can be many practical barriers to Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children attending and engaging with education, including, lack of awareness and representation of their culture in settings. The barriers that families face in accessing education often compromise consistent attendance and children's well-being.



What are some of the barriers?

- **Geographical isolation:** Parents may have no local knowledge of services and arrive without a support network or confident sense of belonging within the community. Also, families are often visiting, living or residing on sites that have been situated on the periphery of communities.^{vii}

- **Availability of early years' places varies; there may be no places available in local settings.** Gypsy, Roma and Traveller parents may not have experienced early years services themselves and may not be familiar with or at ease with the systems.^{viii}
- **Some Gypsy, Roma and Traveller families find that culturally specific words or phrases are often misunderstood or ignored.** Some parents also have low literacy levels, making correspondence related to services difficult.^{ix}

What should early years' settings do?

Many Gypsy, Roma and Traveller parents have told us that they have been worried about declaring their child's ethnicity when enrolling in an early years' setting because they fear racial discrimination. This has resulted in low self-declared ethnicity ascription rates. Early years' settings, therefore, might not be aware of any Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children who are attending sessions.

Settings, therefore, need to take specific action to celebrate the positive aspects of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller culture; this can help to unlearn negative attitudes and behaviour children may have already picked up about Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children.

All early years settings should invest in a wider range of culturally reflective resources to promote knowledge of other cultures among all children; helping to reduce prejudice and discrimination towards the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller community in wider society.



Save the Children UK is calling for all early years settings to ensure that existing policies, procedures and practices are inclusive and culturally reflective.

Every child deserves the best possible start in life. A secure, safe and happy childhood provides the foundation for children to make the most of their abilities and talents as they grow up. Save the Children believes that all early years settings must ensure effective inclusion practice by:

- Outside assessment of early years' settings to ensure that they comply with the Early Years Foundation Stage and are giving

all children, including Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children, the opportunity to thrive;

- Devising a strategy for monitoring the impact of early years work has on children and their families, assessing whether it might advantage or disadvantage families from particular ethnic groups including, Gypsy, Roma and Travellers;
- Local authorities must ensure that Traveller Education Support Services receive appropriate early years training.
- Acquiring books and toys, and providing play activities, that are culturally reflective and support experiential learning;
- Ensuring that all members of staff understand relevant legislation and are supported to attend training to improve their awareness of different cultures;
- Ensuring that training courses are offered by local authorities and that local authorities should utilise the expertise of the TESS in delivering training;
- Internally monitoring to ensure discrimination does not occur.

Government has made significant progress in promoting more inclusive early years' education. However, in order Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children, to access and enjoy a good quality early years experience, there needs to be wider recognition that a range of barriers both in and outside of an early years' setting can affect engagement.

There also needs to be a wider recognition that for any early years' initiatives to be effectively inclusive, these barriers need to be addressed in tandem.

It is up to all early years' practitioners to act now to streamline inclusive practice, in order to fulfil the Early Years Foundation Stage Duty and to ensure that every child truly has an equal opportunity to succeed.



We're the world's independent children's charity. We're outraged that millions of children are still denied proper healthcare, food, education and protection. We're working flat out to get every child their rights and we're determined to make further, faster changes.

How many? How fast? It's up to you.

Save the Children UK
1 St John's Lane
London, EC1M 4AR
Telephone +44 (0)20 7012 6400
Fax +44 (0)20 7012 6963
Savethechildren.org.uk

Gemma Bull
Education Policy Officer

✉ G.bull@savethechildren.org.uk
☎ 0207 012 6461

Notes

- ⁱ The Home Office, *Race Relations (Amendment) Act*, 2000.
- ⁱⁱ Marshall, Paul. *Tackling Education Inequality*, 2007.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Department for Children, Schools and Families. The Standards Site. *Aiming High: Raising The Achievement of Gypsy Traveller Pupils - A Guide to Good Practice*, 2003.
- ^{iv} Department for Children, Schools and Families. *The Inclusion of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Children and Young People*, 2008.
- ^v Save the Children UK. *Early Years Outreach Practice Guide*, 2007.
- ^{vi} United Nations. *Convention on the Rights of the Child*. Articles 28 and 29, 1989.
- ^{vii} Save the Children UK. *Early Years Outreach Practice Guide*, 2007.
- ^{viii} Ibid
- ^{ix} Ibid