

OUT OF THE SHADOWS

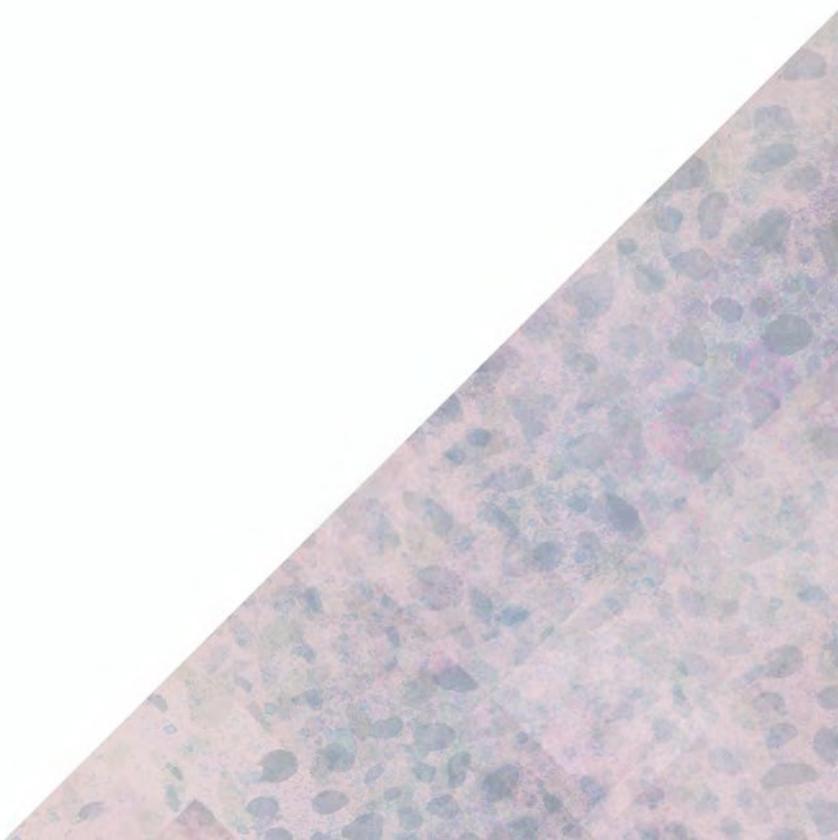
TRAVELLER & ROMA EDUCATION :
VOICES FROM THE COMMUNITIES

Dr Maria Quinlan



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Foreword

Norma Foley TD
Minister for Education

I am very pleased to publish – “Out of the Shadows, Traveller and ROMA Education – Voices from the Communities” – together with my colleague, Roderic O’Gorman, Minister for Children, Disability, Equality, Integration and Youth.

As both a teacher, and as Minister for Education, I recognise the importance of inclusive education for all children. It is my primary objective to promote and support actions that will ensure that the school setting is a welcoming environment for all. The new Programme for Government, “Our Shared Future”, contains a number of commitments regarding the Traveller and Roma community that will play a significant role in supporting these communities. I look forward to working with my colleagues across government to realise these goals.

We know that more must be done to support Travellers and Roma across society, and this is true too of our own education sector. Unfortunately, educational attainment among Travellers continues to lag significantly behind that of the general population. Census 2016 revealed some stark findings. Just 13.3% of female Travellers are educated to Leaving Certificate or above compared with 69.1% of the general population.

The National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy (NTRIS) provides the framework and strategic direction for interventions across Government Departments to support the additional needs of the Traveller and Roma communities in Ireland. The Programme for Government sets out a commitment to review the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy 2017-2021 and ensure that the successor strategy has a stronger outcomes focused approach.



Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland

A key objective of Traveller education policy in recent years has been the phasing out of segregated Traveller provision and the inclusion of Traveller children and young people in mainstream education. Investment of some €150 million is provided by the Department's DEIS Programme which focuses on addressing and prioritising the educational needs of children and young people from disadvantaged communities. It is recognised that not all Traveller children attend DEIS schools but in line with the overall policy, funding for segregated Traveller provision has been incorporated into overall school and other funding streams in order to provide supports for Traveller pupils across all mainstream schools. A new model for allocating special education teacher to schools was introduced for all mainstream primary and post primary schools in 2017. The model provides all schools with a baseline teaching allocation to assist pupils who have learning and literacy difficulties. In addition my Department has secured €500,000 in Dormant Account funding for 2022, specifically to target initiatives aimed at mitigating educational disadvantage.

I am committed to ensuring that actions to improve education outcomes will be advanced in line with the Programme for Government commitments and within the overall context of NTRIS. Initiatives already underway include work by the NCCA following on from their audit of Traveller culture and history in the curriculum to identify possible curriculum supports across the education continuum, and research focussed on the effectiveness of the Department's anti-bullying strategy for Traveller pupils.

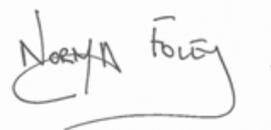
The NTRIS Pilot project was established to trial innovative approaches to improve education outcomes for Traveller and Roma pupils in Galway, Wexford, Dublin and Cork. The pilot has been developed as a cross-Departmental initiative of my Department, the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, Tusla Education Support Services, along with Traveller representative organisations.

Central to the NTRIS pilot is the dedicated team approach in each area, to work with parents, children and young people, schools, Traveller and Roma communities and service providers to remove the barriers impacting on student outcomes in education. This research study was commissioned to obtain a baseline assessment of the perceptions and aspirations of those involved.

Through its holistic approach, this research provides deep insights into the students and parent's perceptions, beliefs and opinions of the school experience and ways to improve engagement and participation amongst the Traveller and Roma community which can inform and drive the pilot intervention strategies. It also provides a framework for the next phase of the research which will focus on monitoring and evaluating outcomes in the pilot areas, and the evidence necessary to inform future policy initiatives to support children and young people from the Travelling and Roma communities in their education.

I wish to express my thanks to Dr. Maria Quinlan for this report and all the participants in the research, as well as all those involved in the development and implementation of the pilots.

I look forward to seeing positive results from this partnership approach and collaborative efforts in supporting our Traveller and Roma students, which will inform policy into the future.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Norma Foley". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'N' and a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Norma Foley TD
Minister for Education

Foreword

Roderic O’Gorman TD,
Minister for Children, Equality, Disability,
Integration and Youth

It is a privilege to publish this report, *Out of the Shadows: Traveller and Roma Education – Voices from the Communities*.

Travellers and Roma are among the most marginalised communities in Ireland. Their voices have often been absent from discussions about the very policies that impact their lives, or their experiences are reduced to a variety of statistics. This report gives voice to those communities, in a profound and deeply striking way, making real the day-to-day reality of education from the Traveller and Roma communities.

Through this report, and the broader NTRIS Programme we aim to achieve real and lasting equality by improving access, participation and outcomes for Travellers and Roma in education. This report provides us with a deep understanding of participation and engagement amongst Traveller and Roma students in schools.

The research used a variety of innovative, creative approaches to capture the lived experience of Traveller and Roma families. Using a case study approach, findings from four pilot sites, based across the country, have been detailed. This case-study approach captures the lived-experience of parents and students from the Traveller and Roma communities, as well as that of teachers, principals and other members of the school community within the four pilot sites. I believe that creating space for these, often-differing, viewpoints and experiences provides greater insight into the challenges facing these communities.

The report provides a summary of findings from each of the pilot sites containing a large volume of data in the form of first-person accounts of lived-experiences. It identifies key issues and challenges raised by students, parents and the school community, along with their views on how to improve engagement with schools and participation in school activity amongst the Traveller community.

Crucially, the report provides recommendations to inform future policy development and potential next-steps in terms of how this data can be used as a basis for further evaluation of the overall NTRIS programme of interventions.

I welcome the publication of this report, and would like to thank Dr Maria Quinlan for her work on it, and all those who participated. It is a moving and illuminating piece of work. I look forward to ongoing work under the NTRIS programme and to efforts to secure a safer, fairer, and more equal society for members of the Traveller and Roma communities.



Roderic O’Gorman TD,
Minister for Children, Equality,
Disability, Integration and Youth



Acknowledgements

I would like to sincerely thank all of the students, parents, and members of the school community who so generously gave their time and shared their experiences with us for this project. I would also like to thank the NTRIS project pilot teams in each of the four pilot sites whose support, assistance and guidance made this project possible.

I would like to extend my thanks to the team in the Research Evaluation Unit within the Department Children and Youth Affairs, and to the NTRIS Research Advisory Group for their guidance, and for their support in the use of innovative methodologies, which aim to centralise and amplify the voices of participants – particularly those whose voices are often silenced in society. I would like to thank the two peer reviewers for their insightful and extremely helpful comments and suggestions on the initial draft of this report.

I would also like to acknowledge and sincerely thank the artist Patrick Bolger for his support and assistance in helping to facilitate workshops with participants during this project.

It was a privilege to sit with over 100 members of the Traveller and Roma communities and to bear witness to their lived-experience. Their voices are amongst the most marginalised within Irish society, and we hope that this project does justice to their words..

About the Author

Dr. Maria Quinlan is a sociologist who specialises in the design and use of creative, visual, and person-centred research methods which aim to facilitate people in sharing their lived experience. Maria is a multidisciplinary researcher who uses a variety of innovative participatory action research methodologies, including photovoice, ethnographic group interviewing and design-thinking to explore how people experience their world. She has pioneered the use of photovoice in Ireland, conducting projects across a broad range of topics – from people's experience of homelessness, addiction and mental health to people's experience of education and employment, particular in relation to issues of culture, mental-health, diversity and inclusion.

Maria was formerly Research Lead at the Applied Research for Connected Health Centre (ARCH) in University College Dublin, where her research focused on the implementation of person-centred healthcare, with a particular emphasis on service quality improvement and co-design methods. She is the founder of the Pink Flower Research, a research consultancy which focuses on creating actionable insight regarding issues of equity and inclusion, using person-centred, trauma-informed methods.

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Introduction

Background and Context

As part of the governments' National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy (NTRIS) 2017-2021, the Department of Education and Skills (DES), the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) and TUSLA are tasked with developing proactive, early intervention supports to promote and support Traveller and Roma attendance, retention, participation and engagement within the education system.[1] In line with this objective, the DES in conjunction with the Department of Justice and Equality; TUSLA; and National Traveller Representative Groups, identified four Traveller and Roma Communities in Ireland within which to run a two-year pilot of additional educational supports. The pilots were initiated in September 2019.

As the pilot's were beginning, research was carried out to gather insight into the lived-experience of Traveller and Roma families, and members of the school community in order to gain a baseline understanding of the current context within each of the four pilot sites. The objective of this research was to gather rich, in-depth insight related to school engagement, participation, attendance and retention which can both inform and evaluate the impact of the pilot intervention strategies.

Traveller and Roma families are amongst the most seldom-heard and marginalised communities within Ireland - the aim of this research was therefore to use a variety of innovative, creative approaches to capture their lived-experience and to centralise and amplify their voices.[2]

Between November 2019 and January 2020, 15 interactive workshops were conducted with over 130 participants across the four NTRIS pilot sites. Using a case-study approach, a set of detailed findings for each pilot site has been produced – this includes a large selection of empirical data in the form of first-person accounts of peoples' lived-experience. The case-studies aim to reflect the depth, nuance and variety of experiences shared by participants as part of this research. In addition to the more detailed case-studies this summary report has been produced. This summary report synthesises the findings from the four case studies and provides an overview of the high-level findings from across the pilot sites.

This report firstly outlines the Methodology used, and then provides a summary of the Key Findings. The Key Findings section outlines the key issues raised by the students, parents, and the school community – and their thoughts on ways to improve engagement and participation amongst the Travelling and Roma communities. These findings are contextualised within the relevant literature in the Discussion section; and then the visual and first-person accounts of Traveller and Roma families and members of the school communities from across the four pilot sites are outlined.

This report concludes with a series of recommendations arising from the research findings, and potential next steps in terms of how the project outputs can be used to form the basis on an ongoing co-design and formative evaluation of the NTRIS programme intervention.

Methodology

Using a mix of qualitative, participatory methods, which include visual approaches such as photovoice and photo-elicitation, coupled with design-thinking tools, the lived-experience of parents, students and members of the school community have been gathered.

As is the reality of our lived-experience, the project findings reflect multiple realities, and varying perspectives. Creating space for these often-differing viewpoints and experiences to be expressed is seen as a powerful part of the process of methodologies such as design-thinking and experienced-based co-design, upon which this project draws.[3]

The methodological approach was guided by the five goals and associated objectives of the NTRIS pilot to target engagement, attendance, participation and retention in Traveller and Roma communities. The methodology was also informed by the literature review of school engagement factors conducted by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA); the guide to inclusive school development produced by the National Counsel for Special Education (NCSE); and the guidelines for supporting students with special education needs produced by the Department of Education and Skills (DES).[4] At the heart of all of these reports is the recognition of the need to be inclusive in terms of intervention design and implementation. As identified within the DCYA literature review;

“There are relatively few first-person reports in the literature of Traveller and Roma students' current experiences in school, or about their expectations, engagement and participation in and of school” (2019: 5)

Approach

The methodology used for this study aims to ensure that, in line with best-practice service re-design, the voices of those whose needs the intended intervention seeks to serve, are centralised and amplified[4.1]. The aim of this baseline study is therefore to centralise and amplify the voices first and foremost of students and parents from the Travelling and Roma communities, and alongside them, the members of the school communities who are tasked with providing the communities with an educational experience that meets their needs.

With this objective in mind, a case-study approach using a mix of innovative qualitative methodologies has been used to gather and present the baseline scenarios for each of the four pilot sites. While certain outcomes which the pilot seeks to achieve may be measured in relatively consistent ways (e.g. attendance and retention of students), much of what the pilot seeks to assess in terms of outcomes (e.g. student and parental engagement and participation) and an understanding of the social and cultural contexts of the school environment require more holistic methodological approaches. A variety of research shows that attempting to measure student-engagement is complex and multi-level process, which cannot be easily achieved using mono-methodological approaches. [4.2]

The approach used within this research is a mixed qualitative methodological design rooted in the philosophical assumptions of the Participatory Action Research (PAR) tradition. The specific PAR methods which were used within this project are photovoice; photo-elicitation; and an adapted form of experienced-based co-design (EBCD), which draws on human-centred design-thinking methods such as journey and empathy-mapping. [4.3]

They aim to provide actionable insight which can ensure that those designing and implementing new interventions are aware of the context-specific factors which may inhibit or enable the interventions in succeeding and which give those who's needs are being served by those interventions a clear and powerful voice in co-designing both the interventions and the way in which those interventions are to be implemented. The methodological approach aims to form a basis for designing with communities, and to create innovative new solutions rooted in people's actual needs.

Pre-fieldwork consultation process

Prior to conducting workshops with participants within the four pilot sites, a consultation process with the NTRIS pilot team members was conducted. The aim of this was to gain a deeper understanding of what the pilot team members understand as the key objectives of the NTRIS programme, what success would look like from their perspective, and particularly to explore their understanding of the concepts of 'participation' and 'engagement'. At this pre-fieldwork consultation phase, the researcher also presented the planned methodological approach to the pilot teams and sought feedback regarding the proposed approach, ethics and safety procedures and assistance with participant recruitment.

In keeping with the definition of school engagement conceptualised by the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) – belonging is identified by the NTRIS teams as a core component of both participation and engagement for students in school. That students feel that they 'fit in' within their school environment is identified by the PISA report as both a key component of student engagement, and also a key outcome measure of education in and of itself.[5] Allied to the evidence drawn from the literature, these findings regarding the importance of belonging to overall student engagement further informed the methodological approach.



Visual Methods

The use of photographs as a method of communicating experiences and feelings is both a research method, an advocacy tool, and a narrative therapeutic technique which uses images, coupled with facilitated group dialogue to give voice to people's lived-experience of a particular issue.

These methods have their roots in social activism and in feminist participatory methodologies - they aim to provide a platform for people who are often silenced or marginalised in society to share their experiences. In doing so they have been found to be powerful tools in empowering people who have often found their voices excluded in society.[6]

Visual methods have been used with children to explore their experiences across a range of topics, and have been found to be a powerful tool in delivering person-driven interventions, allowing children and their families to explore and express what matters to them. They have for example been employed in the area of mental health to empower children and their families to be actively involved in directing their own care; to explore students experiences within the school environment, and to assess their experiences of inclusion and belonging [7]

In the tradition of inclusive, participatory knowledge-creation, it is research by and with people rather than 'on' people. It is a gentle, person-centred and trauma-informed approach which gives participants control of what and how they wish to share elements of their experience. Participatory methods aim to allow us to unpack what participation and engagement mean for the children, their families, teachers, principals, and other members of the school community.

Process

Using a mixture of journey mapping, photo-elicitation and photovoice we explored the lived-experience of parents and students from the Traveller and Roma communities, and with teachers, principals, education welfare offices, home school community liaisons (HSCL), and other members of the school communities across the four NTRIS pilot sites.

Our focus was on exploring their thoughts, feelings, and experiences with regard to school attendance, engagement, participation, and retention. In each workshop all of the participants took part in the overall focus-group discussions, and then were invited to use a selection of these creative methods. Each group followed an organic process whereby the group engaged with all or some of the methods as per their preference.

While the students in Pilot 2 took photographs themselves (see Figure A), due to time constraints, most of the groups were asked to select photographs that resonated with them from a selection of images provided to them. This photo-elicitation process is shown in Figure B. The design-thinking methods of journey and empathy mapping were also used, as outlined in Figure C.

Figure A: Photovoice

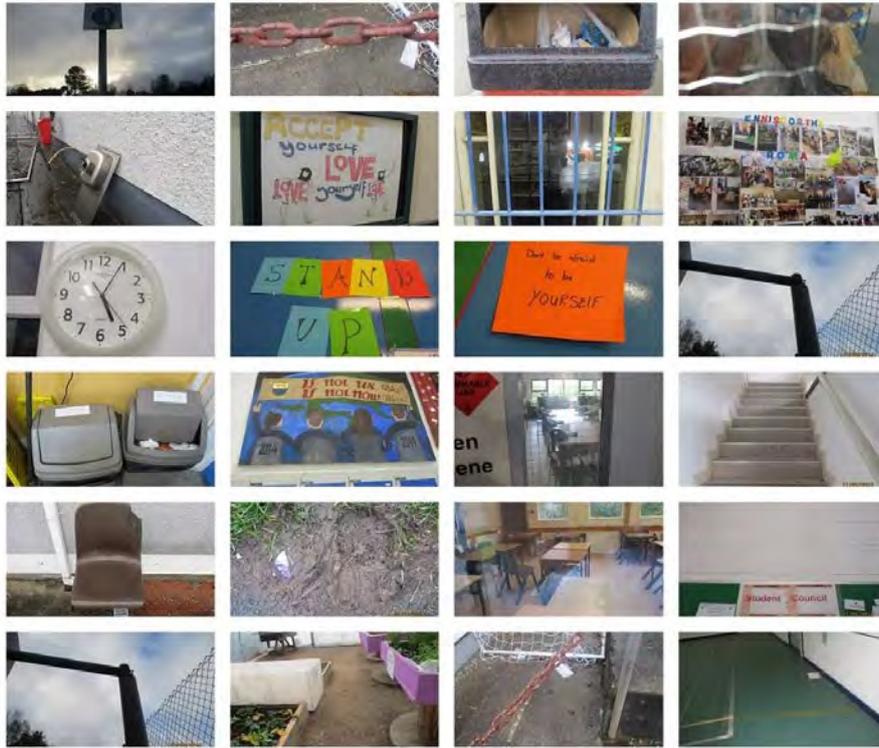


Figure B: Photo-elicitation

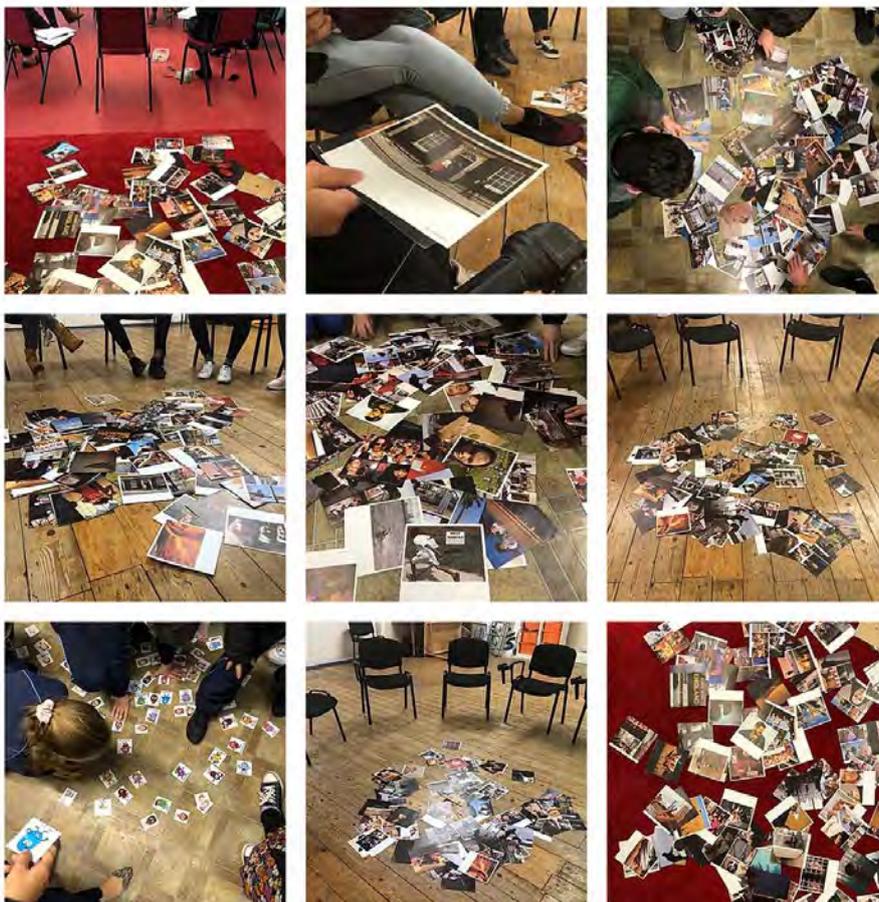
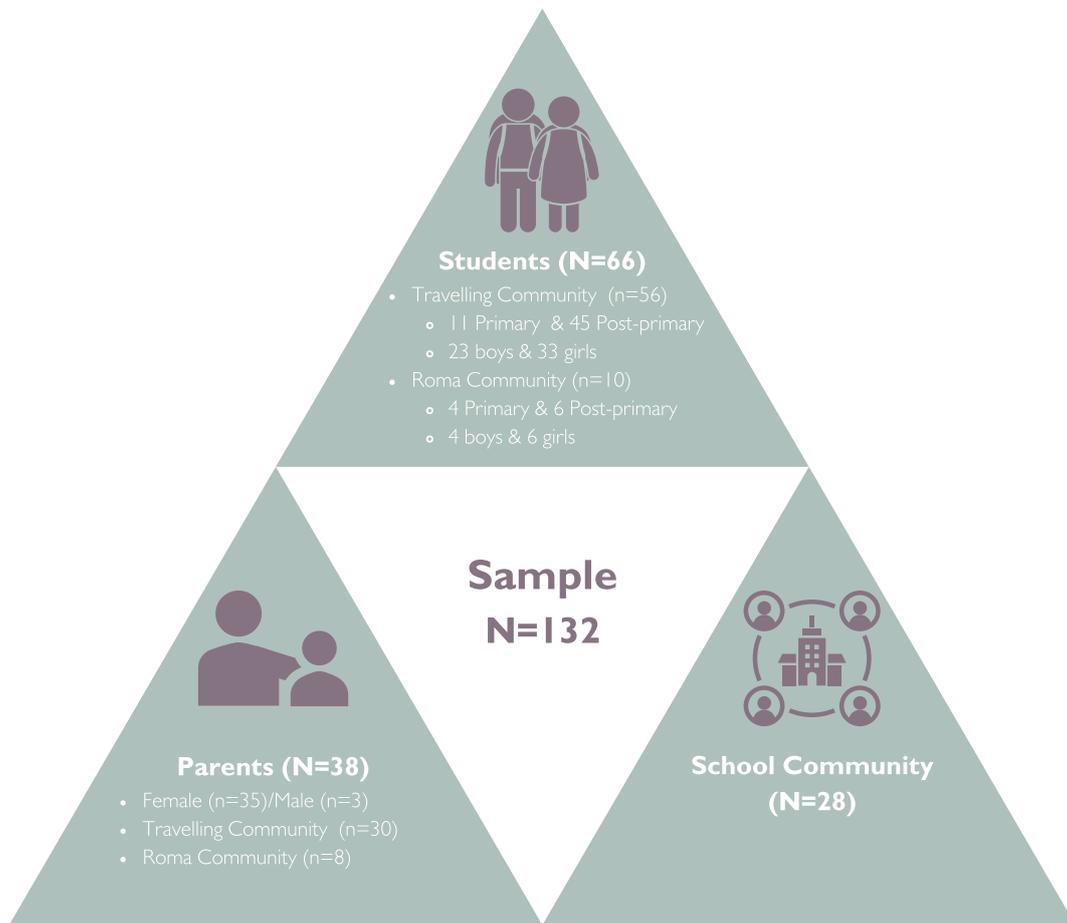


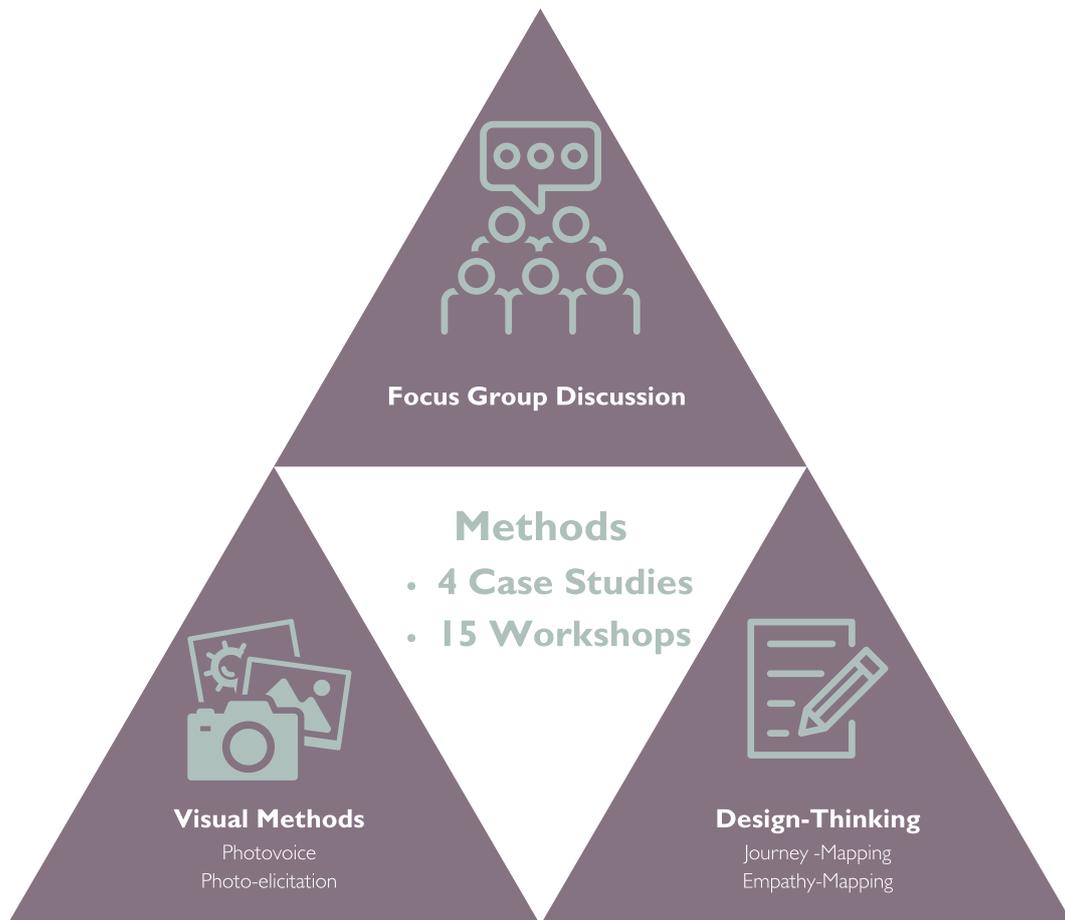
Figure C: Design-thinking



Triangulation of sample and methods



- 15 workshops with N=132 participants across the four pilot sites were conducted. This included;
 - N=4 workshops with N=30 parents from the Travelling community.
 - N=6 workshops with N=56 students from the Travelling community.
 - N=1 workshop with N=8 parents from the Roma community.
 - N=1 workshop with N=10 students from the Roma community.
 - N=3 workshops with N=28 members of the school community (including teachers, principals, Home School Community Liaison, Education Welfare Officers)
- Sampling approach:
 - The NTRIS project teams within each pilot site acted as gatekeepers for the recruitment of participants. A mixture of purposive, criterion and convenience sampling was employed to recruit a sample of members of the participating school community; students and parents from the Travelling and Roma community in each pilot site.



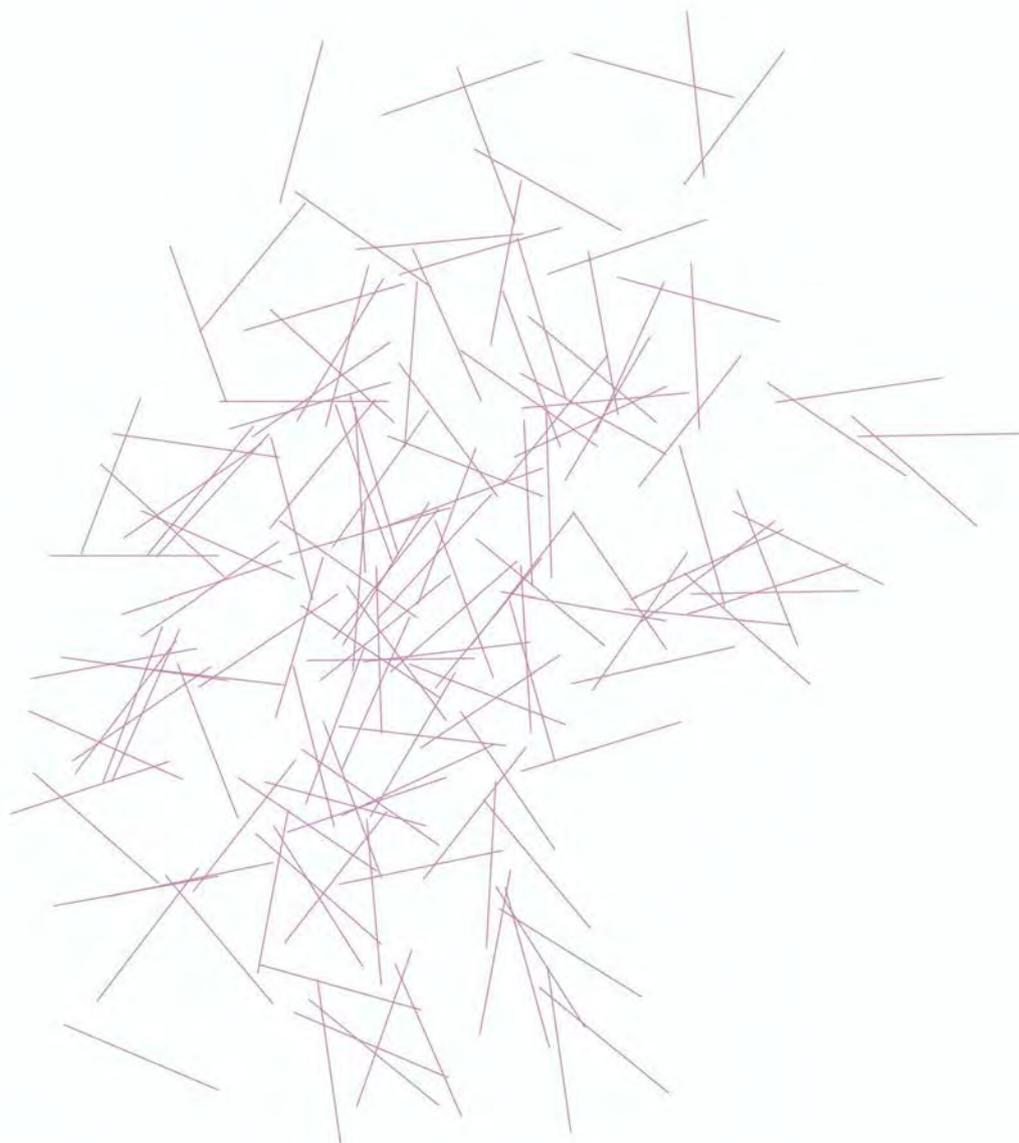
- Case-studies of four pilot sites – aim to capture lived-experience.
- Focus on engagement and participation - key drivers of attendance/retention.
- Combining visual methods – photovoice and photo-elicitation; with focus-group discussion and design-thinking approaches such as journey and empathy-mapping.

Ethics and safety

- The research was guided by research ethics best-practice in this area – drawing on the University College Dublin (UCD) guidelines for working with children, and the PhotoVoice Organisation's statement of ethical practice. [8.1]
- Education Workers from the Travelling and Roma communities assisted in the recruitment of parents and students for this project, and participated in the workshops.
- In order to ensure anonymity and confidentiality of participants, across all the of the case studies, no names have been used, and no identifying features are revealed about any participant.
- A key element of the overall approach is to create as safe a space as possible for participants to share their thoughts, feelings and experiences. This safety and overall sense of trust was fostered in a variety of ways from the project outset.
- Beginning at the participant-recruitment stage, the researcher worked with the NTRIS project team-members from the Travelling and Roma communities to develop participant information sheets and consent processes which gave a clear overview of the project; aimed to address any concerns related to anonymity, use of data; and which stressed the voluntary nature of the workshops. Where consent for it was provided, the workshops were audio-recorded.
- Participants' safety and emotional wellbeing is the number one consideration of this project, and this was reinforced throughout the workshop process. Throughout each stage of the process, participants were given the option of sharing their thoughts, experiences or of choosing not to. The facilitators use a trauma-informed approach, and the methods used provide for a gentle exploration of the lived-experience.
- In each of the workshops with students or parents from the Travelling and Roma community, a member of the NTRIS team was present. In most cases that NTRIS team-member was also a member of the Travelling or Roma community and assisted the workshop facilitators in creating a safe environment for the parents and students to share openly.

Contexts and characteristics of the four pilot sites

- To ensure anonymity for participants within this project, the pilot sites have been anonymised within this report, and are referred to as Pilot 1, 2, 3 and 4.
- The pilot sites are spread across the country and include 46 schools, 29 of which are primary level and 17 of which are post-primary level. Thirty-one of the schools within the pilot sites have Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) status.
- Pilot 1 came on stream later than the other three pilot sites. At the time of data-collection, the schools which were due to participate within Pilot 1 had not yet been identified and thus the Pilot 1 case study does not include any representatives from the schools.
- Across each of the four pilot sites, the Travelling Community is considerably larger than the Roma Community, thus overall the sample includes more members of the Travelling Community (n=86) than the Roma Community (n=18). All of the participants from the Roma Community are from the Pilot 2 site - separate workshops were held with parents and students from the Roma Community in Pilot 2 as it is the pilot area with the largest Roma Community. Due to the relatively small number of Roma students within the four pilot sites, the findings relate for the most part specifically to the Travelling rather than the Roma community.



Research Advisory Group

This research was overseen by the NTRIS Research Advisory Group. The Research Advisory Group included representatives from the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA); the Department of Education and Skills (DES); the National Traveller Women's Forum (NTWF); the Department of Justice; and Tusla.

Members of the NTRIS Research Advisory Group:



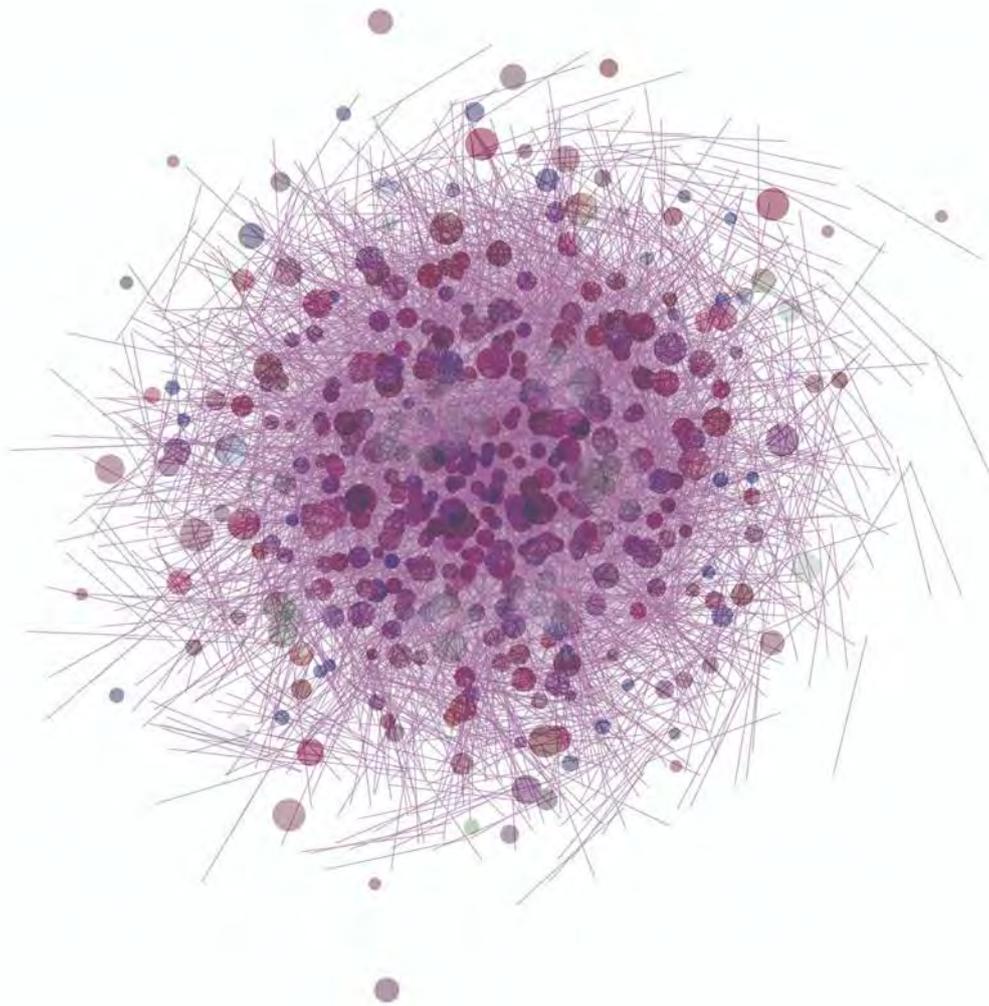
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|--------------------|--|
| • Maria Joyce | National Traveller Women's Forum |
| • Kasey Shine | Department of Children and Youth Affairs |
| • David Logan | Department of Children and Youth Affairs |
| • Patricia Sheehan | Department of Education and Skills |
| • Eimear O'Brien | Department of Justice |
| • Matthew O'Connor | Department of Justice |
| • Noel Kelly | Tusla |
| • Jean Rafter | Tusla |

Research Advisory Group Process:

- Meetings were held at project implementation, project mid-point and project completion stages of the research process. The researcher provided regular project updates and was provided with guidance and support by the Research Advisory Group throughout the research process.
- A draft report was produced and an internal and external independent expert review process was completed.
- A final report incorporating the review process feedback was produced and findings presented to the Research Advisory Group for review and sign-off.
- Final report sign-off was received from all Research Advisory Group stakeholders.

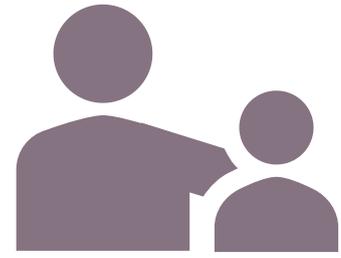


Key Findings



Summary of Key Findings

Parents from the Travelling Community



Parents desire a good education for their children

- All of the parents who took part in this study want their children to have a better, more comprehensive education than they themselves had access to, and want to do their best to support their children in achieving that.
- Having felt 'isolated' and 'overlooked' in school themselves they are passionate about wanting something different for their children. They particularly do not want their children to suffer the lack of literacy and accompanying lack of confidence that comes with it, which they and their own parents have often struggled with.
- They also want their children to feel included and safe in school – again something which they very often did not experience within school themselves.

Significant support at primary level removed at post-primary level

- Parents describe having an overall positive experience of primary school, followed by a difficult transition into secondary school for their children. Parents describe how both they and their children receive significant support at primary school level which helps them to both integrate in school, and which gives them confidence to support their children with their education.
- While primary schools are seen as welcoming, inclusive spaces, post-primary schools are seen as less welcoming spaces where parents from the Travelling community often feel that they lack the confidence or legacy knowledge to be able to fully-engage and support their children.
- The transition and extra work-load demanded of children in post-primary school is described as a difficult and stressful shock to the system by some parents. Their children often struggle with secondary school for a variety of reasons, which can ultimately leave them feeling like a failure as a parent.
- The stress of trying to keep an unhappy child in school is very challenging for many parents and can put a considerable strain on their relationships with their children.
- The key issues parents highlight include the pressure and stress of the workload on their children; the lack of communication and support at post-primary level; and the discrimination and exclusion they experience in both school and society generally.

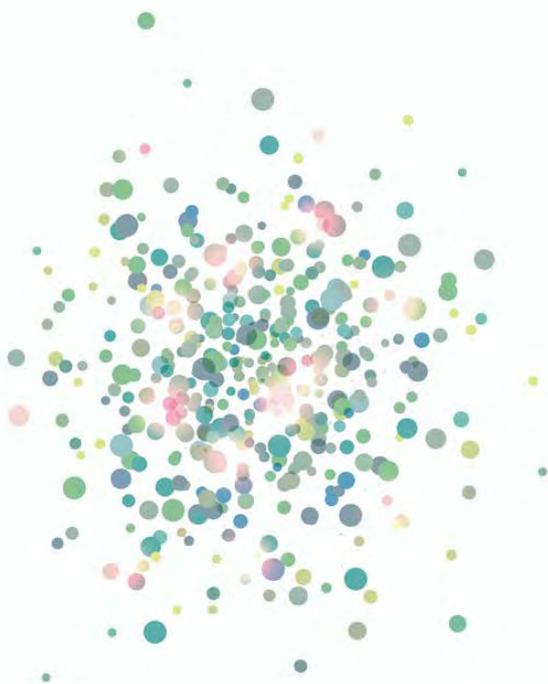


“Home school liaison stops after primary. You do as a parent have to understand when they finish primary over secondary there’s a big change and there is no communication like in primary ... in primary there’s so much interaction with the parents and the kids. The teacher will organise science week and that’s when the parents go in and the teachers get to see how the parents interact with the kids. And you get to see how the child is getting on in school and what they have to do. We love that.”

- Parents express a Catch-22 situation whereby they want their children to have a good education, and especially want their children to have the written and numerical literacy that many of them did not receive at school, but they do not wish it to be at the cost of their children's mental health and wellbeing. The parents are keenly aware of the high suicide rate within the Traveller community and are concerned at the stress which painful and discriminatory experiences in school can have on their children's mental health.
- The stress of trying to keep children who are struggling in school, who are falling behind and who end up being frustrated and bored in school due to their lack of progression is too much for many parents. As one mother puts it, "by Junior Cert enough is enough".

“For me pushing a child to do something they don't want to do...to keep pushing, pushing. You can only push a child so close to the edge.”

“...if you push a child too much, they could go over the edge..... when they are happy, I'm happy....they should be entitled to leave [school] when they want to leave.”



“....my little boy and girl, they are not the happy bubbly kids that they were, and I feel like a failure....That’s how I feel. I am a failure....they were happy in primary school and now it’s like a heavy cross. I try to give them some quiet time in the evening....It’s a school where they want to pressurise the children... they are continuously crying, struggling....”

Discrimination & racism undermine their children's education

"He told my son [there is] no point in you coming in because when you're 16 you'll leave and get married. Says I he's only 14 now so will you give him a chance."

"Praise is very important to Traveller children. They don't give them any confidence....it sticks in my heart. They are not going to give time into our kids. It sticks in my heart.."

- A fundamental issue that Parents feel negatively impacts on their children's education is the extensive discrimination and racism that people from the Travelling community experience in Ireland. This discrimination is wide-reaching and is beyond the education system, but in their experience the education system reflects it through a variety of structural, institutional, and inter-personal practices.
- Their children experience exclusion and racist name-calling, which often makes them feel unsafe and unwanted in school. As one parent puts it, settled people think "you're nothing but a tinker, you shouldn't be here".
- Parents say they can often feel alone in trying to agitate for change, having to fight for their rights to be seen, heard and respected; for their children to be taught; to be treated fairly in school and in society.

Low expectations and negative treatment in school

- All of the parents express a very strong desire for their children to be well-educated, and to have a positive, happy experience of school. However, their experience overall is that their children are treated differently, more negatively, because they are from the Travelling community.
- Due to a variety of factors including stereotypical beliefs about Travellers wanting to leave school at 16, parents feel that teachers can often have low expectations of their children. The parents believe that these low expectations lead some teachers to make less of an effort to teach and encourage their children than they would with non-Traveller children.
- This in some ways echoes their own often painful experience of feeling isolated, passed-over and alone in school, and they are very keen to protect their children from having a similarly difficult experience of school.

- Parents feel that that people in positions of power and authority look down on them, treat them with disrespect and as a result their confidence takes repeated knocks. This further effects their ability to engage with schools, and they often feel afraid to approach schools for help or advice in supporting their children.
- Parents feel they and their children are considered 'less-than' by schools, and that their children are skipped-over, excluded, and often given reduced timetables. This can lead to significant levels of stress for both children and parents and home life can be very negatively affected. Children's fear and anxiety in school can result in them 'acting-out', and parents can struggle to keep unhappy children engaged in school.

Lack of understanding of Traveller culture within schools

- In the parents' experience, schools require significant education in both Traveller culture, and also in issues of race and racism; in concepts such as institutional/structural discrimination and in what it means to be truly 'inclusive' in what might be termed an inter-cultural way.
- They highlight a series of examples which reveal this gap – with schools often appearing to be reluctant to address what the parents call the 'elephant in the room' that is representation of Traveller culture generally and racism in particular.
- The parents describe how their experiences of racism and discrimination are often invalidated or dismissed by schools.

Settled school for settled children – assimilation rather than integration

- Parents describe how Traveller culture, values, experiences and needs are excluded from the education system.
- Rather than being a system which values inter-culturalism, the education system is seen as being a 'settled' system, which values only settled values and norms which Travellers must accept, and assimilate to, even if it does not meet their needs.

“.....we kind of had to give [the teacher] a cultural awareness talk there and then inside in the classroom.....And talk to her about the Traveller background and how there's nothing in the curriculum about Travellers.... the way they are teaching. They don't know what racism is. They don't know what oppression is.”



“Not only in school...in all walks of life...you always feel like because you are Traveller that your words are not listened to - you need proof that the scenario you are in went the way it went or ...the

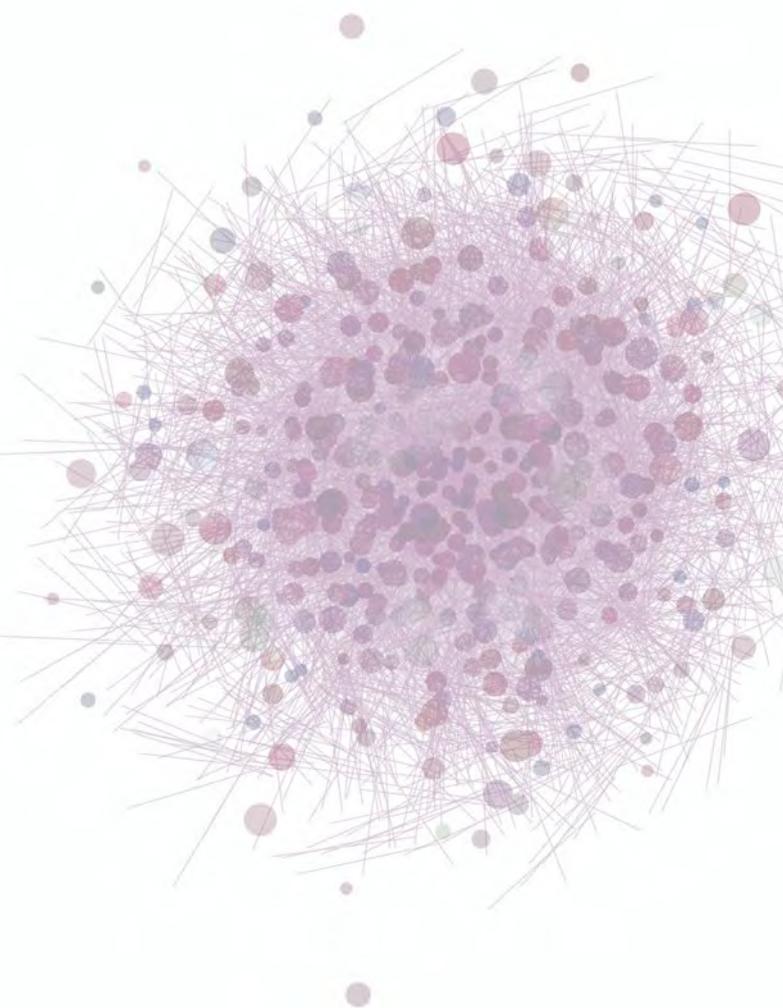
Guards are always going to be sent to your house and to nobody else’s house. You don’t want to be playing the victim or using the discrimination card but when you are a Traveller you don’t feel confident whether it be going into a restaurant, into a pub, going into a shop.”

“You have parents who don’t have confidence. You don’t have the confidence to go in and talk up because you are asking for something you are not entitled to have, even though you are, though you feel if you say the wrong thing it’s going to affect the children in the school.”

“I never went to a Parent Teacher meeting. I don’t know about them. I didn’t go to none. I would find it difficult to go to them, because they put me down so much I wouldn’t have that much confidence myself but the bit I have they’d have that gone out of me.”

Workplace discrimination – impacts on perceived ‘value’ of education

“My son done his Junior and he done his Leaving and he still couldn’t get a right job out of it. He looked for apprenticeships and he could not get them....It goes by your address as well. Where you live. If I was going for a job this minute I wouldn’t give my address. I’d get a friend to give a settled address....but you know the minute we’d speak you’d know we were Travellers”

- 
- Across the four pilot sites, parents describe the discrimination that Travellers face within the workplace. This experience of workplace exclusion fosters a sense within the Travelling community that even if they do the often difficult work of engaging with the settled education system, that their children will likely not benefit from that education as much as a settled child may.
 - Hence the ‘value’ of that education for a Traveller child and a settled child is not necessarily considered to be equal.
 - Parents highlight the barriers that their children face in accessing workplace opportunities. They have faced significant discrimination in getting jobs, despite their educational attainment.
 - This leads to demoralisation and demotivation when it comes to trying to keep their children engaged in school – especially when their children often experience significant challenges and stresses in school.



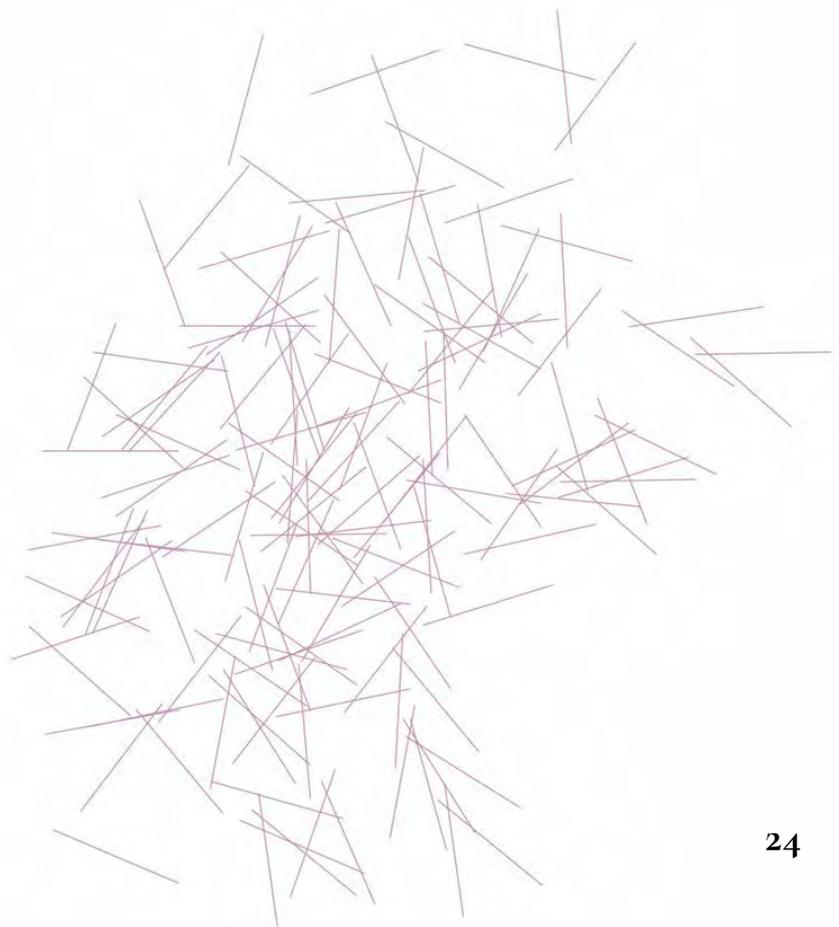
“I’ve a young fellow done four years in college. He’s a full carpenterhe’s working at the moment on a building site.....he come back to me in the evening and he said Mammy, a fellow came into the site, and he was on about Travellers. Some fellow robbed copper or some fellows robbed metal or whatever it may be. My young fellow’s hiding his identity....He just put his head down and he listened and he won’t say nothing...That’s awful discrimination like. To go through all that years of school and college and to hide who he is.....he shouldn’t have to feel like that....You’d be affected by it.”

What's working well and suggestions for improvement

- While the parents have all experienced discrimination and other challenging barriers to their children's education, they also highlight some significant positive experiences which have been very meaningful and impactful for both they and their children.
- Parents highlight the value and significance of having a principal or a teacher who they view as caring about Travellers. Members of the school community who don't make assumptions about Travellers, who are interested in learning about Traveller culture, and who have a zero-tolerance policy for discrimination, including the use of racist language within their schools, have a very positive impact on the families.
- Positive reinforcement from teachers can also have a major impact on Travellers' sense of belonging and safety in school.

"First year in secondary was horrible, every week, phone call home. Just pure nonsense and stupid messing....this was very hard, there were days I'd get the phone call when I felt like crying....the principal said I've seen kids like him before in first year and wait until he gets into second year, there'll be unbelievable change and he was telling the truth and if he hadn't told me I don't know where my son would be now.... He said I'll have a chat with him, try and get him involved in things, playing football and things and it's unbelievable, I can see even at home, I stuck with it. This year, unbelievable, down last night at the meeting where you go around to each of the teachers for the Christmas report, every teacher can't believe the turn, the improvement.....If that principal didn't care he could have said off with ye.... When you have someone who will understand, help you and work with you, parents need to work as well. They need to be down the school to get involved as well.....The principal down there helped me an awful lot because I'll tell you if you have a person that's going into school everyday and doesn't want to go it's hard work. It affects your home."

- Parents would like to see Traveller culture and heritage taught in school – with Travellers more visible within the curriculum, and having more input into curriculum development.
- They also suggest that Traveller Culture and Awareness Training (TCAT) should be rolled out for teachers and students – as they feel that a deeper, more sophisticated understanding of race, ethnicity, inter-culturalism and systemic racism is needed in schools.
- Other potential areas for development highlighted by parents include;
 - Allowing Traveller children to be in classes together – this makes them feel safe and reduces feelings of fear and isolation for students.
 - Homework clubs are a great resource for families – continuation/increase in provision.
 - Traveller culture needs to be more supportive of children's education.
 - Continuation of primary HSCL supports into post-primary.
 - More opportunity for parents to visit secondary schools (similar to PEEP initiative at primary level).
 - Remove Youthreach financial incentive - can act as an unintended disincentive to children staying in post-primary school.
 - Transition year is highlighted as a difficult year in terms of trying to keep their children motivated and engaged, and many would prefer if it was optional.
 - More options for non-linear careers – more options for apprenticeships.
 - Confidence-building – more assistnat with career guidance; interview skills.



Students from the Travelling Community



Students have strong career aspirations, but struggle at post-primary

“Primary school had a lot of freedom in it. We didn’t have exams and all these things coming up. When you go into secondary school, first year is not bad but you look there at second year and you’re building up for your Junior Cert and you look at third year and it’s even worse and you’re getting all these exams and then fifth year is going for Leaving CertThere’s way more challenges than primary school. It’s just the pressure of exams. You don’t know what’s going to be on it and you mightn’t be the best at that class as you are at other classes and you might think you are going to fail it and you’re stressing about it because you really want to pass it..”

- Overall the students’ experience of school, particularly at post-primary level, is described in relatively negative terms. While there are elements of school that they enjoy, overall they speak of feeling frustrated and bored in many classes, and of finding post-primary far more challenging and stressful than primary school.
- Many find the difference between primary and secondary school stark – in terms of difficulty of subjects; the supports available; exam pressure and feeling included overall within the school system.
- The students have a variety of career aspirations – but there are significant gaps in their knowledge and understanding of the pathways/educational requirements of those careers.
- Early school-leavers in the sample describe struggling to find different pathways to career opportunities or additional education.
- Irish is found to be very challenging across the board, and the students often find subject choices limited.
- Few of the students want to do Transition Year, and some would like a more fast-track way through the Leaving Certificate.

Feel that they are treated more negatively than their settled peers

- Within post-primary school a majority of the students feel that they are treated differently, more negatively, than their settled peers by teachers, and that there is less integration with their settled peers than they experienced in primary school.
- While the students highlight some teachers who they describe as being friendly towards Travellers, they feel that they are picked on unfairly, and that they are not trusted or liked by some teachers. In their experience, Traveller students are repeatedly blamed for things which are not their fault.
- Students feel that teachers often not interested in teaching Travellers – they are often put sitting at the back of the class, and not given homework. They describe how this makes them feel excluded, unwanted in school.
- Teachers are perceived as often having stereotypical beliefs about Traveller students, believing for example that girls plan to ‘run-away’ to get married at 16 – all of the students reject this stereotype.

“You are blamed for things you didn’t do - if there was another young one there and she was talking you could swear black and blue that you weren’t talking but [the teacher] still wouldn’t believe it. ”

“I’d like Travellers to be treated like everybody else.”

“I’d like [teachers] to be less disrespectful because there’s a lot of them that is and it’s not nice for Travellers.”

“There’d be classes sometimes and you’d walk in and the teacher would make you sit at the back of the class and she wouldn’t even ask you for homework or if she was going around checking for homework she’d skip your table. It would make you feel not wanted in class.”

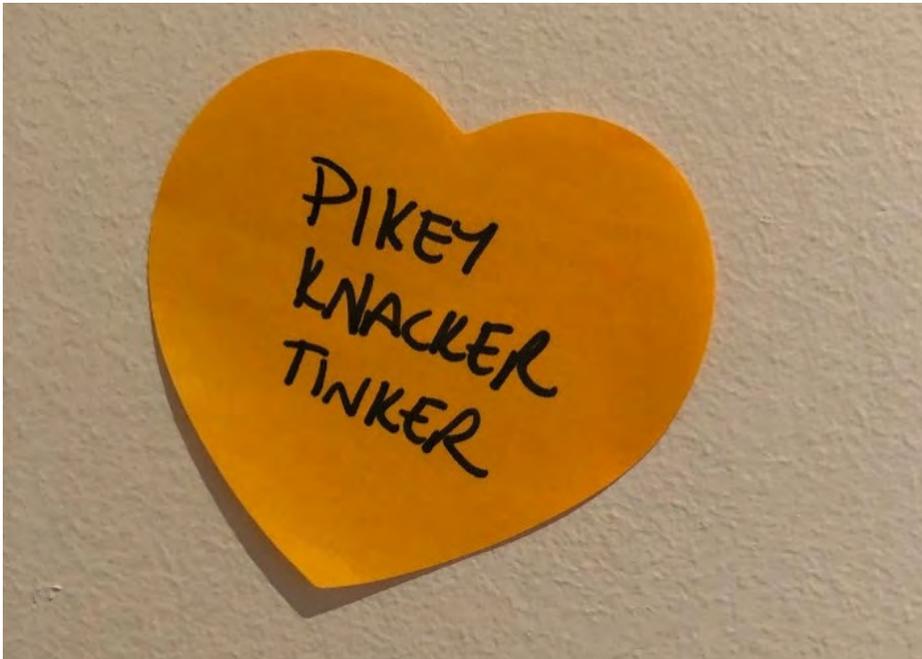
Subjected to racist name-calling and discrimination

- Both within the school system and in the wider societal context in which they live, the students describe how they experience significant exclusion and discrimination, and how overall they feel like they are outside of the settled community. This undermines their trust, sense of safety, inclusion and belonging within the education system.
- The students describe a variety of situations where they experience prejudice, discrimination and are subject to racist name-calling. For the students, being followed around shops in their local areas is an everyday reality.
- Students describe how they often feel disliked by their settled peers; and that when racist name-calling is reported to teachers often nothing is done.
- Echoing the parents who participated in this project, they also feel demotivated in school due to what they see as limited opportunities for Travellers in the workplace.

“You won’t get a job because you’re a Traveller....I’m like a nobody”

“I think most Travellers are all judged the same. [We’re] all different but all judged the same...”

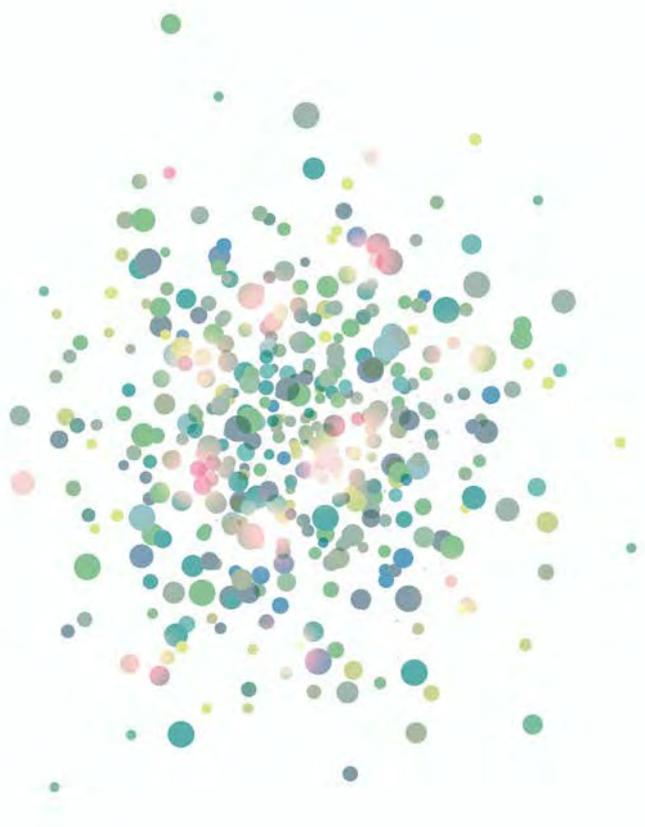
“If you are down the town, the owners of the shop will follow you around thinking you are going to rob but just because one does rob doesn’t mean everyone does. From the minute you go in to the minute you go out watching you to make sure that everything you look at isn’t put in your pocket.”



“...there’s a lot there if you were arguing with them would throw things back in your face like - they would call you a pikey, a knacker or a tinker. Settled people, Travellers don’t use those words.”

Feel alone in settled spaces

- Students express the sense of isolation and aloneness that they feel when they are the only Traveller in a group of settled students.
- They also feel that they had to struggle to get teachers to understand their need to be with their friends from the Travelling community.

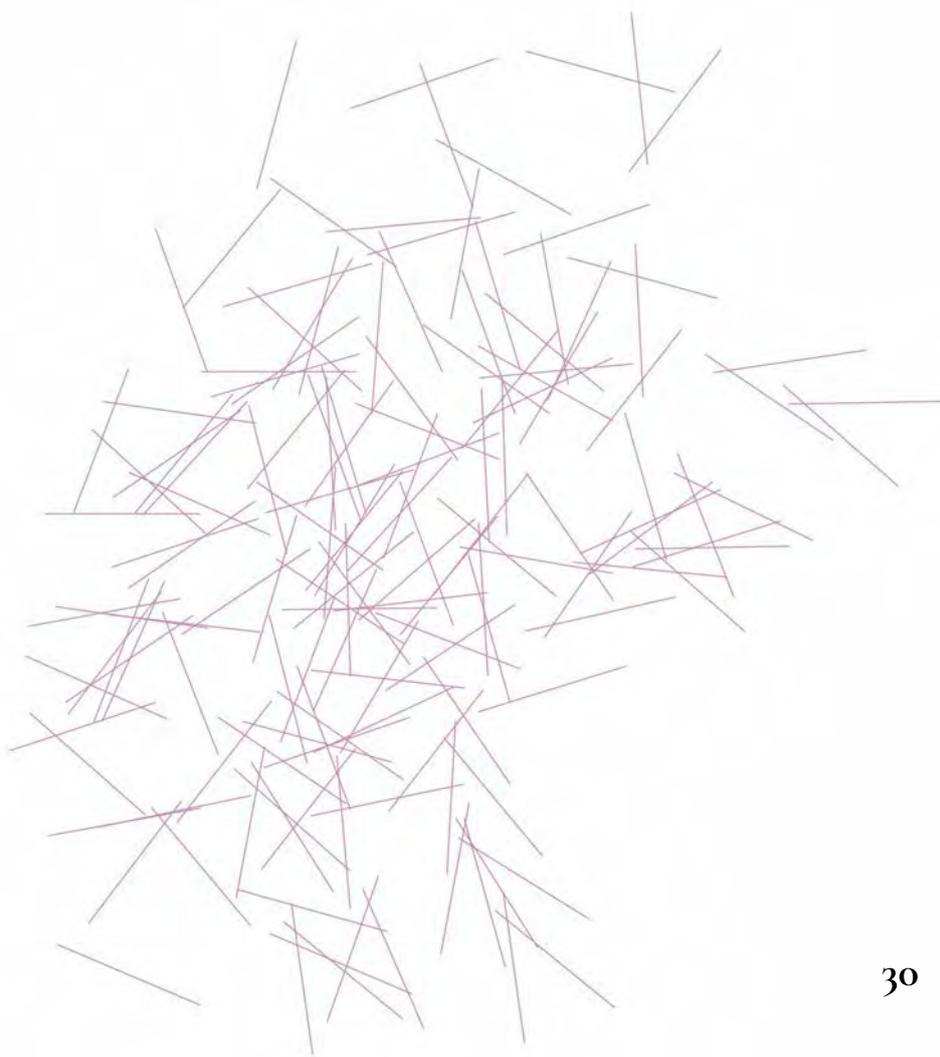


“When I went into first year I was put into a class on my own and I had been used to being in a class with all the girls in primary school and when I asked to be moved into the girls’ class they wouldn’t let me and I had to stay in a class by myself. I wasn’t used to being on my own.”

“No matter what way you put it every person in the class gets to sit beside the person they want to but full stop we are not allowed nowhere near each other.”

More visibility of Traveller culture on the curriculum desired

- The students describe how they have a mixture of experiences in school with regard to how welcoming or open teachers are to discussing and asking them about Traveller culture. While they find that some teachers make a real effort to ask about their culture and they feel that their culture is respected and something to be proud of, their experience of other teachers is not as positive for them.
- The students would very much welcome the opportunity to talk about Traveller culture within their classes, and would be very happy and proud to explain to their teachers and classmates the various elements of their cultural heritage.
- The students in Pilot 3 and Pilot 4 both reference their Civic Social and Political Education (CPSE) text book as an example of where Traveller culture is visible within their school curriculum. However, for both groups, the representation of Traveller culture shown in the textbook is stereotypical, and not in keeping with their own experience of being a member of the Travelling Community. Both groups outlined how they had raised this issue with their teachers, and while the students in Pilot 3 expressed frustration that their concerns were not listened to, the students in Pilot 4 had a far more positive experience, as described in the following quotations.





“In CSPE there’s one chapter on Travellers and we’ve done every chapter around that, but it’s always skipped. ..we’ve actually asked teachers, can we do it? And they’ve said no we haven’t reached it yet but we’ve done every chapter before it and about six chapters after it. We talked about it once in first year.

Even that chapter it gives a bad look for Travellers because in that chapter there is a really dirty mobile home, children with nappies, they didn’t look washed or anything, it didn’t give a good impression. By looking at that chapter people might think that’s our lifestyle but it’s not for a lot of us, but by them not doing the chapter we can’t explain that so there’s nothing we can do. We asked them could we do it. And they said oh we’ll reach it sometime – but we are already in third year and we haven’t done it.”

“We had a [CPSE] book and it had pictures, and I live on a site, and there were pictures that were dead wrong. There is more than one Traveller in my class and we weren’t happy about it. We brought it to the principal and said this shouldn’t be in it and the principal talked about it and the principal got all new CSPE books and got rid of the old book.”



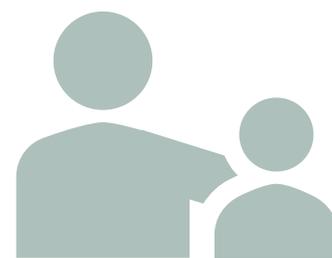
Positive aspects of school

- While the students experience many challenges, they describe their parents as very encouraging, with an expectation that they will complete their Junior Certificate at a minimum.
- Echoing the experience of parents from the Travelling Community who participated in this project, the students had an overall positive experience of primary school – felt included within the school community and supported academically.
- At post-primary level, the students enjoy the practical subjects that they have access to and times when they can be in class with their friends from the Travelling community. The students also describe appreciating teachers who “are civil, who talk to you...who don't paint us with the same brush”. As is echoed by members of the Travelling community throughout the project, the students value teachers and school staff who are respectful, and who will “have a conversation with you”.
- The students in Pilot 4 overall report having a positive experience of school. While there are subjects they don't like, and elements of school which frustrate them, in comparison to the findings amongst the students from the Travelling Community in the other three pilot sites, these students report far less overt discrimination and in general do not feel that they are treated differently, or negatively, by teachers due to their ethnicity.
- The students in Pilot 4 also describe having clear career ambitions and more of an understanding of the pathways to achieve them than students in other pilot sites.

“I'm going to do the Leaving Cert, 100% because you have more chance of getting an apprenticeship at 18 instead of 16 so you might as well stay in school for the extra two years...”

“I want to do an apprenticeship as a plumber and definitely will stay to sixth year, do the Leaving Cert.”

Parents from the Roma Community



Strong desire for children to engage in school, but face practical barriers

- Parents from the Roma community express a strong desire for children to engage in school. Perceived value of education is high within the community.
- It is felt that overall engagement in school is strong in the Roma community in terms of the value placed on education and parents wanting a good education for their children.

Language

- Parents have strong hopes and expectations for their children in terms of their careers. However there are logistical barriers experienced by parents from the Roma community, specifically in relation to language – which affects their ability to support their children in terms of assisting with homework. It also makes it difficult for them to engage with the school and to attend parent-teacher meetings.
- For example, one parent describes how his child has been absent from school for five days, but he couldn't go to the teachers to explain the absence because he doesn't speak English and there was nobody to support him with translation.
- While there have been some language supports in the past, they are seen as not being fit for purpose and not plentiful enough to meet the needs of the community.

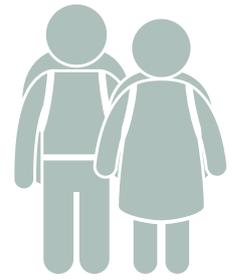
Financial

- Financial resources are another key issue, particularly for families recently arrived in Ireland and who may not be eligible for the governmental supports.
- There are also the language and general literacy and educational barriers to completing the relevant forms required to access financial supports for school.

Transport

- Transport is also an issue for the Roma community within the area, with some living a distance away from the schools, and in areas which lack appropriate public transport.

Students from the Roma Community

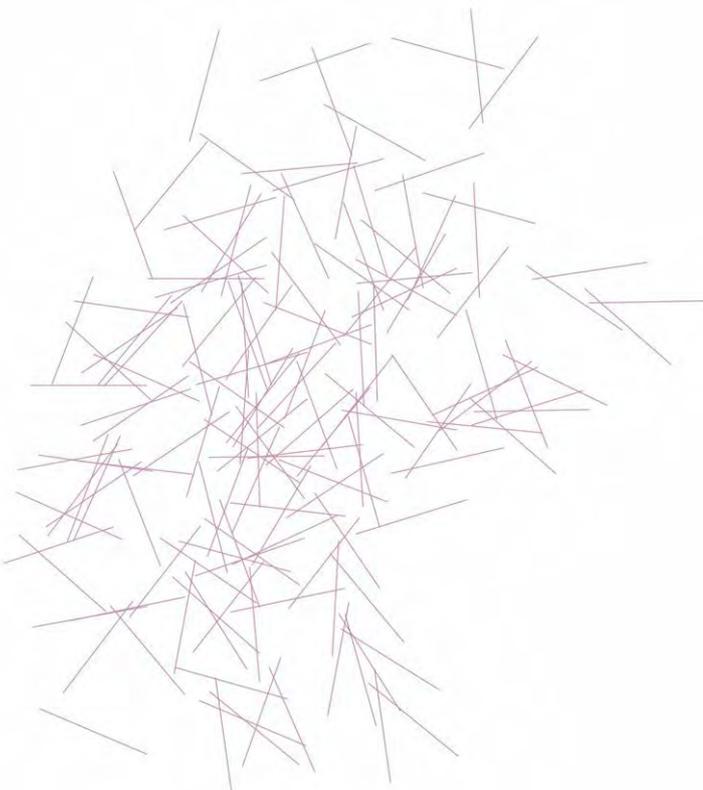


Positive feeling toward school and value of education in their lives

- The students overall express positive feelings towards school, many of the post-primary students, and some of the primary students, already have a clear idea of what they would like to achieve from their educational experience, what courses they might like to study and what professions they may wish to enter. Several talk of wanting to be teachers.
- There is clarity within the group that certain educational qualifications are required in order for them to achieve their career and life ambitions.
- All of the students describe their parents as being ambitious for them from an educational perspective, and very supportive of their education.

“Education can open doors. Education can help you in your future. I like school because it’s fun and lots of sports....I like maths..”

“I plan on going to WIT. I have three plans, legal studies, early childhood or business”



Exclusion, discrimination and logistical barriers experienced

- While the Roma community is well-established in the Pilot 2 area, and there is a strong sense that they feel part of the community now, they experienced exclusion and discrimination particularly when they first came to Ireland. They have experienced being bullied by students from the settled community in the past; and now see newer migrants to the community being targeted for racist abuse.
- Echoing parents from the Roma community, students also highlight language and transportation as barriers to their education. For example one sixth year student describes how he lives 'completely in the middle of nowhere' and has to walk three miles just to get to the bus. He has recently stopped going to school because of the transport issues.

“There are many girls in our school, they are not all Irish, there are Muslims and other girls make fun of them because of the Hijab they wear, they make fun of them that they wear it to school and you can just see the tears in their eyes and I feel so sad for them. And we are trying to talk to them and trying to be friends with them because we are not Irish either so we know how they feel because when we came here the first time, we felt the same thing because they were making fun of us as well.”

Members of the School Community



Retention of students from the Travelling community remains an issue

- Across the pilots sites, members of the school community report that while transition to post-primary is seen as a given now for Traveller students, a majority still leave school at age 16 - many without completing the Junior Cert. In their experience Traveller children are often frustrated and unhappy in post-primary school.
- The school community in Pilot 4 are the only group who report a significant improvement over the past decade in progression to the Leaving Certificate amongst students from the Travelling community. However numbers overall are still small, and the school community describe how Traveller students face significant discrimination, bias and barriers when it comes to entering the workplace which demotivates them from further education.
- The reasons for the lack of progression to Leaving Certificate amongst Traveller students are multi-layered and complex, with divergent views emerging amongst the members of the school community who participated in this study. For some the issue is rooted in systemic discrimination, racism and exclusion of the Travelling community in Ireland. While for others the issue is seen as resting with the Travelling community, and their perceived lack of interest in engaging with the education system.

“...at the end of the day, we would sell our school on the basis of children being happy...I don't see Traveller children smiling in class. In the yard, yes, but in class, I don't see Traveller children smiling in our school. I'm sad about that.

Cultural barriers within the Travelling community

- Some members of the school community believe that schools are operating from a place of inclusivity and that they are doing all that they can to support Traveller families. For these participants, the causes of and solutions to poor engagement, participation and retention in school lies with the Travelling community themselves.
- The school representatives raise several issues related to what they term 'Traveller culture', which they perceive as being central challenges to the Travelling community's engagement and participation with the education system. Culturally, education is perceived by the group as being problematic for Traveller children – in that it is not prioritised, and that they can face exclusion from their own community if they want to achieve in school and engage fully with their education.
- Traveller families are perceived as not valuing education, and therefore of not engaging fully with the school system.
- Many of the school community believe that Traveller students generally want to leave school at 16 – girls to get married, and boys to work with their families.
- School communities in Pilot 2 and Pilot 3 find that Traveller students tend not to participate in extra-curricular activities or to mix extensively with children from the settled community. Traveller parents appear reluctant to attend parent teacher meetings. The school community in Pilot 4 however describe far more engagement from Traveller parents and students overall.
- Family circumstances are perceived by some as being traumatic for children; feuding; fighting; domestic violence; mental health issues; alcohol. Women can lack equality and access to power within their family.

"Unfortunately, their traditions is what excludes them. They don't take part in activities after school. They don't take part in play dates. Their traditions within their own family exclude them from getting involved in school."



“When taking part in after-school activities they’ve often said to me, you know, I need to go home and change into my ordinary clothes so that I can tell people at home that I’m going down town. And I’ve let them come to choir in their ordinary clothes when everyone else is in their uniform....I had two girls who performed in a concert and everyone else had eight and 10 people there to support them. They had nobody. And their Mam had lied to the rest of their family to say where they were going that night. There’s huge pressures from home.”

“We had a student, we had huge hopes for her, from the day she came into school, when she was asked what she wanted to do, she said she wanted to be the first female Taoiseach. ... She got a good Leaving Cert. She could have went to college, but the culture beat her down....she had to conform to what other Travellers expected.”



"The girls do want to learn, but I think the cultural expectation at home means that the girls don't get the opportunity to be able to engage in the classroom and to be able to come in on a regular basis. The boys on the other hand will tell you out straight, 'I don't want to be here. I want to be out working with my uncle and I have a job', So as a result, it's very hard and you can see it, like you know, they want to continue with their cultural traditions...but it's very hard when you're trying to get them in and, get them focused in a classroom."

Attendance issues create insurmountable gaps in children's education

- Poor attendance is seen as one of the key root causes of poor engagement and retention by many amongst the school community who participated in this study. They outline how poor attendance means Traveller children can miss significant amounts of learning, and this coupled with a lack of pre-school attendance means Traveller children are often behind their settled peers in primary school, a gap which widens further in post-primary.
- Attendance in school is seen as a major barrier to children from the Travelling community's engagement with education – particularly at primary school level, where primary school representatives spoke of their deep frustration with some parents within the Travelling community whose preference appears to be to keep their children at home until they are six, rather than send them to school at five, or send them to pre-school.
- This then has a knock-on effect on a child's ability to fully participate and engage at post-primary level, where they are expected to take on the full curriculum despite perhaps missing significant amounts of their primary school education.
- While schools are given extra supports for children who have special learning needs, the issue raised by the school representative is that children who have no learning difficulties but who have missed out on learning due to absenteeism are meant to engage with the full curriculum without additional supports.
- Children from the Travelling community are perceived as being unhappy in school – for many of the school representatives the root of this unhappiness is again believed to be the lack of attendance and resulting frustration with trying to learn subjects which the children lack the prior primary school knowledge base to fully access.
- Discipline and challenging behaviour are also highlighted as an issue within the Traveller student base – again the school representatives link this to the students' frustration at trying to keep up with the curriculum when they have missed so much of the basics.

“...primary school attendance is poor...children are not leaving us ready for secondary school, despite everything that's put into place for them.....Traveller women don't want to let their children go until they're six because legally they don't have to be in school until they're six. In our school, if a child presents to school at six, they're going to go into a Senior Infant class. The majority of children in the room with them will have already done two years of EECE and a year of Junior Infants, so on the day that child starts school, they're already three years behind their peers. So that means that for the next seven years, they're behind and they can't play catch-up. They have no chance of even getting into the game of catch up.”



“....to arrive in a second level school and go into a mainstream class with 30 children, you need to have attended primary for eight years. If you don't, then you just don't have the skillset to survive in a second-level mainstream class. Children who come into us with learning difficulties, we have a file on them....they get resources and they get exemptions.....children who come in as horrendous attenders right through the primary system don't get any support in our school because there's nothing there for them.....They struggle with English. Struggle. And they're supposed to do Irish, French and German as well. And the children, nobody's asking the children..... until we fix the attendance in the primary school, we're on a hiding to nothing. We're wasting their time and ours basically and that's a terrible thing to say.”

....somebody said to me recently, 'How can a child get to the end of primary school and not be able to read?' And I said - Very easily. 'Where would you like me to start?'it's the three years missed.I heard some lady from Barnardo's last week saying oh, the schools are not putting enough supports inAnd I actually wanted to shout at the radio because we are putting supports in for parents and I can go out, I can fill in forms with them.....I sit with the parents and talk about it, I get the place, then they just don't bother coming in.....it is so, so frustrating. Travellers do not want to engage, full stop....the parents don't want the girls in secondary school. They just want them at home....Schools are doing as much as they possibly can do....but the [children] have to be there...So many of the Traveller children would do really well if they were actually there every day, and the Roma children. Bright as buttons.”

Exclusion and discrimination a barrier to Traveller families' engagement

- While some members of the school community who participated in this study feel that the issue of engagement and participation lies within the Traveller community and a perceived lack of value placed on education, other members of the school community, particularly those in the Pilot 4 area, feel that systemic exclusion and discrimination faced by the Travelling community is a more significant barrier to engagement and retention of Traveller students.
- Echoing the experience of parents and students from the Travelling community across the four pilot sites, these members of the school community believe that due to the discrimination and exclusion that the Travelling community experience in both education and the wider community, that education does not deliver the same benefit for Traveller students as it does for settled students. Workplace discrimination is seen as a key issue which can make progressing to the Leaving Certificate and on to third level seem like a waste of time for Traveller families.
- They believe that there is a lack of supports in place for parents and families to mitigate against legacy of structural discrimination in education, and in society generally. In these participants' experience, parents and students from the Traveller community face a continual battle to be listened to, to be respected, and to have their culture valued. They face discrimination and exclusion in many aspects of their lives, including in relation to housing conditions, with some families living in deprivation, lacking basic amenities of water and electricity. This further impacts on the parents' ability to ensure that their children are in school every day.
- Some participants question the dominance of settled-community values and norms within the education system, and the potentially exclusionary nature of how education is structured. They believe that as school staff in Ireland are overwhelmingly from the white settled community that they can lack the cultural awareness and understanding of discrimination and bias faced by the Traveller and Roma communities.
- Historic state abuses perpetuated against members of the Traveller community (within education and other areas) have not been addressed and significant hurt, trauma and mistrust remains – they believe that families can't be expected to engage with powerful state organisation who have a history of treating them badly.

“...recently we had a student who wanted to do TY and his mother said he's in a bubble.....that in another year when he tries to get a job ...he's not going to get work so stop leading him up the garden path is basically what she is saying. That's her genuine fear for him as his Mum and I think that's really relevant because it's the battle the Traveller community has... it's a fight constantly and that's something we have to do something about because it's not fair and their voice needs to be heard.”

Education-system challenges

Curriculum not meeting Traveller student needs - radical innovation required, but school community feel that they lack the power to do this.

- Members of the post-primary school community highlight issues with the curriculum as another barrier to Traveller engagement and retention in education. Many believe that the post-primary curriculum is not meeting Traveller needs, but there is a perception that individual schools have little power to innovate.
- Many in the school community feel frustrated that they cannot do more to provide the kinds of courses, subject-choices, and daily structures which in their experience Traveller families would like to see provided by their school. The DES and the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) have attempted to innovate via the revised Junior Cycle, including the Junior Certificate School Programme initiative, but there appears to be a gap in understanding what these alternative programmes could offer in practice.[9]
- The school community also highlight the lack of availability of Leaving Cert Applied in most post-primary schools as an issue.

“I think we need to do something very radical. I would say we need to do away with Leaving Cert and the points system. So I think it needs to be a very, very radical change....I also believe in listening to the students’ voice....the problem is I think we do listen, but we can’t do what they want anyway....You listen, but the decision-makers are not listening.”

“.....we’re kind of churning out students on an industrial basis. It’s like a factory system that we have...Our school system comes from the industrial revolution where we try and fit everybody into this one bracket and it doesn’t work....the Traveller students are running away from that system.....we don’t know what help to give them.”

Alternative curricula – student-centred or exclusionary?

- In the school community's experience, not all Traveller families want the same things, with some for example wanting reduced timetables for their children, while others feel strongly that their children are not to be treated any differently to other students in the school.
- They highlight what they feel are the potentially conflicting requirements of integration and inclusion of students from the Travelling community on the one hand, and issues of providing an alternative or specialised curriculum and daily structure that would better meet their perceived needs on the other.
- For example the school community in Pilot 2 believe that shorter courses, practical subjects which have more relevance for the Traveller students and shorter days are what the Travelling community in the area would like to see offered. However there is a perception that this approach would be rejected by both the DES and Traveller organisations such as Pavee Point, as exclusionary and promoting further segregation of the Travelling community.
- Some members of the school community feel that they are in a bind of not being able to provide families with what they are seeking. They recognise that this is a complex issue, and one which needs considerable dialogue within and between the communities.

“.....the parents here want an alternative curriculum. They want a shorter day or a shorter week. They want it, whereas if we gave them what they wanted, Pavee Point and other Traveller organisations would be shouting ‘discrimination, segregation. Why are our children being treated differently?’ So there needs to be a resolution in the Travelling community as well.... I find them very contradictory because some of them are saying ok, you know the Traveller class that used to be around years ago? Some parents and pupils are saying we want that back. And then even the same parents could flip and say oh, what about integration and our culture?we want to be assimilated....It’s complex.”



“I would have an alternative education programme with a completely different curriculum for all students who want to access it. Not just for Traveller students. I think that’s a manageable thing to do and I can’t understand why it’s not in place. If the politicians, if the powers that be are there, you know, let’s get Travellers what they want. Let’s integrate them in. They’ll be integrated in the school. They’ll have a choice whether they want to do the Junior Cert or short courses or whatever it is. It’s a student-centred approach. I can’t understand. Maybe I can’t understand because I don’t see the problems that arise from it. I don’t know. But I think there should be a separate educational programme that anybody could access, not just Travellers.”

Focus on measurement rather than relationships

- For many in the school community, relationship-building is seen as key to engaging marginalised communities in education. Despite the publication of a Wellbeing Strategy in 2018 (updated in 2019), there is a perception amongst some of the school community that the DES remains focused on measurement and outcomes to the detriment of relationship-building.[10]
- The post-primary representatives in particular highlight the need for radical innovation across the board within the education system – a current focus on measurement and tracking of outcomes are perceived as ticking-boxes rather than providing children with what they need in order to fully learn and succeed in the world.

Funding gaps

- Despite a significant increase in DES spend on Special Needs Education from 2011 to 2017 – schools have found funding, particularly the loss of Visiting Traveller Teacher in 2011 challenging in terms of their ability to engage and retain students from the Travelling and Roma communities. [11] While spend has increased and certain supports are in place, there are still both gaps in service-provision, and in some cases money being spent on services which are not fit-for-purpose.
- There is a perceived gap in learning supports at post-primary level for students who have no learning difficulty per se, but who need extra learning supports due to missed primary years.
- Lack of integrated supports – from pre-school to post-primary level. Certain supports in place at primary level are removed from many families when they transition to secondary level.
- Lack of fit-for-purpose language and other practical supports such as transport for Roma families.

Settled norms

- Members of the school community also highlight some taken-for-granted norms and values embedded in school culture which can be exclusionary to the Traveller community. For example, in their experience school uniforms and compulsory transition year can be barriers to Traveller student retention. Many in the school community believe that in Traveller culture 16 is the age of adulthood and therefore it is hard for students to be treated as 'children' once they are this age.

The experience of the Roma community

- Across the four pilot sites, the Roma community is considerably smaller than the Travelling community and the school community has less experience overall with working with families from the Roma community.
- In terms of the students and parents from the Roma community which the school representatives do work with – the key challenges they experience are firstly the considerable language barriers; and secondly that children from the Roma community are found to be very quiet in school which the school representatives perceive as a lack of engagement and potentially problematic.

“Our Roma children are extremely quiet. Extremely. We actually were worried about how quiet they are. They don’t really engage.....they just sit and watch and listen and they don’t ever rock any boats.”

“I find the language barrier is massive...I was this week trying to teach a child maths through the calculator. Project Maths is so wordy now....a student who is particularly bright. I haven’t got the time to put into him to work on his English. That’s a massive problem.”

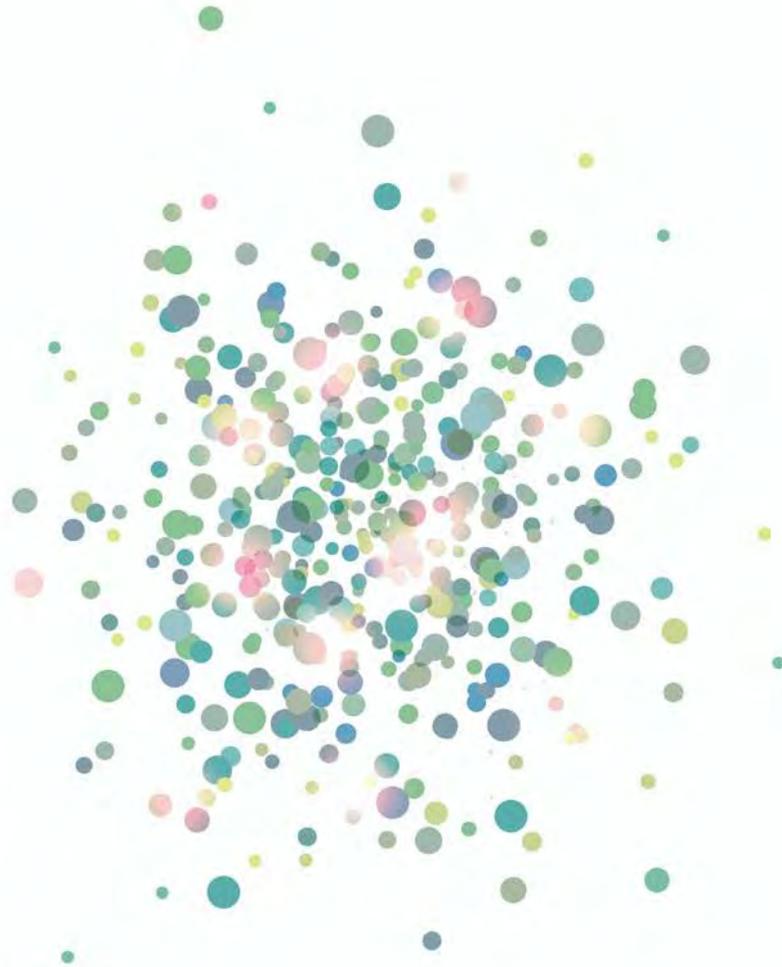
“Their self-esteem is normally totally on the floorI would find with our Roma children, their attendance is really, really poor and that’s definitely holding them back.”

Suggestions for improvement

For members of the school community, inclusion and engagement is complex and requires significant work across several fronts:

- Barriers to Traveller families in school and society generally are extensive and therefore response needs to be multi-layered - e.g. housing-rights; mentorships; scholarships; making real effort to educate school staff and settled community on Traveller culture, bias and discrimination.
- Embrace Traveller and Roma culture (in school and in society), listen to the communities, provide opportunities for Traveller and Roma families to share their experiences, to be listened to. Communicate respectfully and openly – it is extremely important to listen to the Traveller and Roma communities, to provide them with safe spaces to express their needs, and to feel included and part of the school community.
- There needs to be societal and state recognition of the trauma experienced by Traveller families on multiple levels – including racism, discrimination; housing deprivation; mental health challenges; inter-generational trauma due to systemic and structural discrimination.
- Workplace discrimination needs to be tackled – provide Traveller students with safe, secure work-placement opportunities, and viable career pathways.
- Most Traveller students are the first-generation in their families to complete their Junior Certificate; Leaving Certificate or to go to college. Therefore they need extra supports to bridge that social/cultural capital divide which is common to first-generation students.
- Parent/teacher meetings can be daunting and extra care and support that is provided to Traveller parents at primary level is often not in place at post-primary.
- Relationship-building is seen as key (home visits; HSCL; involving parents in the school). HERO and PEEP initiatives should be extended to post-primary level. Younger fathers within the Traveller community are very active and engaged with their children's education and could be further engaged through targeted initiatives.
- Provide families with positive reinforcement – communicate their children's strengths and successes; provide scholarship and incentive programmes to encourage students.
- Student-centred approach - offer subject and extra-curricular choices to students based on their own interests; be creative. Freedom for schools to create short course based on the students' interests. Schools need devolved power and resources which they can use to develop curriculum that meets the needs of the communities. Need to listen to Traveller and Roma families and co-design solutions.
- Transition year should be optional. FAS/Youthreach payments are a disincentive to staying in school – remove financial incentive or offer it to students at all schools. More options to provide Leaving Cert Applied in all post-primary schools.
- Need alternative non-linear educational pathways which account for differences in family-structures.
- More integrated supports – which should follow the student rather than be associated only with particular schools. (e.g. DEIS)

Discussion



Discussion

Contextualising the findings within the literature

The Department of Children and Youth Affairs' (DCYA) review of the literature relating to school engagement outlines a variety of factors which serve to enable or inhibit students' engagement with school, and identifies the factors specifically related to parents, students and schools in terms of the drivers of school engagement.[12] A key stated aim of the DCYA review was "to explore whether existing Irish policy efforts to retain Traveller and Roma children within the education system are 'missing' something in the chain from parental aspirations, to parent and student engagement in schools, to school attendance, retention and completion." (DCYA, 2019: 2). The findings from the research outlined herein would suggest that a key missing piece of the overall policy efforts is a clear, consistent, and multi-layered approach to tackling institutional and structural discrimination and racism within the education system.

While many of the teachers, principals and other members of the school community who participated in this research believe that their schools are inclusive, safe spaces for all students, the majority of parents and students from the Travelling community do not experience this as true for them. This is particularly true at post-primary level – primary school is experienced as a far more positive experience overall by the parents and students who participated in this project.

While feeling a sense of belonging has been identified a key component of student engagement within the literature – for members of the Travelling community who participated in this research, belonging is severely undermined by both wider societal racism and discrimination experienced within the education system.[13]

Members of the Travelling community describe how they live with a variety of daily discrimination and racism plus a legacy of institutionalised discrimination – all of which undermine the community's ability to participate fully within the education system.

That members of the Travelling community experience exclusion, marginalisation, structural and institutionalised discrimination, and racism within Ireland, and that the community has experienced the attendant negative educational outcomes of such experiences, has been well-documented in a variety of research contexts.[14] There has also been significant literature produced by the Department of Education and Skills, and others, related to the need for schools to have the resources and educational inputs required to truly understand issues of race, ethnicity, racism, discrimination and how to develop cultures which are inter-cultural, inclusive and actively anti-racist.[15] The complexity and multi-layered, multi-dimensional nature of structural and institutional discrimination requires schools to have a nuanced and sophisticated understanding of firstly how these barriers can be unintentionally reproduced and reinforced, and secondly that significant action is required in order to create inclusive spaces for all communities. The concepts of discriminatory bullying, including exclusion bullying also need to be understood and mitigated against.[16]

In an international context, there is a wide body of research literature which explores the challenges faced by ethnic-minorities within education and workplaces, which further deepens our understanding of both the impact of structural discrimination and racial micro-aggressions, and of the ways in which schools can mitigate against them.[17] There is also a growing body of research literature related to the concept, and consequences, of racial trauma - a form of race-based stress, which as defined by Comas-Diaz et al (2019) refers to People of Colour and Indigenous individuals' (POCI) reactions to dangerous events and real or perceived experiences of racial discrimination.[18]

All of this literature helps to contextualise the findings across these four case-studies, with many of the findings from both this national and international literature echoed within the experiences shared by participants' in this research. There is a continued persistence of structural inequalities and institutionalised discrimination, as well as the denial of racism towards Travellers, which has been highlighted previously in the work of Fanning (2002), Bryan (2007), Divine (2011), Kitching and Curtain (2012) and others.[19]

Belonging undermined by discrimination and exclusion

Rather than feeling a strong sense of belonging, the predominant feeling amongst the parents and students from the Travelling community who participated in this research is one of being unwanted – both in school and by the settled community more generally in society. While the families are quick to point out positive experiences that they have encountered with certain schools, teachers and principals who have had a significant impact on their children’s lives, their overall experience is more bleak. Parents talk of feeling ‘hated’ by the settled community in Ireland and describe certain teachers and principals who they feel would like to see Travellers ‘wiped-out’.

The impact that this has on Traveller families’ ability to feel safe in school cannot be over-stated. Parents talk of the fear that they feel for their children – many of the parents have had very painful educational experiences themselves and, even when their children are doing well in school, many are haunted by the spectre of past hurts being revisited on their children;

““I’m always asking how his day was, just in case. I have that fear in case he might say oh, someone called me a knacker today or someone wouldn’t hold my hand today. But thank god he’s not having that at the moment.”

Parents’ own educational experiences are highlighted in the DCYA’s review of the literature relating to school engagement as a key driver of student’s school engagement.[20] Figure A is a collection of pictures chosen by parents from the Travelling community who participated in this project to describe their own experience of school as children. Echoing previous research, a consistent theme amongst the images is of being alone, excluded.[21] In discussing these pictures, the parents spoke of the sense of the aloneness and isolation that they felt in school – the legacy of which still impacts many today in terms of their lack of confidence in approaching teachers, in feeling safe and included in these predominately settled spaces.

“I was the only Travelling girl in the classroom. You were literally on your own, I didn’t want to be there. How can you mix with people who don’t want to mix with you? I just didn’t want to be in school. I hated it.”

“I just listened in school, I don’t think they wanted me in there... I was the only Traveller in there just the lonely little one but come 12 I was gone. Taken out, it wasn’t your fault, but you wouldn’t learn when you were on your own.”

“My experience was there was no talking about Traveller’s culture. I think .. we were trying to hide it if anything in school that we were Travellers... with our generation as we were kind of too ashamed to talk about it and then we just stood back.”

Figure A: Images Chosen of Parents' Own Experience of School



“...that’s the thing about us in Ireland. I don’t feel discriminated against. I feel hated....hated, yes. Hated. Hated. For what reason? I just feel hated. It’s gone to that stage now I think a lot of Travellers feel that and what we’re saying about discrimination, they hate us more.”

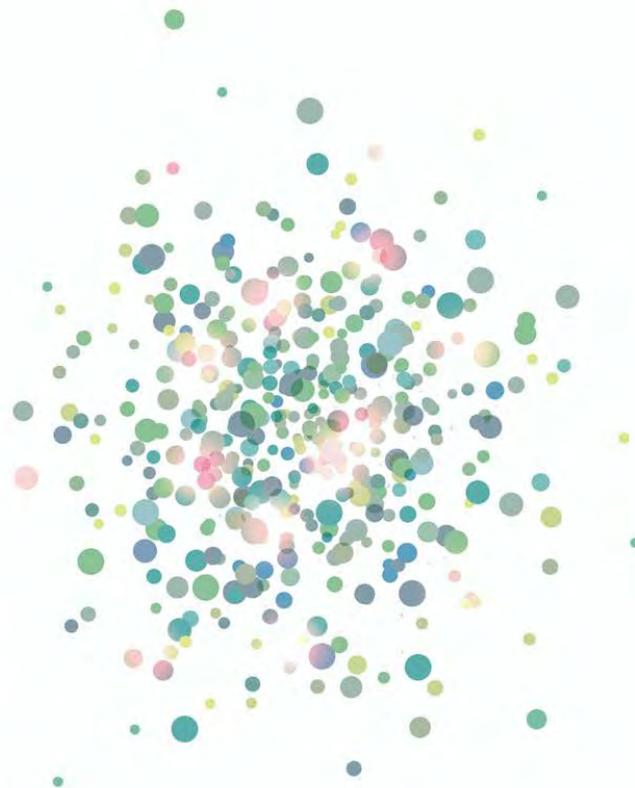
There is a deep sadness within the Travelling community with regard to how Travellers are perceived and treated in society generally. The participants within this study outline how they are used to not being heard, to being passed-over, to being excluded from public places and spaces. Both the children and parents within this research recount numerous examples from their daily lives of being called racial slurs; being asked to leave ‘settled’ spaces; and being made to feel very uncomfortable by the settled community, especially when they seek to enter a ‘settled’ space.

For some of the students being followed around every shop they enter in their own town is a taken-for-granted everyday reality; others talk of local schools which ‘do not allow Travellers’ as if it is a straightforward reality, rather than a fundamental violation of a child’s right to education. The community face daily aggressions based on their Traveller ethnicity. Within this context, we can see how both participation and engagement within school may be problematic for the Travelling community. A continuous refrain from both parents and students across the study is the feeling of not being ‘wanted’. This obviously severely undermines a sense of belonging.

Settled spaces are not experienced as ‘safe’ spaces for Travellers – and the humiliation and shame that members of the Travelling community describe feeling when they are routinely excluded from settled spaces in Ireland is in keeping with the literature regarding racial-trauma as described by Comas- Díaz et al (2019) and others.[22] In exploring and conceptualising racial-trauma Comas-Díaz et al (2019) state that racial-trauma can result from experiences such humiliating and shaming events and witnessing racial discrimination toward other members of your community. They recommend that culturally informed healing modalities need to be developed, in conjunction with methodologically sophisticated research which can drive the inclusion of public policy interventions in the area of racial-trauma.

Many students from the Travelling community who participated within this study describe feeling very low levels of belonging within school, a key component of what has been termed 'emotional engagement' within the literature.[23] This then impacts negatively on both their behavioural and cognitive engagement in school. Factors highlighted in the literature that serve to drive engagement include a school climate which is perceived by students as treating everyone equally, and which mitigates against negative behaviour such as bullying and discrimination. However students from the Travelling community consistently describe feeling that they are treated differently, more negatively than other students, because they are from the Travelling community.

Students feel singled out for heavy-handed behaviour from teachers, and that bullying, and racist name-calling is not taken seriously when they report it to school staff. It is important to note that the findings amongst students within the Pilot 4 case-study differ somewhat in this regard, with far fewer negative experiences being highlighted. The feedback from members of the school community within Pilot 4 (teachers, principals, Home School Liaison Officers etc) also differs from the feedback from members of the school community within the other pilot sites – with far more issues related to structural discrimination and racism highlighted by members of the school community within Pilot 4 as being key barriers to Traveller education.



Divergent viewpoints amongst the school community

The representatives from the schools who participated within this study identify a variety of factors, both systemic and cultural, which in their experience inhibit the engagement of students from the Traveller and Roma communities with the education system. Across the case-studies there appear to be varying levels of conceptualisation of issues such as structural and institutionalised discrimination, racism and what it means to be truly inclusive, and actively anti-racist within the school communities. While some members of the school community, particularly those in Pilot 4, highlight the legacy of discrimination and racism as being key factors which drives reduced engagement in school amongst the Travelling community, for many teachers and principals in other pilot sites, the key issue is what they perceive as a lack of interest, and value put on education amongst the Traveller community. This lack of interest/value is perceived as driving a lack of attendance which is then perceived as driving the lack of belonging felt by students from the Travelling community, and an attendant lack of both cognitive and behavioural engagement.

There is deep frustration expressed by some of the school representatives that they are doing their best, with limited resources, and that they can only do so much if parents and students do not wish to engage with school. As one participant from the school community describes it;

“...take it for granted that all needs are being met, that schools are inclusive and start that as the baseline and go forward, rather than constantly going back to ‘is this an inclusive school?’ Just assume that we’re all doing a really good job. And then move on from there....I think to be fair, the secondary school system has adapted hugely and one of the things that needs to stop is [we need to] stop talking about, not being included in school. We’re doing everything we can and there are still people who don’t attend school and don’t see the value. So rather than blaming, you know, I think especially at Junior Cycle now in secondary schools, it’s something for everyone nowfor all the different styles of learners and the learner who can achieve a little and a lot...That’s not the problem at Junior Cycle. It’s the attendance means you miss school, means you miss work, means you miss learning, you don’t go home and get it reinforced with homework.”

On the other hand, some representatives from the school community express a deep awareness and acknowledgement of the structural barriers, and legacy of institutionalised discrimination which members of the Travelling community experience. As another participant from the school community puts it;

“It’s really horrifying but I think that having started this work and started to meet with lots of Traveller organisations, Traveller parents and giving them a really safe space for conversations there’s a huge amount of harm and hurt that has been untold from parents and grandparents and inter-generational. I would believe that until that nettle is grasped, until there is a mechanism for that story to be told and for responsibility to be taken by the state around what happened..... we have an expectation that they will be able to engage with the state and with the school system and with professionals. With that baggage and that lack of responsibility that the state and organisations have taken how can we expect them to?”

There appears to be a gap in the understanding amongst some of the school representatives of concepts such as institutional racism and the traumatic impact that it can have on parents and students. For example some teachers seem to have the expectation that Traveller students should bear the burden of initiating integration with their settled peers – this perhaps reflects a lack of familiarity with the wide body of research on the effect of ‘othering’ and exclusion on stigmatised minority groups’ ability to feel safe, and confident to approach what they experience as a hostile dominant group. For example one participant says;

“I think that word ‘equality’ really needs to be looked at. I mean Pavee Point have their definition of it and assimilation and integration, all this The Traveller children will tell you and the Roma children, ‘Oh, we do everything in our power to mix and match at lunchtime’. We have ghettos at lunchtimewe know exactly where all the Roma children are, we know exactly where all the Traveller children and dare we say to them, ‘Would ye go down to them or up to them?’ No, this is our time. This is lunchtime. We ain’t integrating. What is their interpretation of the word ‘equality’? They don’t want to be equal to us.”

Similarly some members of the school community appear to conflate Traveller children being indistinguishable from settled students as a marker of inclusion and integration, rather than reflecting on the value-based judgements that may be inherent in such a viewpoint.

Emotional-labour of challenging systemic discrimination

Members of the Travelling community within this study describe how they expend significant emotional labour fighting to be heard; to be listened to; for their experience of discrimination to be acknowledged. This apparent lack of nuanced understanding of the complexities of systemic racism and bias within some schools can mean that the Travelling community's experience of discrimination is often denied, invalidated and minimised. This echoes the work of Bhopal (2011), who's research highlights that settled people can often believe that members of the Travelling community do not experience racism because they are white – despite the recognition of Irish Traveller ethnicity in 2017.[24]

The burden of educating settled people, and of dismantling racist structures should not be placed on the communities suffering from them – and yet Travellers within this study describe how they feel that this role often falls to them. Again this echoes the work of American scholars regarding the emotional labour racial minorities can face when attempting to navigate white spaces. For example, Evans and Moore (2015: 439) describe the complexities which People of Colour can face in navigating white spaces;

“...white institutional spaces create a complex environment where People of Colour must navigate racial narratives, ideologies, and discourses, while simultaneously attempting to achieve institutional success ...In these distinct environments, people of colour experience an unequal distribution of emotional labour as a result of negotiating both everyday racial micro-aggressions and dismissive dominant ideologies that deny the relevance of race and racism. As a result they must actively seek ways to engage in forms of resistance that promote counter narratives and protect themselves from denigration while minimizing the risk of severe consequence. Our data suggest that a more nuanced conceptualization of resistance and the context in which resistance occurs is needed in order to understand the everyday experiences of People of Colour”[25]

As well as echoing the Traveller experience of navigating settled educational and work spaces, there are also potential learnings within this literature in how to build more inclusive anti-racist spaces, and in how to support Traveller and Roma families in feeling safe within predominantly settled educational spaces.

‘Value’ of education contested – settled school for settled children?

One of the stated goals of the NTRIS pilot programme is to “foster an appreciation of the value of education among Traveller and Roma communities”. Findings from this research would suggest that the concept of ‘value’ needs to be unpacked further as it is not necessarily a straightforward neutral concept with a shared-understanding across the communities. Rather the ‘value’ of education is contested across the participant groups within this study.

While there is an apparent taken-for-granted assumption that formal mainstream education delivers a consistent value for students by some members of the school community, both parents and students from the Travelling community have a different experience. Many participants from the Travelling community feel that the education system provides a settled-centric curriculum which meets the needs of the settled community, but which excludes Traveller needs, culture and heritage and also minimises any legacies of institutionalised discrimination. The invisibility of Traveller culture on the curriculum is echoed in other studies, and is identified as a barrier to engagement within the DCYA’s review of the literature in this area.[26]

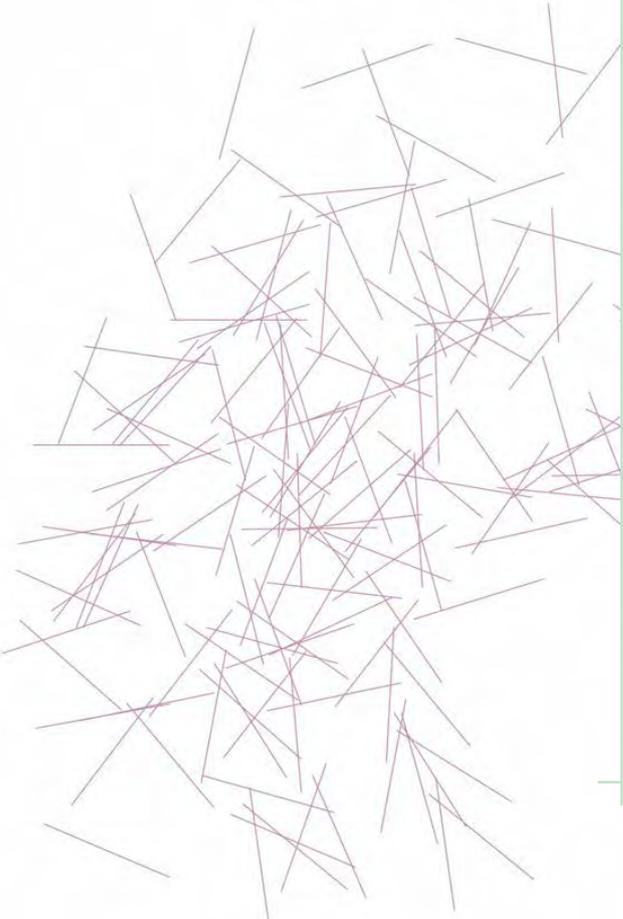
In their 2010 study, Hourigan and Campbell found there to be a significant gap between the state’s espoused aims to support inter-cultural education and the enacted provision of policies and resources which would support those aims.[27] They found Traveller culture to be largely invisible within the Irish educational curriculum, and that members of the Travelling community had little power within the educational system. Hourigan and Campbell (2010) also found that the prejudice experienced by Travellers constituted major barriers to Traveller progression into mainstream education and into the workforce.

“So I have to ‘value’
education....that’s the system.
And the system is something
that can’t change....that’s the
way things are because that’s
the way things are for white
settled people... then it
should be all right for us.”

Due to the discrimination which they experience in the workplace combined with a settled-centric curriculum, a Leaving Cert is not perceived as inferring the same benefit for Traveller children as it may for children from other communities. There is an expectation that Traveller families should engage with, and place value on, a system which does not meet, or indeed appear to value, their own perceptions of their needs. A system which Traveller families do not experience as respecting their ethnicity or protecting their children from discrimination and racist abuse.

Many members of the school community express frustration at feeling that they make a significant effort to put supports in place to engage Traveller and Roma families in education, but that their efforts are not working. There are differences in opinion between participants with regard to why those efforts are not working.

Whether the supports are fit-for-purpose, and whether the efforts that are made are directed into the right areas needs to be examined further, with significant consultation with, and dialogue between, schools and the Travelling and Roma communities. This would allow for a thorough assessment of needs and would reduce both the potential for misdirection of resources to supports which appear to be ineffective for many families, and the accompanying frustration experienced by both families and members of the school community.

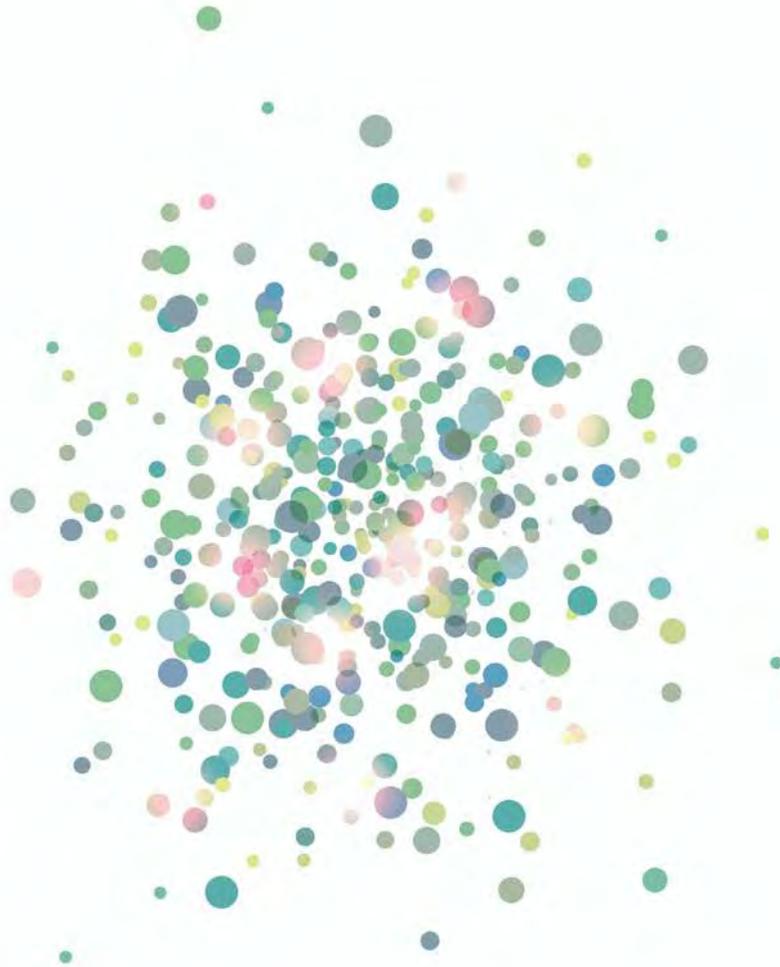


“....we talk all the time [about], the assimilation policy, we see education and I’m sure the government sees education as another way of making us settled people. They provide for us what they provide for settled people. And we tag along with that or else we don’t get anything...You know, we’re not looked at as an ethnic group....We should be grateful like. That’s structural racism....and the schools become resentful when we [aren’t grateful]. ‘We gave you everything’we were saying yes, you’re spending millions, but you’re not spending it the right way. You need to listen to us.”



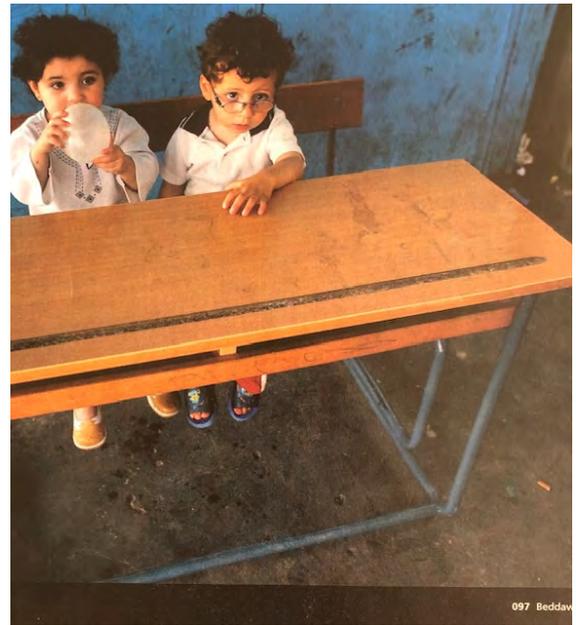
Voices from the Travelling Community

Parents



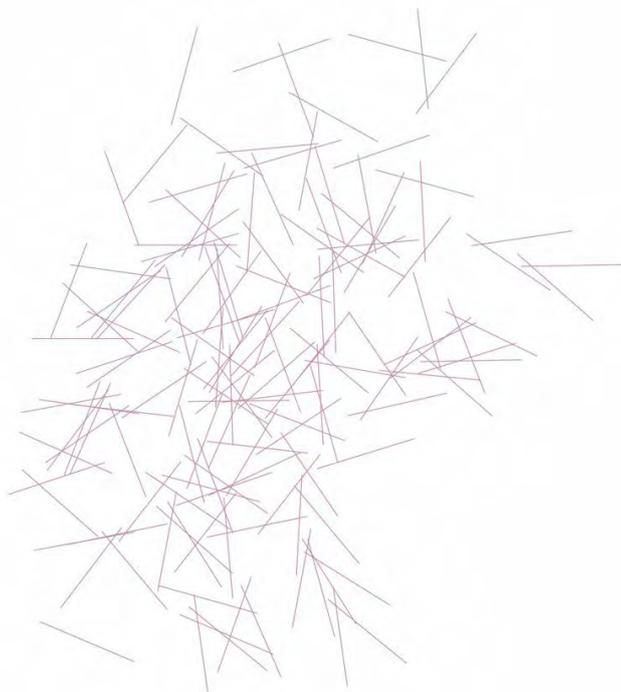


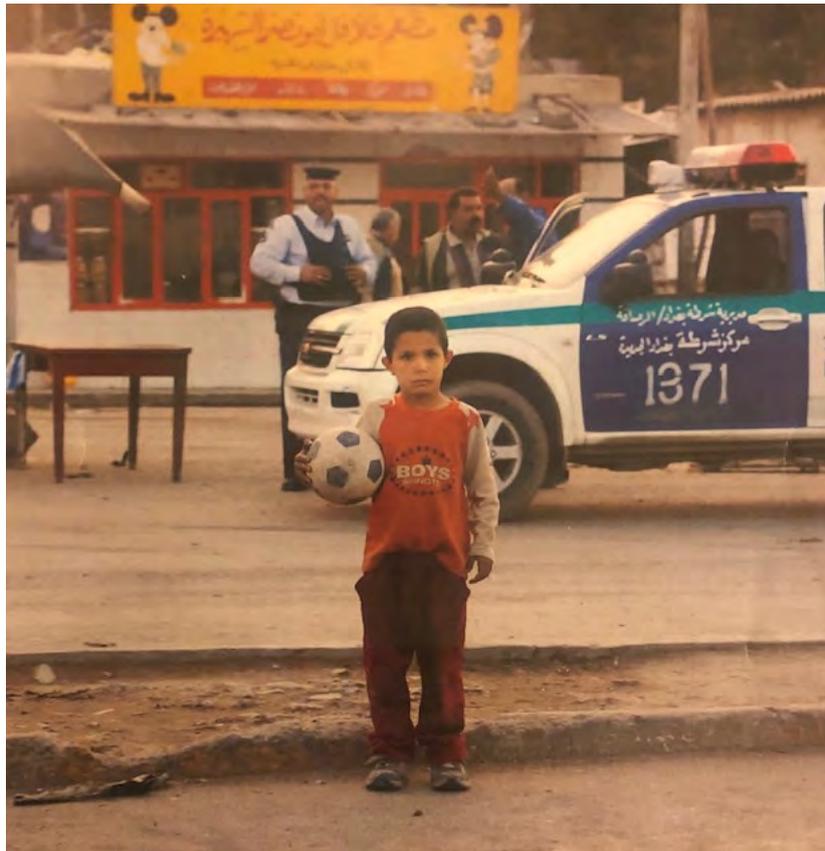
There weren't many Travellers in our school growing up, only my siblings. And just kind of thinking there like, we were discriminated against. No one would share or play with us. I know it sounds kind of corny now, and it's even still happening today. We used to do Irish dancing where you pair up and no one wanted to pair with us. Didn't want to hold your hand...and all that kind of stuff, so I faced discrimination in school. So I suppose that's me then [in this picture], like as if I was just standing there and watching everyone else get on with stuff, and getting involved in stuff.



This is the nice experience for my little boy. He was in a class with no other Traveller children. But now he's in a class with a few other Traveller children and I think he prefers it. He has friends. My little boy, when he was younger, he was ashamed. Not ashamed, but he'd be saying that in all the books and things, they'd be saying you live in a semi-detached house or this or that.

He was kind of ashamed to say that he lived in a caravan and things like that because he was the only member of the Travelling community in his class... They use that as normality like - to have a house, do you know?...so he was kind of embarrassed to say that he lives in a caravan. ...but now that there is a few more Travellers in his class, he's a lot more open about things. And that's a good experience for him, to have someone else in a class that he can kind of share...whereas if he didn't have that in the class, you could imagine he would be still embarrassed to talk upso I think now that he does, he feels more comfortable ...especially when he's so young. He's only seven..





I picked this picture of the young fella playing ball, the guards behind him. That's the way we were reared up years ago because the Guards gave the Travelling people a very hard time. When I went to school, you tried to keep yourself the best you could because you got the Guards down to give your mother and father a hard time. I picked up the football at an early age down the country and I got from first to fourth class which was very good but the teacher who had fifth and sixth, the master at that time, if you got something wrong in science you'd go home with the two hands caned and you wouldn't be able to do anything until the next Monday morning.

The happiest time I had in school was when it was football and I played because I was never good at school because when I went to fifth class I didn't want to be at school no more but you couldn't report at that time, your mother and father couldn't go down and have an argument and complain with the clergy, the teachers and the guards, you'd never get nowhere with them.

I'm sorry I didn't do a lot more at school because if a person can stay at school and do their Leaving Cert there's an opportunity to go into an apprenticeship whether it's an electrician, or plumber or whatever you want. The lads now have a much better time, there's a lot of settled people working with Travellers, I think that has broke a lot of barriers for Travellers. There's a lot of Travellers causing problems for themselves, the lads here have great opportunities. I think if some of those at least get the best Junior Cert they can they can go on to another level of education outside of school that can lead them on to get a job but they should at least stay at school until they get the Junior Cert and make it the best they can.



245 Sepang, Malaysia

246 [anonim] Lake Koronia, Greece

I picked this picture because I think it kind of made me think back about when I was put into situations in school in groups of settled people by myself.

That's how I felt. Isolated and not confident, I didn't want to participate basically.



Serpong, Indonesia

I chose that because I loved school. I left school at 11 years of age because at that time you had to leave school to help your mother. But I loved everything about school and about learning and I couldn't stay in it.

I wanted the children to have that experience. They used to come home and have murders. But I think engagement for me was a big one and maybe in the end, it paid off because the whole eight of them did their Junior Cert and four of them done their Leaving Certificate, so for me, I suppose I fulfilled my role and they can do what they want to do with that after, but while they were in my care, I just thought I done as good as I could really. As a Traveller you would have to push that bit further the whole time.

I picked this picture because it reminded me of a good experience that I had with the school, which is very rare. So in this photograph you have a few different cultures there. They seem to be respecting each other and they seem to be mindful of one another's culture. Recently I had a parent teacher meeting for my son and he was after telling me on a few occasions that he felt bad in the class because a few of the children were making comments about Travellers and a few of the children said they didn't want to play with him because he was a Traveller.

So basically I went up [to the school] and I was all guns blazing and when I went in, the teacher couldn't apologise enough and she said that she was completely unaware of it and she was very helpful and very supportive and she offered to even consult with my boy first and see if he wanted to talk and if he wanted to celebrate anything, about the good things that he likes about his culture and talk about his culture. So that was a good experience.



Then you have your man here. He seems to be a rich man looking down at this waiter. He's looking down at her, kind of judgmental and he's looking under his nose at her. So that would be kind of bad experiences I would have had in school with principals and the older teachers who I think are a lot more old-fashioned. The younger teachers seem to be a little bit respectful of diversity and different cultures, but I think the older teachers can be terrible.

.....the younger teachers, they care a bit more. They're gentle and they're probably taught more in their training too to be respectful of different cultures. They're quite friendly....But the older teachers are just discipline. They're set in their old ways, and they will have the presumption that Traveller children are going to be awkward....and they were probably taught this in their training that you're going to see difficulties with Traveller children, and that they needed to be taught with more discipline than the settled children..



"I feel like I've been fighting all my life because of who I am and I don't want to see my child go through the same thing."



The reason I chose this picture, is that I've a boy six years old and he's in primary school. And every day, they come out in a line. They call it 'an lína'. It's where children hold hands, and some days, he comes back home, he'd be very upset and he's only six years old, saying that the child beside him didn't want to hold his hand. So I'd ask him, 'Why did she not want to hold your hand?' And he'd just look at me. The child wouldn't have any answers.

So I went up to the school one day and I spoke to the teacher about it, and she said that that was up to the child itself that was walking out with him if she wanted to hold hands with him or not. So I asked her would she put my child in a different line. So she did and he made a friend.

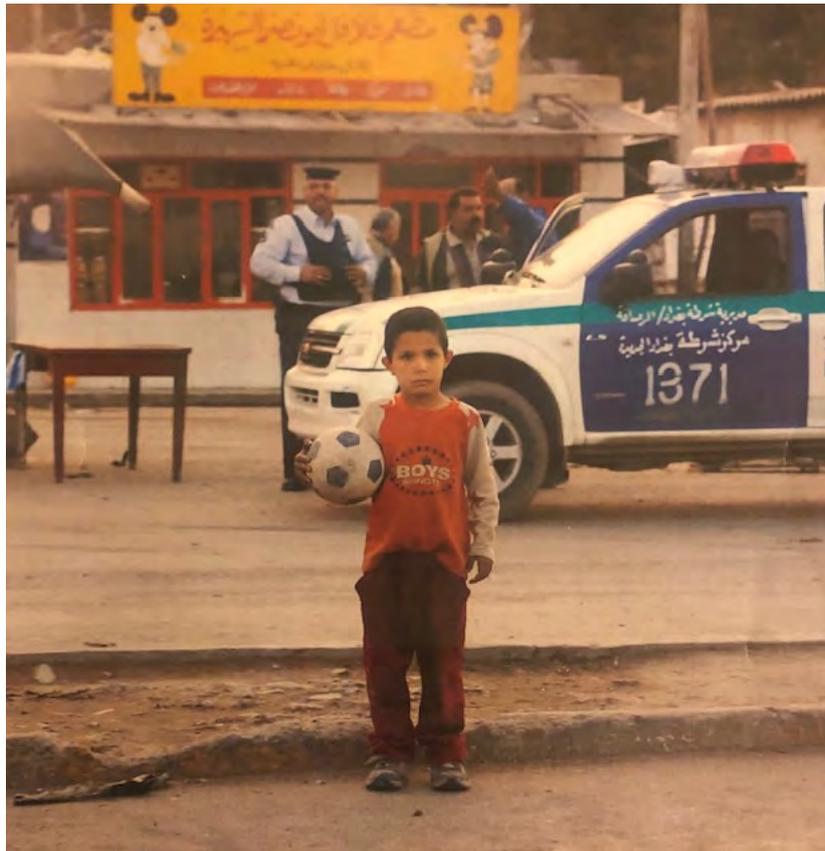
It hurt me an awful lot knowing that a child of six years of age was coming out in his lína every day and the settled child beside my child wouldn't hold hands with my child because he was a Traveller.



I suppose it's how I see my son when he was first at school. He's 12 and he's transitioning [to secondary], but I kind of see now the name-calling and he's reacting to it and he's the one getting in trouble with it. And I would see myself like that, people called me names as a child. I reacted. I was a trouble-maker, do you know?. So I kind of see that and that worry is there....I see that happening with him. I see that he's reacting up to it and I've been getting phone calls from the school and stuff. Stuff that wasn't happening before.

.....last year, his teacher, she gave like a scenario of safety at home – she said don't open a door to Travellers..... he was really angry, so he was like, 'Why didn't she say that about settled people? Why is it about Travellers?' And a month later, she gave an example about Roma people begging, coming to Ireland to beg. So they're two instances I had to go into the school over.

I have a worry now transitioning into secondary because I've seen him. He's reacting. He's getting angry about little things, whereas before, it didn't affect him as much. I just kind of feel like I've been fighting all my life because of who I am and I don't want to see my child go through the same thing.



I picked this photo because it reminded me of my little boy - he's not very confident and he's kind of emotional.....right now he's ok in school, but I don't want him to go through the same experience I did because I think he'd take it very bad because he is so sensitive.

My experience was there was no talking about Traveller's culture. I think it was kind of we were trying to hide it if anything in school that we were Travellers and when they [settled students] went talking about their holidays and talking about their homes, it was like you would actually probably lie and pretend you did this and pretend you did that instead of being comfortable.

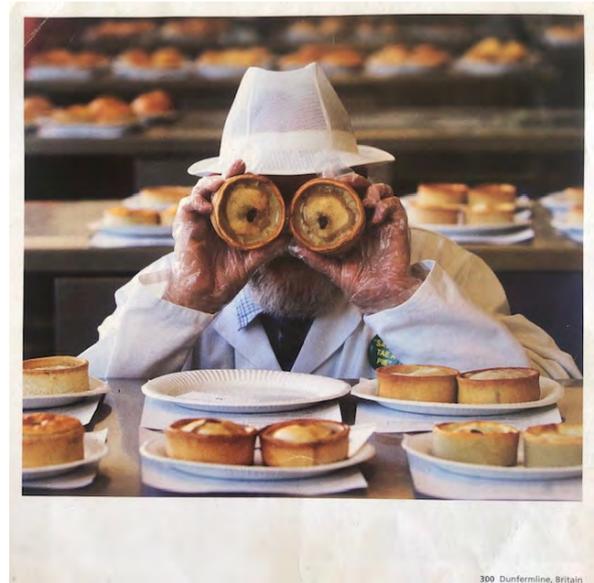
So I think the children should be more comfortable in talking about it and especially at a young age anyway, making it normal to talk about it for them and feel comfortable. It should be acknowledged. I think that's probably what happened with our generation as we were kind of too ashamed to talk about it and then we just stood back. When you don't acknowledge something, it kind of becomes the elephant in the room. If it's acknowledged and talked about, it makes it normal.



I picked this picture because it feels like in school... the back is turned to you. You're just there alone and when there are incidents of discrimination in school and when you're being discriminated against...they're just telling you shut up. They're just pushing you aside. We all had these experiences in different ways.

My own son was accused of taking another boy's jacket. Out of six boys, they all had the same jackets, but my son was pulled out of the class and accused of taking another boy's jacket – the boy had just left his jacket in another classroom. They didn't bother checking. They questioned my child. Where did he get his jacket? Where did he get the money for the jacket? When did he get the jacket? Did he take the other boy's jacket? And my child was telling the principal that that was his jacket.

The teacher was very good and supportive and had it out with the principal and said that child started in September with his own jacket. The principal then told me I was overreacting after completely shaming my child like that. I was overreacting.

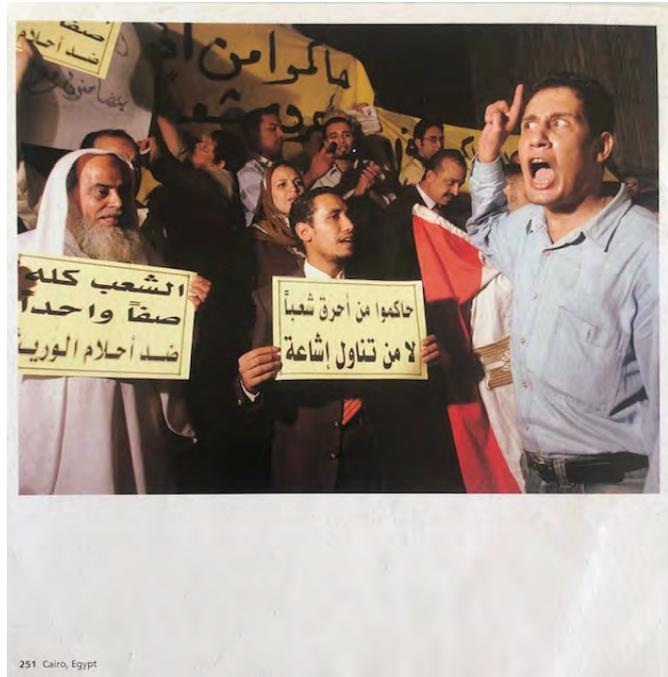


I had a daughter who was getting on ok in school. She had a lot of stress in school and art was the only thing that she did kind of click with in school. Then a teacher came along and he was being a bully in the art class. He pushed her out of art class.....that made my daughter see the system, the school system through a whole different lens, that they were bullying and they were picking on her and she did not like it.

She would not go back. That's it. Two bad experiences in school. And I had it myself growing up as well. I don't mind if my child leaves school at 15 because I know there's nothing happening there. Not that I don't mind. I'd love if something good was happening, yes, but I know there's nothing good happening. They might learn more from me or someone else. I'd love it if there was a proper system, but there's not.

I haven't a clue what's on the placards. God only knows what they're saying. But basically when I went to school, I was the only Traveller child in the class and I didn't have the confidence to speak up when I knew the answers ...so this just reminds me from day one when my three children went to primary school.... I drilled it into their head to be proud to be a Traveller, speak up if you know the answer and just be confident. So I don't really think that came from the school. It came from me, you know.

It is a bit different for my kids because there's a lot more Traveller kids in their classes, so it's kind of more easy-going to talk about being from the Travelling community. Now, my partner's not a Traveller, but I tell my children they've the best of both worlds. So they feel good about each side, rather than being in the middle and being confused....and I drill it into them as well because I do not want them to go through what I went through. I want them to know, if they know an answer, they can be just as good as anyone in the class. Their marks can be as high, if not higher, than anyone else in the class. So I think it was me that put the confidence into my kids about being a Traveller, a member of the Travelling community starting in school.



251 Cairo, Egypt



038 Washington, DC, United States

This one is just me trying my best to become a confident woman, to fight for not just my own children's rights, but every Traveller child's rights. Through education. [The teachers] don't treat them any differently, no, I'll be honest. I'd be wrong if I said that, the teachers are very good up there, but I do think, Traveller Culture Awareness Training (TCAT) or something should be involved in all the schools...I think that would bring the Travelling community that bit further on and it would also educate the rest of the kids that are members of the Travelling community about the Traveller culture. So I think that would be a good step.

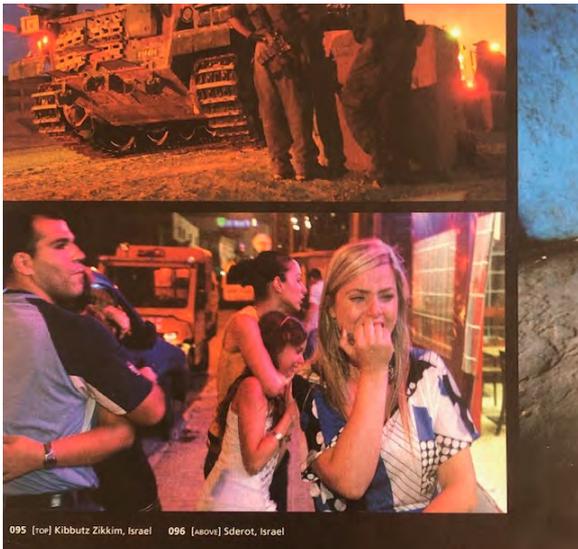
I want [schools] to do anti-racism training....because they think they know about the culture. They don't know the underlying issues, how children are feeling living on a halting site with no running water.



078 [top] Melbourne, Australia 079 [above] Meyerton, South

I chose this picture of Oprah... The reason, one of the reasons, well, I love her anyway, but I picked it because my daughter did her Leaving Cert last year. She started with six other Travellers, they all fell out of school one by one, and so then she didn't want to be there either. So six Travellers started in first year and by the time she got to sixth year, they were all gone. This period of time when she was on her own there, there were huge problems and for the first time in the 17 years, I found myself going up to the school about my daughter. So I said to one of the teachers as a suggestion, 'Look, have you ever thought about doing the yellow flag, you know, around diversity and that?' And she said, 'Yes, we did. We talked about it, but we realised we don't have enough diversity in the school'. So what she was talking about is People of Colour.

So the Irish education system, certainly this school, you know, said we don't have Black people, therefore we don't have diversity. So I said, 'Well, actually, you know, there's LGBTI people, there's Travellers there, there's probably children of one-parent families. There's loads of diversity'. I said, 'If you look for it, it's there, you know'. So then that didn't work and then I went to the principal. I had a meeting with the principal and I said to them, 'Look, what will help', I said, 'is if you try in some way to celebrate Traveller culture, acknowledge it in the schools'. And he said, 'Well, actually, we don't celebrate any culture in schools'. We said, 'Well, actually, you do. If you look around your walls, they're full of white settled culture. That's celebrating culture. If you have a picture of a white settled person there that's achieved something, that's a celebration of that culture'. But he couldn't see it.



This one here, you can see the top part there is I'd say it's war or something because there's a tank and soldiers and stuff. But anyway, me putting my children to school in the morning, like every other parent, it was a battle to get them to school, but I got up, I put them to school.



And when they'd be gone, this is how I feel. At peace. Really calm. Sit down, have my cup of tea, sit down, have a grand bit of peace and again, I might get a phone call or whatever, come to the school, and that's how I felt. That was the battle on again, do you know what I mean?, so it was a constant battle, to be honest with you. Four of them all left school at an early age.

The experiences in school were all negative. It was never any good. ...my children were put on a reduced timetable. ...I'd be chasing them around the field in front of all the neighbours, putting them into the motor, dropping them back up and I'd be no sooner landed down home and they'd be back in on top of me again. And there were never any consequences like. There was never... No one ever came and no one ever wanted to know, well, why aren't they in school? Or anything like that. It was just the schools, that's what they did and they got away with it and it's still going on to this day. It's no different. My youngest is out of school now. She's out of school since she was 16. Same thing, all negative.

I put them to school because I wanted them to have an education because my experience in school was very bad. So I wanted something different for them. I thought education, oh yes, get them educated, they'll get a good job. They'll have something. They'll have a better future. As far as I'm concerned, things are worse now than they ever were.



They [settled people] don't see us. They don't see us for who we are. All they are getting is a blurred version of us and so then obviously they are discriminating and sometimes it's genuinely not their fault because it's what they hear but it still doesn't make it any better for the people receiving it. If they were getting a better education about Travellers in school - which is obviously a good thing why the Traveller Education Bill needs to come in - people will learn about Traveller culture and history, they might get a small bit of a better view but that's only in secondary schools.

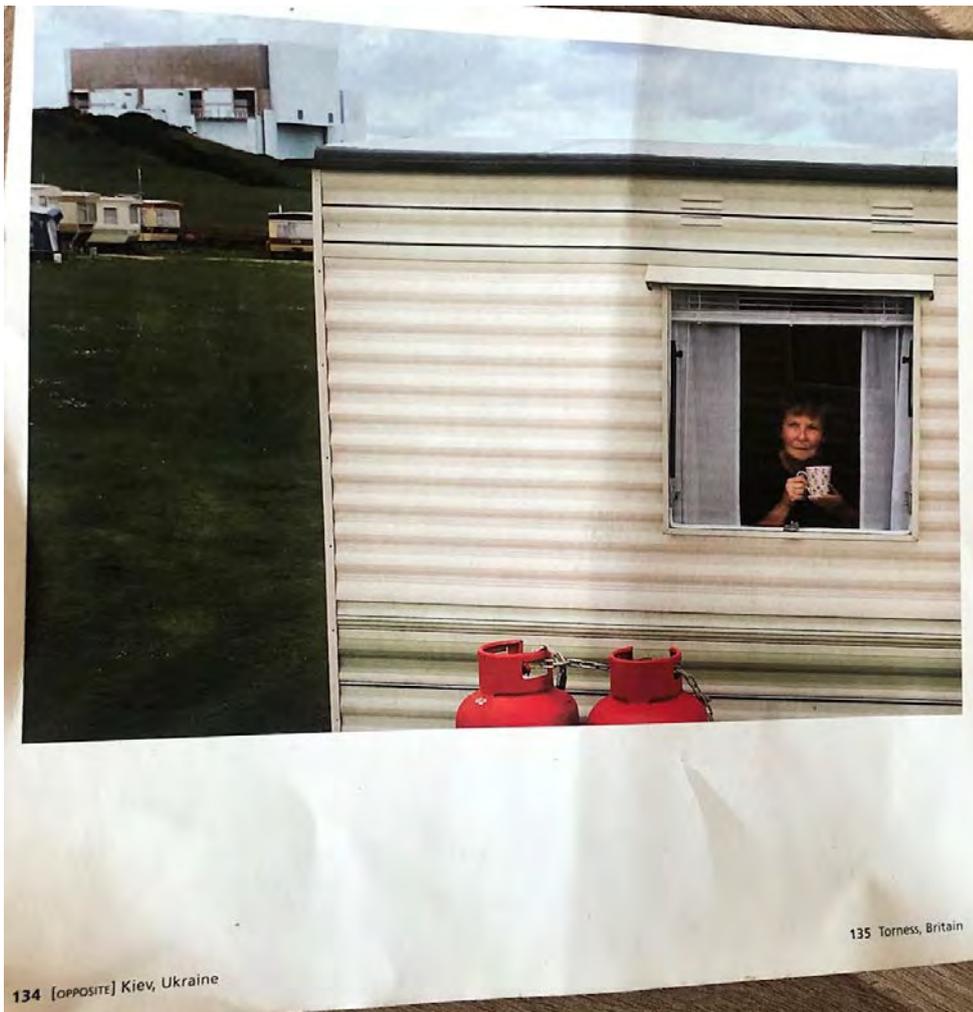
The teachers are getting clever about the way they are discriminating, they're doing things by saying you won't go to college, you're going to leave school at 16, you're going to get married, ignoring the children. This seems to be what's happening. When I was in school they were openly saying it, now they are more clever about it.



As a Traveller going into primary, secondary and trying to get work it's a barrier we're facing, you feel that way all the time. Every step you take forward you take three steps back. ...just by being a Traveller, discrimination, everything, work, schools, everything.

In the ideal world for a Traveller, which you would want for your children, you would live on your own on Traveller sites and homes, you'd walk into a job that you can work in without being discriminated against.

That's an ideal world where you don't have to be ashamed to say where you are coming from.



134 [OPPOSITE] Kiev, Ukraine

135 Terness, Britain

I live in a mobile home with no proper electricity and I think it's a bad experience for my kids to have to get up in the morning times [for school] in the winter when it's cold. If I had proper accommodation, it wouldn't be as hard. I'd say that would be the number one thing for me anyway.

I just find looking at her - what is out there for us? She's living in this in a field. There is nothing there for them. Just thinking what is the outcome for us? I've went to sites where you can't get in the gates with poles in the ground. They've no water, they've no toilets, no electric, no washing place so if you're in a small trailer freezed with the cold...I'm lucky I have a house, I'm blessed, I say that every day when I go around them sites and I come back and I'm blessed that I'm in a house.

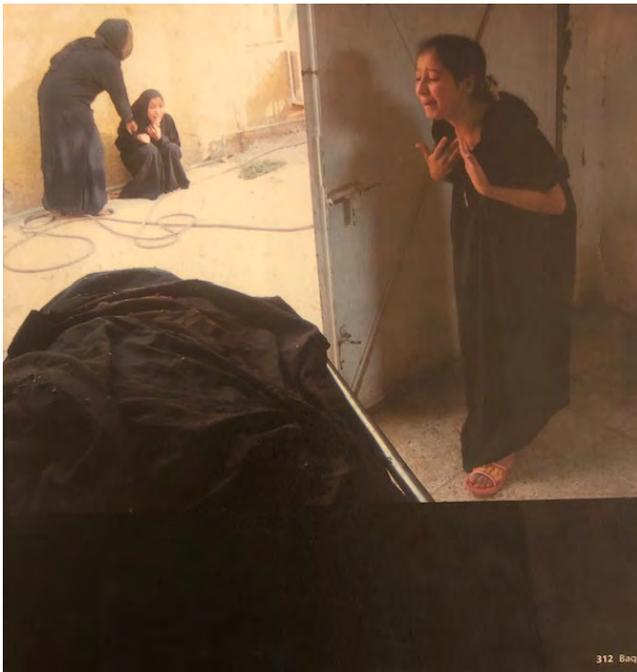
They're in small trailers and they could have three or four small children you could have to get one or two washed and fixed and put to school and it's hard with their children in school they mightn't have the price of a school jumper with the crest or books and you need to understand that there are sites out there in a very bad way.



I just felt that you are standing alone against a lot of things. With the Traveller children when you go into school they are standing alone because they are still getting taught the settled way. For me it's all settled, settled, that they still don't know that when they go out in the world the discrimination they will face and with my son right now he doesn't see any discrimination at all but he's going to be meeting other people who won't accept him. I want to try to explain to him that he's not going to be going out there to a lovely happy world.

I was with a teacher a couple of months ago when I was explaining about my son going into fifth year and he's all in his head that he's doing this and doing that, it's all great but you need to explain to him as well that when he goes out looking for work he cannot use his own address, the teacher is not explaining all this to him, I have to do that. I said [to the teacher] you're putting ideas into his head, building it up for this world out there that's not there. It's going to be a different world he heads out to.

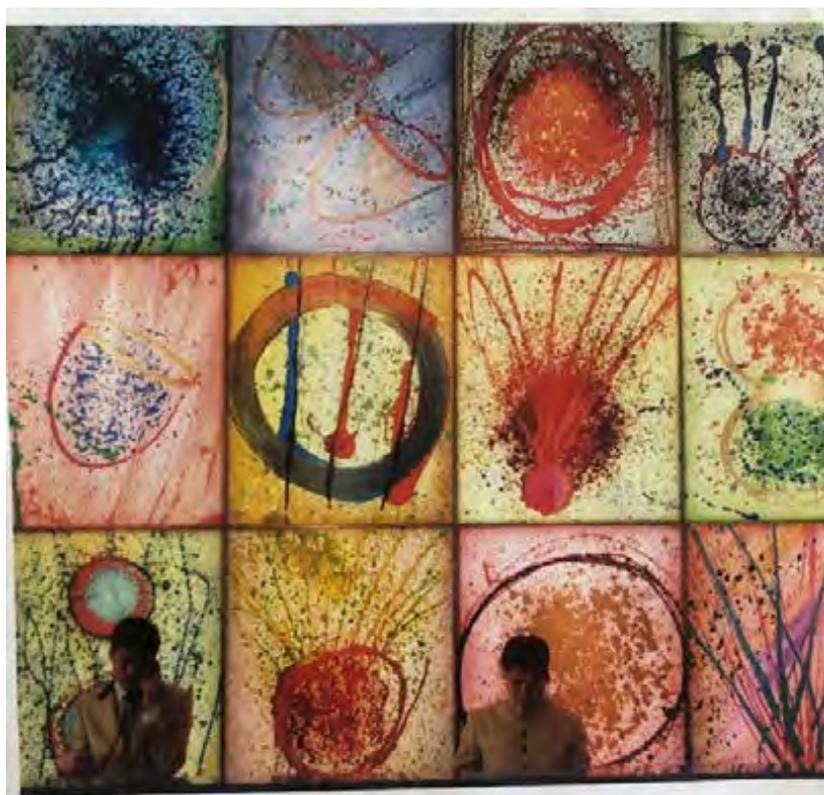
They're telling him he can do anything and everything and I still have to say that every job out there mightn't be for you. He maybe will have to hide that he's a Traveller in a job for a long time before he's accepted which my other son had to do. My son had to go in and work and didn't tell where he was from and then as he went along in a couple of years they knew he was a Traveller and he didn't care then.



This photograph shows how I felt going to school and what I was still putting up with my children. I felt like this going to school and throughout school. I do feel like my two youngest children are quite happy once they're in, but my oldest is still not happy. She just doesn't want to be there. She doesn't like it.she's going to secondary school in September. There's an issue every day, a different problem every day. She just doesn't want to be there. It's a sentence. It's a punishment. Like you hear children, 'I can't wait to be 15 to leave school. Please can I leave school?...I hate school. I hate my teacher. I hate it'....Once they get to the secondary school, that's where the battle begins really...Like it's a battle getting them through school.

And the low expectations then the teachers have in school. Like in the past, girls were often told sure you should be off married. Like there's girls about 15 years of age, and they don't do it now. I think you'd just be told to just be quiet. Keep your head down and get on with it. You can leave when you're 15. And they know as well, the Traveller boys are leaving school, and [schools] are doing nothing. They know that they're coming in late and that they're skipping out on classes. There's no follow-up to it.

I think as well when the Traveller children act out, the school think they're cheeky or stubborn, but it's not. It's that they're that anxious and they're that fearful of what's going on that they've no other choice than to act out to try and stop it. There's not the right support for you. They bring it out through behaviour then. It's interesting because even as an adult, being a Traveller, an adult Traveller, when you do confront someone about the way you're being treated, you're looked at as being aggressive. And that you were in their space. Like you're very aggressive. 'I'm not even going to engage with you now because I don't like your manner'. They'll use that, you know, how dare you like...question something....Why speak out? ... Why not just put up with the shit?



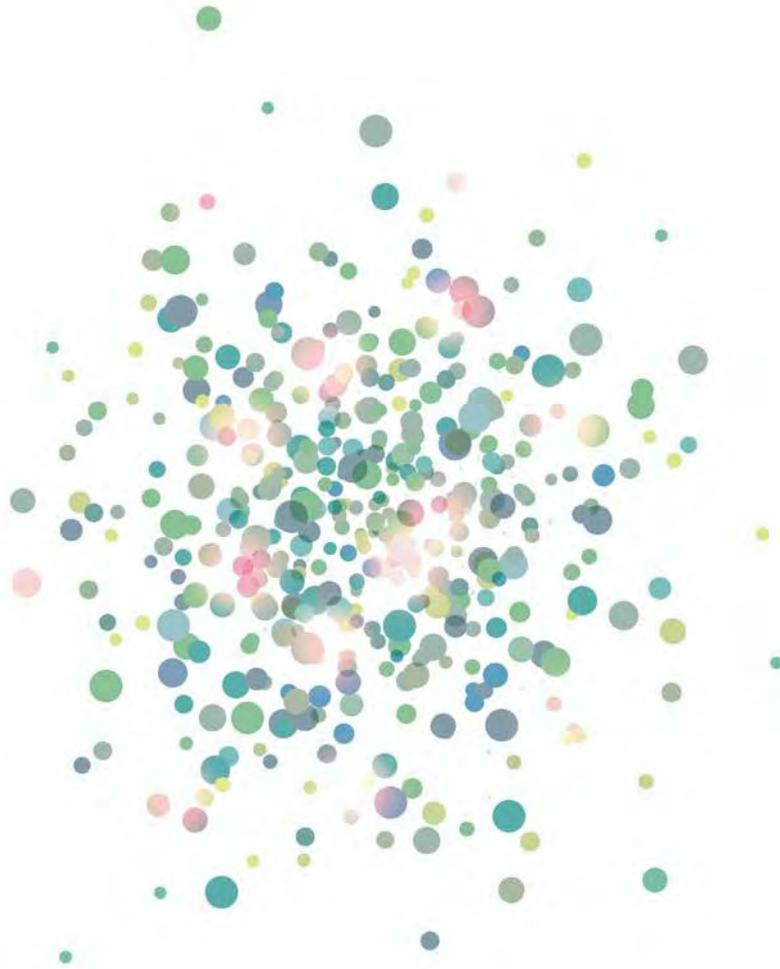
I've a 10-year-old son. There's not many Travellers in his school. So I always have the fear that he'd go through what I've gone through, but thank God, he's buzzing. He's getting on great.

I chose this picture because there seemed to be a lot going on. He's very popular in his class, thank God. He's fully aware of who he is. Again, he's a half a Traveller and half a settled person and he's fully aware of who he is. They all know he's a Traveller. He's very popular, which I'm very proud of. A few months ago, one of the women did a presentation in here about Traveller education and he was sick on the day. So I brought him to work with me and he sat in on the presentation. She mentioned about Traveller culture curriculum coming into the schools. So he was there listening to it and he was very interested in the presentation.

Anyway, he went to school the next day and came back and said, 'Mammy, I asked my teacher can we talk about Traveller culture and she said yes, after Christmas'. He's very open about who he is and I'm very proud of that. I'm not blowing my own trumpet, but he's a very intelligent child and the teachers are constantly pulling me aside telling me, because he'll be the messer as well in the class. They're constantly telling me that he could go places and that he's a very intelligent child and so I think it's totally different from what I got. And I'm delighted that things are going this way for them, do you know.

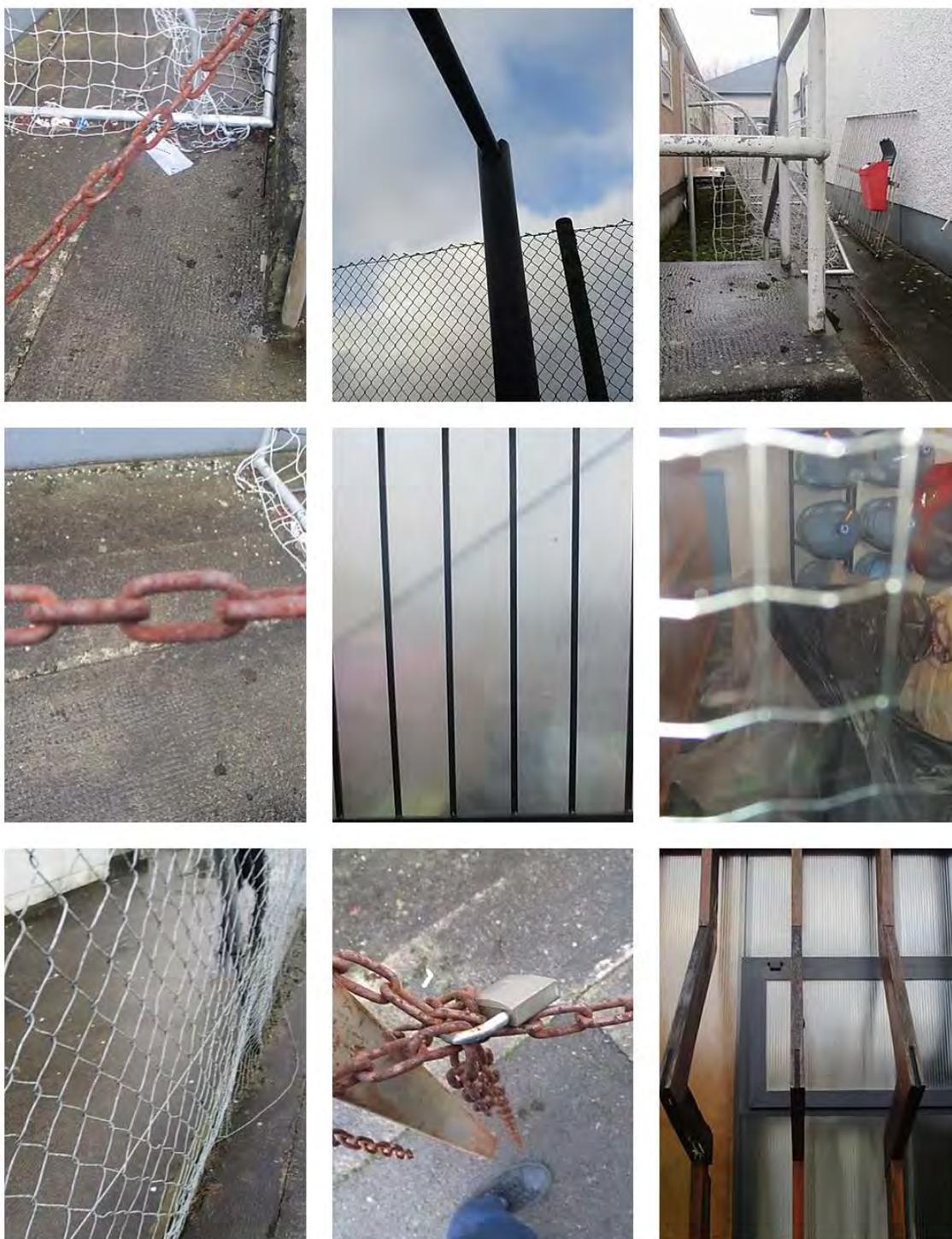
But still, I'm always asking how his day was, just in case. I have that fear in case he might say oh, someone called me a knacker today or someone wouldn't hold my hand today. But thank god he's not having that at the moment.

Students





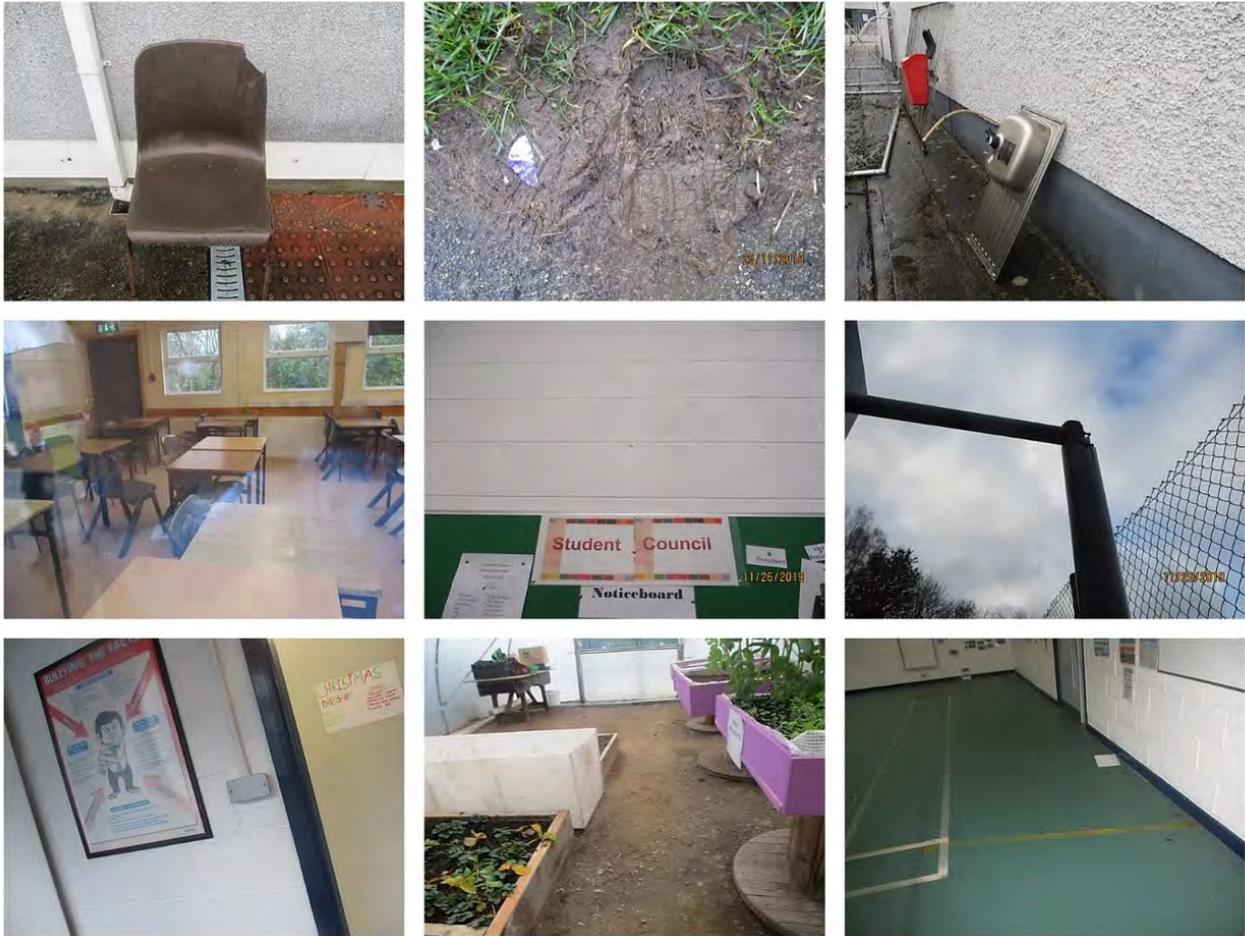
“....you feel like dirt, left
out, thrown out”



Every morning I wakes up, I feels sad going into school....you're held in, and we're not learning anything.

I tries me best and sometimes I just can't do it.....coming into secondary, everything might as well have been French.

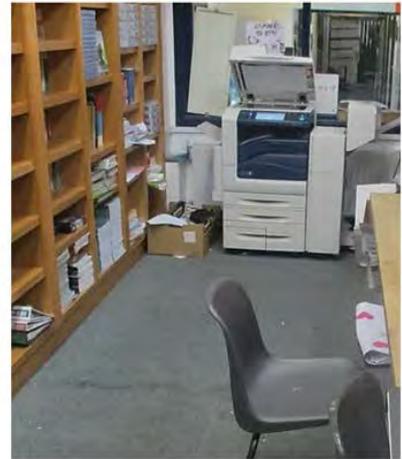
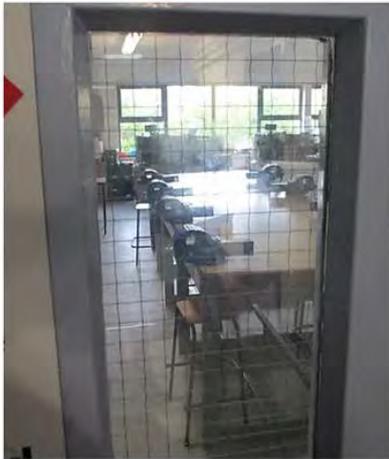
I didn't want to get into trouble.....my Mammy just bursts out crying now when I talk about [a certain teacher] ...I feel sad for me Mam...I feels threatened if I didn't go to school my mam will go to jail.



You have to....persuade [teachers] that you're good enough....I feel that [teachers] are able to help other people but not us

I'm all by myself, broken...others are together, but I have no-one.... people don't like us

Students chose images of an abandoned sink; a broken chair, a broken basket-ball hoop, and separated flower-beds to describe the feeling of being left-out, unwanted, separate within school. One student in the group took a photograph of her student council noticeboard as an example of where she feels students from the Travelling community are not welcome. Traveller students describe feeling 'outside' and mistrusted – and of feeling 'alone' when with a class full of students from the settled community.



In terms of the images that the students took to describe positive elements of school we have photographs of the wood-work classroom – which many of the boys in the study describe as their favourite class; and photographs of positive affirmational quotations which are on the walls in school.

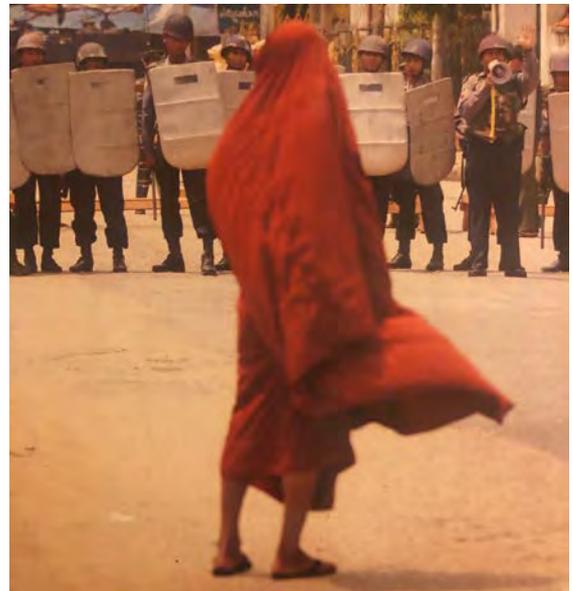
The photograph of the stairs is used by one student to describe going to his favourite class which is a resource class for children who need extra support, where he gets to be with a favourite teacher and with his friends from the Travelling community.



“[The course leader] said that what happens all the time is I accept Traveller girls into my group to learn and then they leave, they run away.so I said I’m not planning on running away, I just want to go in there to learn, to do something that I like and she kept saying no, there’s no space.”



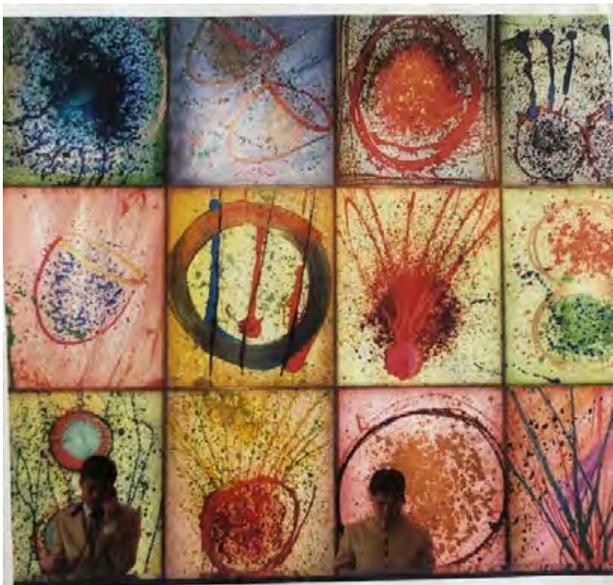
I picked this one because this is me every night before I go to school because I really don't want to go and especially days I have certain classes because I hate them so much. I get made to go to school by my mother and father.



This picture then is about people going to school who don't really have much friends and often you see get bullied in school. I didn't like the fact like that I didn't basically fit in and sometimes we wouldn't be left sit together at lunchtime even. Some of the teachers in the school I went to were nice, they were understanding but some other teachers couldn't understand that I needed someone to talk to.



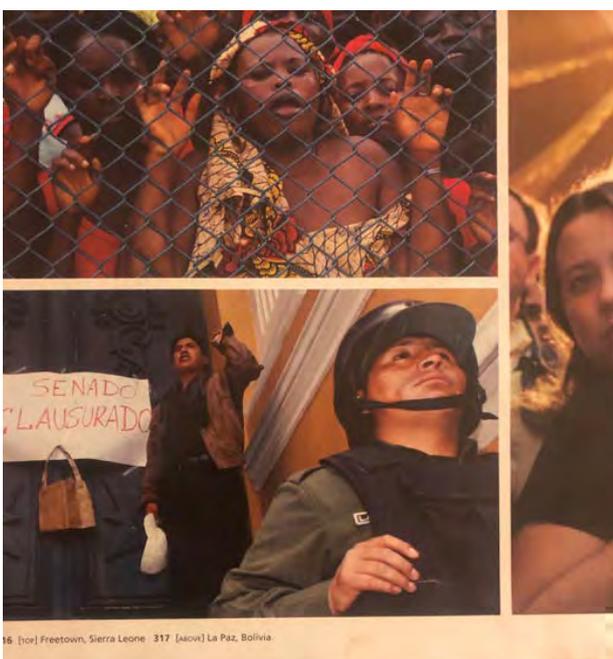
This reminds me of all of us. Like we all don't want to be here



I picked this photo because it reminded me of art class because I liked it. I liked hanging out with my friends. I hated school but I liked art and history and geography. I regret leaving in fifth year. I don't even know why I left. Two of my cousins stayed on and did brilliant and if I'd stayed on for an extra couple of months I could have done my Leaving Cert. They are in college now...I want to be a youth worker. I'm hoping to get into the course in that.



It would and I wouldn't want to become a guard. Where I could help people. I wouldn't because you could be putting your own life on the line. This also shows beauty, and music - I love music and maybe something with music. I can't do music in here, it's not a choice subject. For guards you obviously have to do training for that but you obviously won't do it in school.

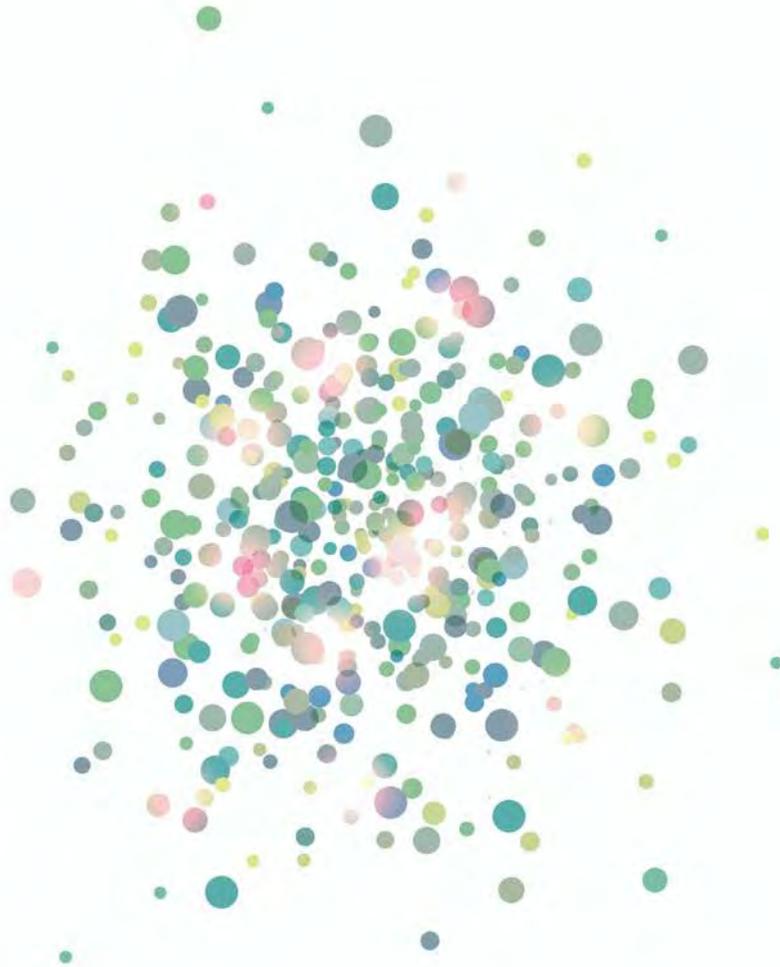


I picked this one because we are treated differently. Some teachers treat us differently, more stricter. We are treated differently. There are three Travellers in second year and we are put in a class on our own. We get easier work when we don't need it. You don't really learn in class, you just watch films.



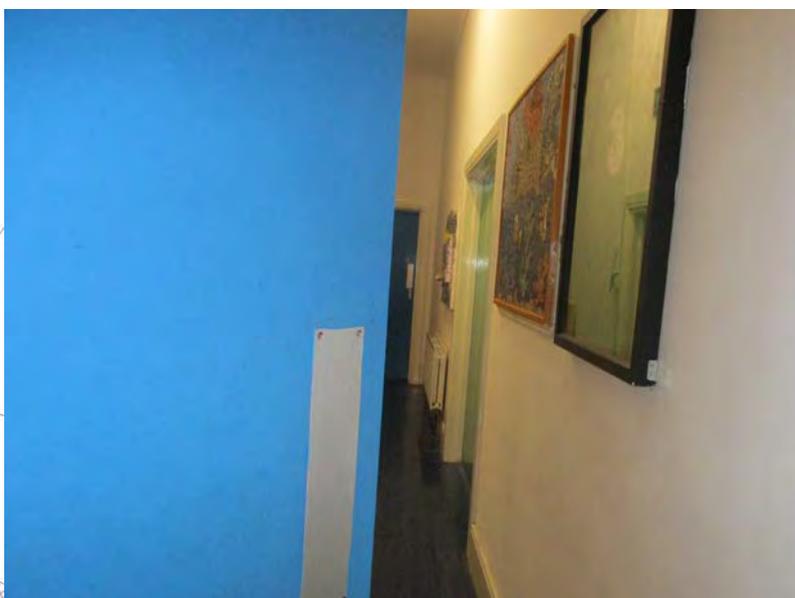
Voices from the Roma Community

Students

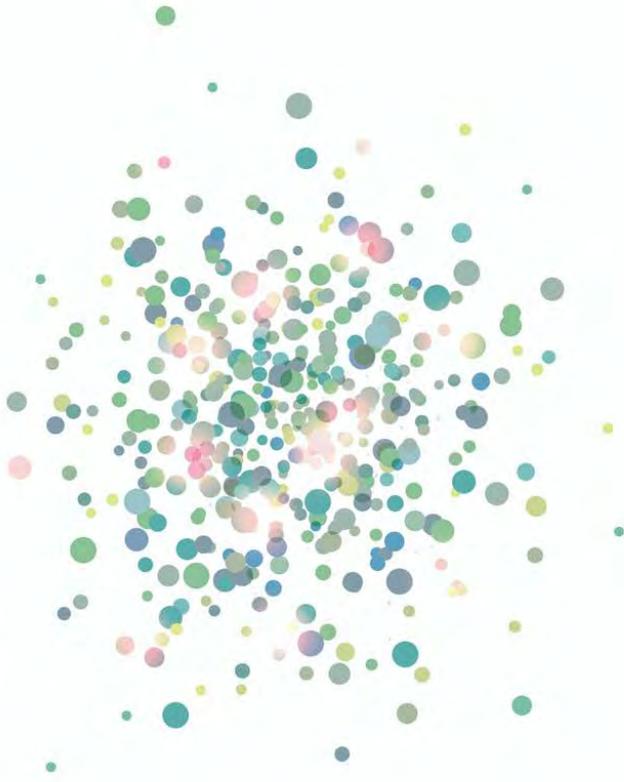




I took this picture because I think if you're going to go to [secondary] school for six whole years, and you don't bother to study, all your future plans are gone to the trash and you've no plan B! I want to be a teacher.



Education can open doors. Education can help you in your future



This is a barrier – there's a barrier between you and the school, language barriers and all that. If you're new and don't know the language, then it's very hard.



It's the good thing about school. It's the place where we go to get a good education for our future..



The bad thing about it is that there are many nationalities in our school and they are judged by their colour and their religion and nationality. There are many girls in our school, they are not all Irish, there are Muslims and other girls make fun of them because of the Hijab they wear like they make fun of them that they wear it to school and you can just see the tears in their eyes and I feel so sad for them. And we are trying to talk to them and trying to be friends with them because we are not Irish either so we know how they feel because when we came here the first time, we felt the same thing because they were making fun of us as well. Now we are good friends with all of them. Since we came in secondary school, first year they used to judge us but now it's different. They make fun of the new nationalities now



I would like an office job, working with computers, so I have to do two years of a PLC course. I also like woodwork and art and English.The bad side [of school] is sometimes you feel lonely."



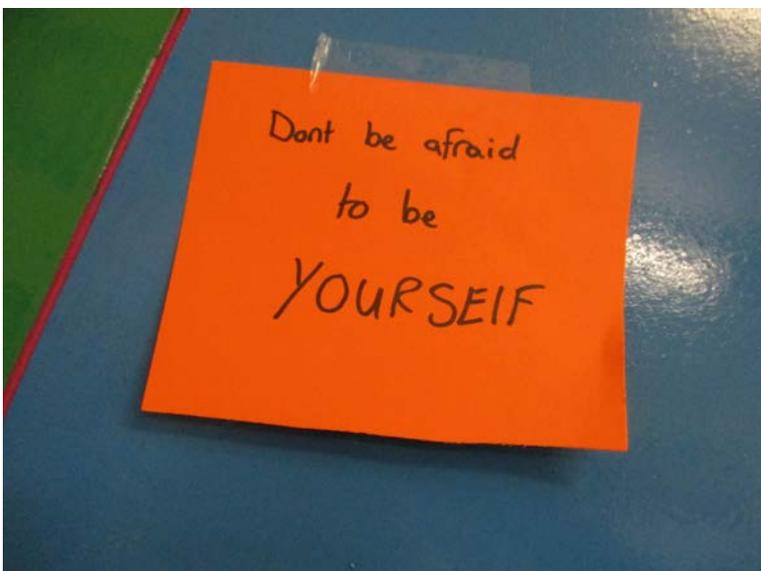
“I'm proud to be part of the Roma community. Don't be afraid to be yourself. Why would you be afraid to be yourself? Even if someone tells you that you're different, you're different in own way, in your own thing. That makes me proud – to be myself.”



I'm proud to be part of the Roma community and that shows who I am. We have an intercultural day once a year and we get to talk about it then. It's nice to show people who you are.



Stand up for yourself. Even if you get bullied. Don't walk away. Stand up for yourself.



Don't be afraid to be yourself. Why would you be afraid to be yourself? Even if someone tells you that you're different, you're different in own way, in your own thing. That makes me proud – to be myself.



Voices from the School Community



"So to us as an educator, it's not really what we can do. Society within their culture has to change somewhat as well."



I remember meeting one student when he was in sixth year, start of sixth year, and he was talking about going to the army. He was real bright and bushy tailed. By Christmas, early January, the chap was different. The life was drained out of him. And I said, 'What's wrong with you like?' And he wouldn't really open up. I said, 'Well, what are you planning on doing after the Leaving Cert?' 'Ah, I'll be married, sir, in two years' time and I'll be working with my father'.

But the purpose of this picture is I'd see your man all cuts and bruises and the family, that family, they're trying to get away from the norm, but it's their culture is bringing them back in. So even with all cuts and bruises, trying to burst your way through it is a problem too. They'd bring you back in.....The solution for that unfortunately doesn't lie with us. Because it's within their culture that they're being brought back into what the others perceive the way they should be, whereas the other side of it is they actually want a better life for their children. I would feel they genuinely do, but they don't want to be reprimanded for the way they're trying to raise their children as well. So to us as an educator, it's not really what we can do. Society within their culture has to change somewhat as well.



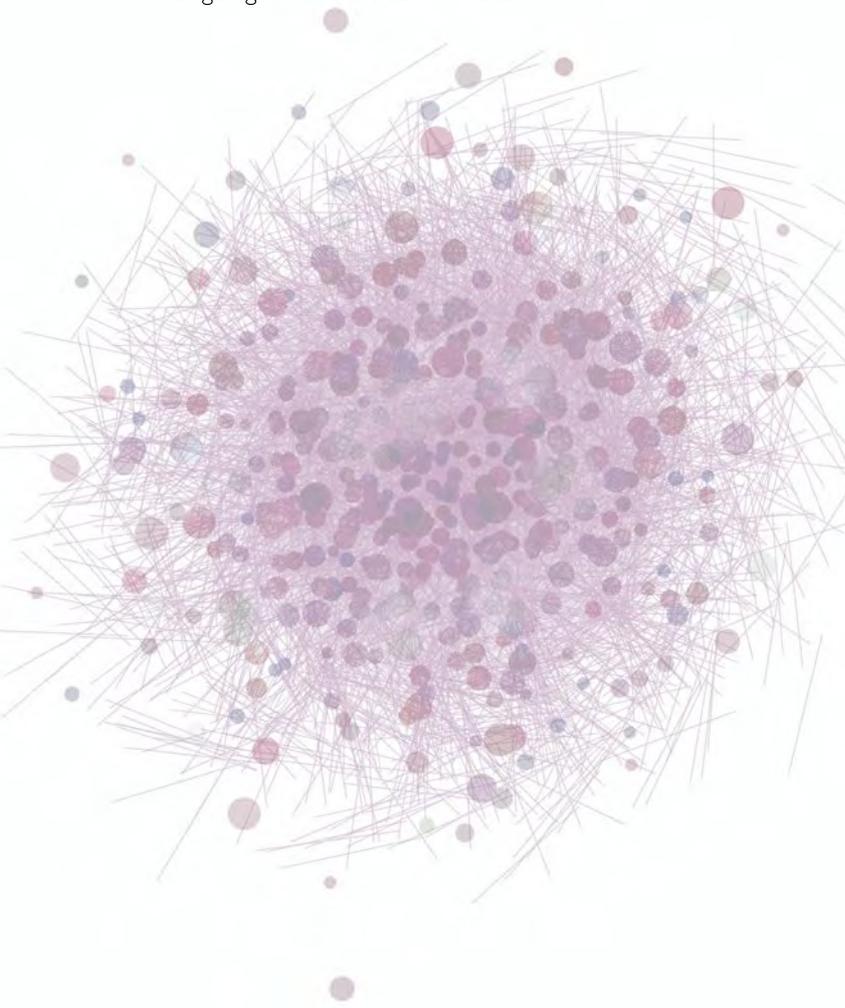
From my experience in the past year, I've picked this one for the home. No matter what we do in school and what interventions we put in place, the home is where it all stems from ...I've had some success in the past year with kids and the ones I've had success with, I have had parental support.

The ones that haven't been so successful, I don't have that full parental support and I think unless we can get the parents fully on board, no matter what we do in school, it's not going to have the same effect.



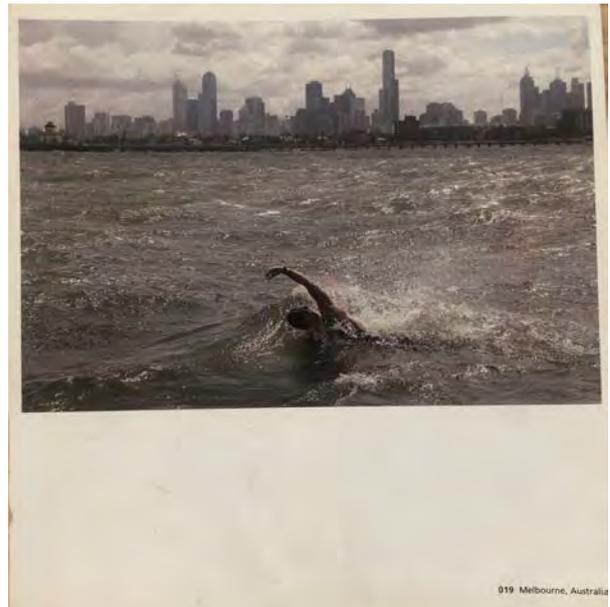
The trucks are all lined up and at the top everything is running in line – we'd have quite a few students from the Travelling community who do go straight onto Leaving Cert and who do very well, very focused, we'd have some very high achievers...but then you'd have the crew that don't want to be there, they just don't want to be there no matter what. When they come in in first year they tell you straight away 'I'm not going to be here after 16'...and once you get to half way through second year they are already preparing to leave the place...and no matter what you can do at that point it won't work, so they are the trucks that are perpendicular to the rest. What we find at that point is that it's very difficult to get them to change their mentality. Where the change comes I don't know, because the day they come in in first year they'll announce it to you that they'll do the Junior Cert and that's it...and then even to get to Junior Cert is a challenge, because once they are 15 I find they are saying they are too big for here.

...It's family, if the family are supportive. I've never actually met a family that aren't supportive when they come in for a meeting etc, but there are those families that really value education and they want to drive their child on. Now some of those families, you might find a boy there that will still say he's going at Junior Cert and that might be cultural, I don't know. Certainly there are families there that would support it all the way and at the moment we'd have four in the senior cycle between fifth and Leaving Cert, and I know that they are going to do well – they'll go on to some form of third level...and some of them will be in NUIG.





My first picture is a family, happy faces. There's a huge sense of belonging once they come in and they feel very much part of the school. It's all happy as Larry, we're all inclusive, there's no difference in anybody from whatever background. First year it's perfect. Second year fine, getting near the end of second year they probably won't do Christmas tests [there's about three or four girls from the Travelling community in each year] ...so second year they might miss the Christmas test and then they might miss the summer tests...and then coming into third year we would find a lot of them are looking at 16 [as a leaving point] ...so it depends when their 16th birthday falls then. For some of them it will be mid-third year, gone...I am full of optimism for my four girls currently in fifth year, but they haven't hit 16 yet, and I've already lost one this week who's 16.



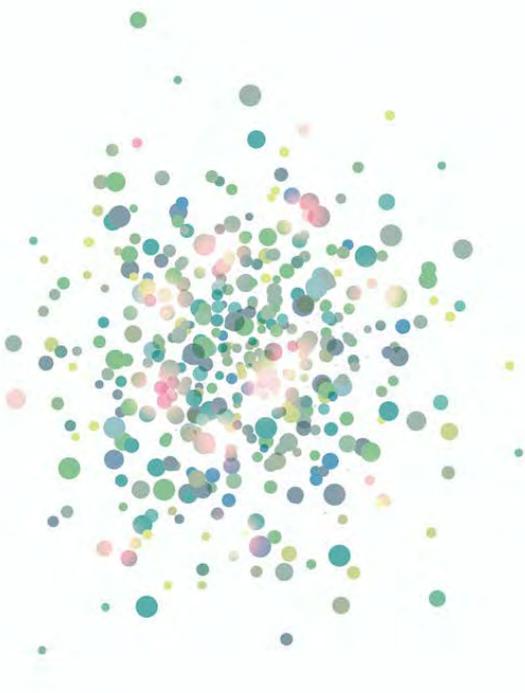
The second picture I've chosen is swimming against the tide. I've had plenty of conversations with families and with the girls themselves...Marriage is huge, it's a big thing that I can't do anything about. There are less girls who want to be married at 16 but there are a few dads I've spoken to over the past few years and they don't want the girls to be in school to senior cycle. They probably see the girls to be married, even if the girls don't see themselves to be married. I just find, that 16 thing is just a killer for me...because they're getting on, everyone's getting on together, they are included...it's the 16 thing. Youthreach is a big problem for us as well because you get paid at Youthreach so there are some families who will all go to Youthreach for senior cycle. At Youthreach they might go on to do the Leaving Cert Applied (LCA), the bus picks them up from home and they get an allowance for it. Obviously that's more tempting, we only do the Leaving Cert Established, which is unfortunate because the LCA would have been better ...but you couldn't run a programme without numbers and the DES took away the co-ordinator of the LCA in our schoolswe had a reduced pupil-teacher ratio for LCA and they took that from us as well so I'm fighting against Youthreach the whole time and I can't blame them.

My other big problem is that a lot of the girls aren't allowed to get involved in extra-curricular activities that take place after school because there might be no way home afterwards, and they're maybe not allowed to walk home when it's dark, and that's a huge part of school life – it brings a lot of joy, and a sense of belonging and they miss that bit then. Or they might not be allowed to go on a trip – even though the school would help out in any way.



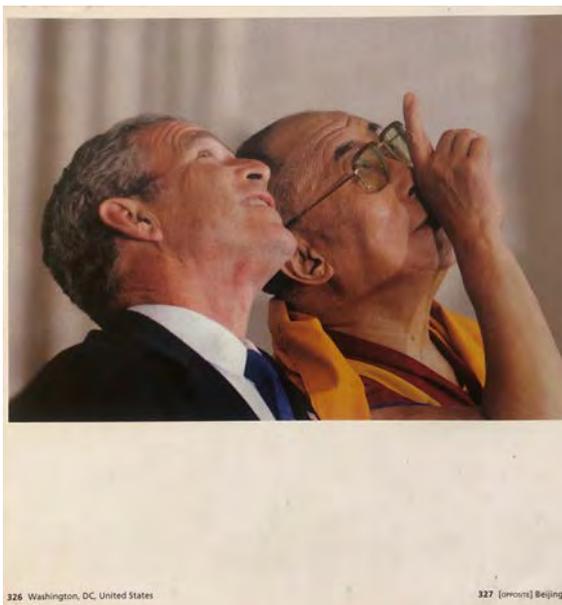
In terms of the experience in primary school, I picked this picture of the young boy running enthusiastically. School is kind of the good thing - all our children in general, particularly in the primary school, are very enthusiastic about school.

We bend over backwards to make sure that everybody is included. We have the school uniform, which makes everyone the same and I teach in a brilliant DEIS school and any stranger could walk into any of our classrooms in our school and they wouldn't be able to pick out who were the Travellers and who weren't. Everybody is working. Everybody is included. So that's working very well.



It was the neon top that jumped out at me here, whereas in school everyone is totally included, totally involved, totally the same as everybody else, but then when it comes to outside of school, it's the culture then again. When you meet the girls when they're out and about, they're in their cropped tops and their cropped minis and their neons. We have our confirmation and our communion where we are including everyone, but yet our Travellers, they stand out a mile when it comes to this, even though we're working so hard for everyone to be included and they themselves want to be included.....it's when they're out of the school environment, that suddenly they stand out, even to the kids in their class who wouldn't have taken a bit of notice of them.....We're fighting so hard to include everyone and we're always very, very conscious of our responsibility in including them. Now, it's not difficult in our schools and particularly in our primary schools. It's not difficult because, you know, all the children are fantastic. But then it's ruined for them, suddenly when they stand out dressed like this.

They're all enthusiastic and when you meet them at the end of sixth class and they're doing their transition, [to post-primary] oh, they're all going to schools. They're all going to be doctors and nurses and teachers and vets and all, which is fantastic. But then it all changes. They reach puberty.

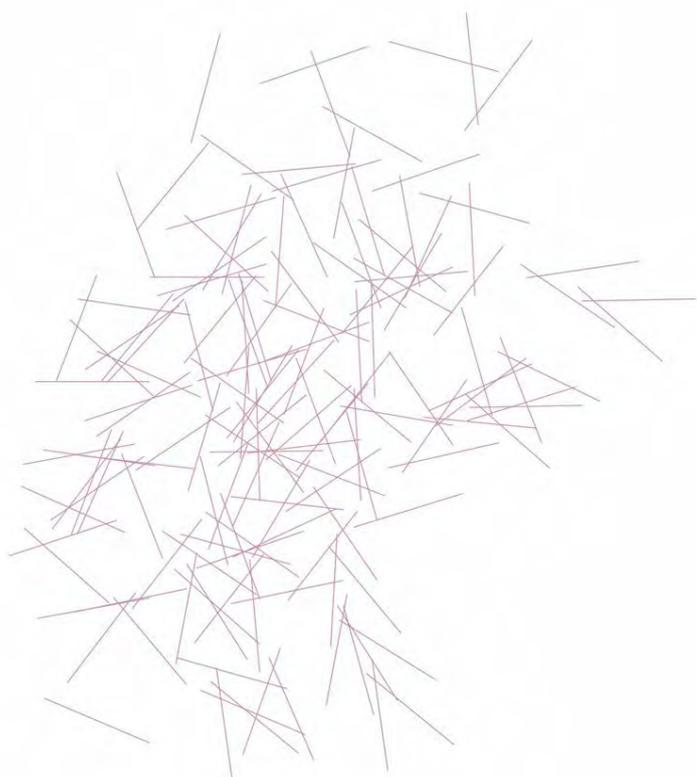


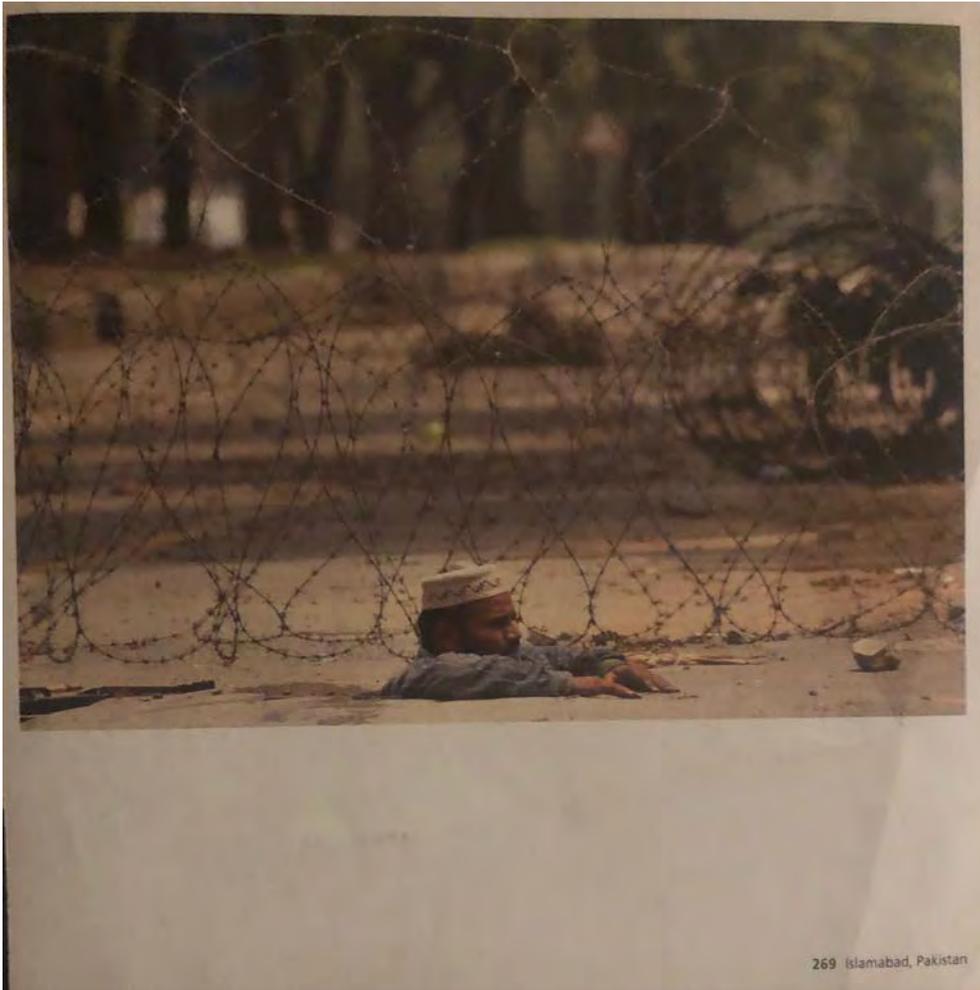
I suppose the positive picture that I took was that we're all the same, we're looking up and we're hoping, you know, hoping for the best, that we can move on and I suppose that in itself for the people of [the area], for the community...we're very fortunate that we're all here because we care and we want to see NTRIS working, to give us the proper supports that in 10 years, we're not going to be in the same situation.



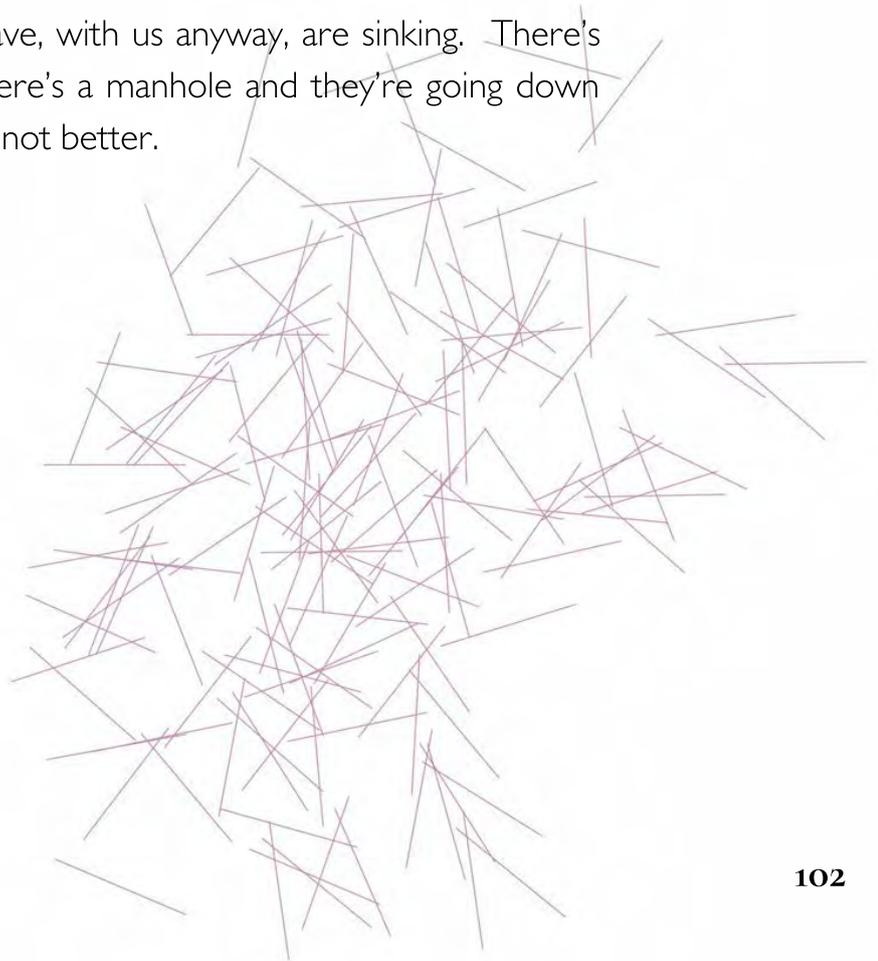
I think the negative - I just thought of the separation here. We're all in our little units in our little classrooms doing the same thing. You know, my hope for this project is that there'd be more inclusion between the childcare services in the area and the primary schools. Now, in fairness, the links between primary and secondary always have been great and they'll continue to grow during this project, but the missing link I think, is preschool.

I think the missing piece to this picture, is from the preschool to schools, it's so segregated. We should have more liaising with the childcare staff and all of that. Even bringing them from the preschool setting to the mainstream setting more often, instead of having them segregated.





I think the children we have, with us anyway, are sinking. There's no doubt about that. There's a manhole and they're going down and it's just getting worse, not better.



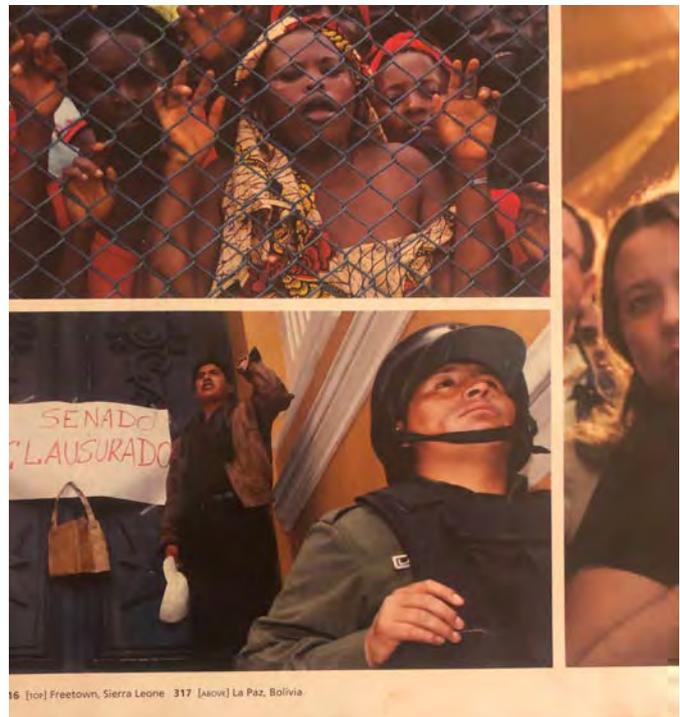


61 [top] Ankara, Turkey 162 [above] Istanbul, Turkey

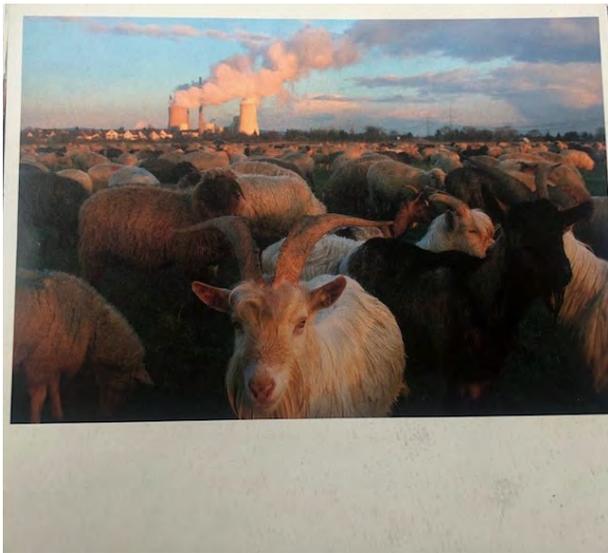
I think the top picture here symbolises the Department of Education, and Pavee Point. Sorry, this is the way now - highway or byway. And I think the Travellers are just telling us no, thanks. Not having it. This is our way.

If education was a business and we were trying to get customers, clients in the door, we definitely wouldn't have any Traveller children. We sell nothing that they need. There's no product in our school that a Traveller family would come in and want. You know, rules and resources stop our ability to innovate. There's not really room for a school to radically innovate. I contacted the Department a few years ago to see was there anything we could do for the Travellers and they said, 'Well, you've the Junior Cert, you've the JCSP programme, you've Leaving Cert, LCVP and Leaving Cert Applied. That's your lot'. You pick whichever one is most suitable from that.

I've had several children refer to school as a prison. And I suppose just when I saw the wirewe have some Traveller children who are excellent and we have some who come to school with the sole intentions of disrupting class so that they'll be sent home as quickly as possible. I suppose when you're caged or if you're in a place you don't want to be, there's very often frustration. I see a lot of frustration with parents, with students, with teachers.



16 [top] Freetown, Sierra Leone 317 [above] La Paz, Bolivia



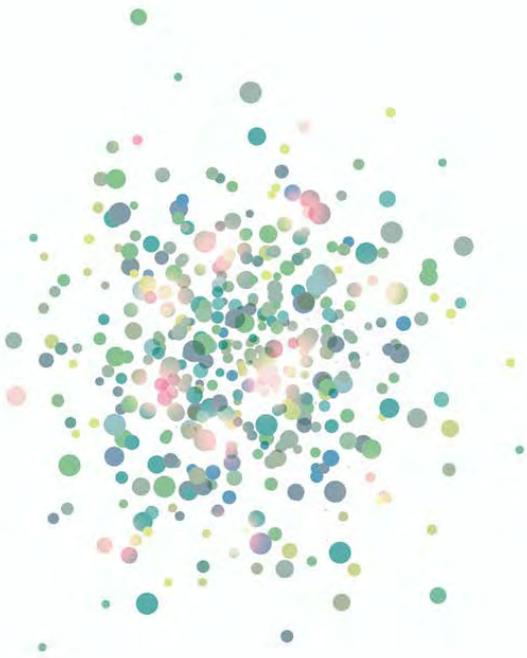
We kind of emphasise everyone being individuals. It's great to be individual and develop your own personality and yet we want them to follow our herd. I think schools are full of kids because most of us are part of a herd. Like really, it suits 20% of the population, our current system, the top 20% because it's an academic system. There's 80% of kids not being catered for.

I've a son myself that hates school, and I'm like well, I don't even believe in it. So the reason it's successful is because we always follow the herd. We have to follow the herd because if we don't - there's nothing else.



I picked this one as I think the boy represents the Travelling community. The building represents the school system. Outside, it says 'help wanted' and these kids are running away from it as fast as they can and the solution is, you know, he's got to turn round and come back in.

There needs to be talks on both sides. We need work from both sides,...It's not about him just coming back into the building and accepting our norms, our education system. And the sign also says; 'Stop the killings now'. ...the killings to me was the killing of their culture, you know. That's what we're killing. That just stood out to me.



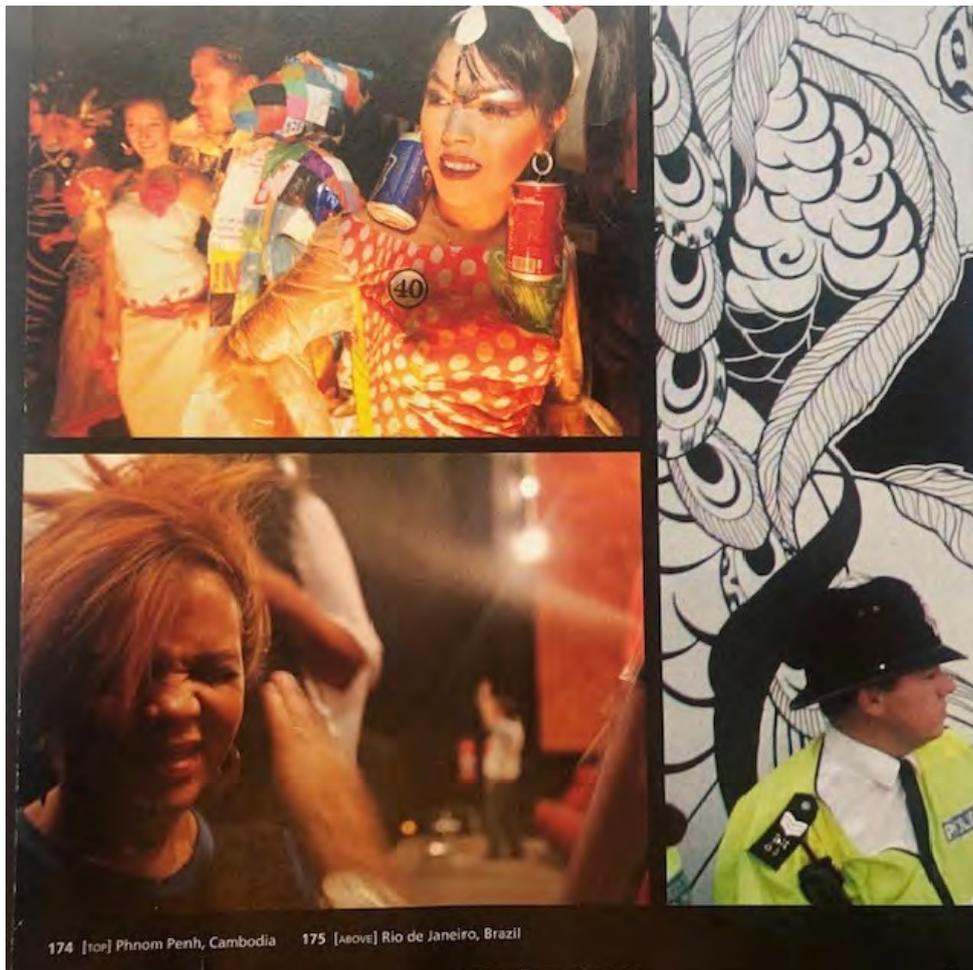


"People, when they're in their own culture, seem really, really happy, but it's how do we integrate...? When we embrace their culture, they can be part of the bigger group...make them feel like what they're doing is actually valued or where they're coming from is valued."



In terms of what's working well, in this picture the kids are having fun, enjoying themselves – even if they're sliding down the side of a mud mountain they look like they are happy and enjoying themselves. There's a sense of belonging when they are having fun. We're trying to be as inclusive as possible, with initiatives like the yellow-flag, recognising all the different cultures in our school.

There are challenges in it, but there are also things that are working so it's not plain sailing every year but we have made progress. If we can get a good start at it in first year, or even a good transition from sixth class to first year that's the key...because if they haven't engaged by fifth year, Leaving Cert they will be saying 'I'm too big for there now, I'm just passing the time'... so we find the key is the transition from primary school, to embed them into secondary as much as we can. That first nine weeks I think is really important. More important than the curriculum is getting them embedded into the school.



174 [TOP] Phnom Penh, Cambodia 175 [ABOVE] Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

My picture is all about cultural diversity. People, when they're in their own culture, seem really, really happy, but it's how do we integrate them? When we embrace their culture, they can be part of the bigger group. Just from my own experience of music, in my earlier years of teaching, it was very much like I had my bank of go-to Traveller songs and my bank of go-to pop songs and then the more middle-class kids would play the harp and sing Les Mis and all that. But my new approach is to try and integrate it and try to, you know, get the girls or the boys to talk about the songs and what they mean. I suppose just how can we culturally integrate them and make them feel like what they're doing is actually valued or where they're coming from is valued? So just getting maybe some of the settled kids to perform some of their [the Travelling community's] music or to value what they're doing.

My other subject is business. There's a Traveller boy in first year, really nice boy, and we talk about how his family are entrepreneurs. He's learned that word in the class and it's just, you know, to integrate what they're doing outside in their world. If his dad goes out in a van and sells stuff or has a stand in the town, to actually value that, and to get them to talk about that in class, you know, as well as the child that's performing, in the Royal Irish Academy at the weekend on her harp. What they're [the Travelling community] doing is equally as valuable.



What I wanted to show with this photo is how we communicate with the boys because I believe it does make a major impact how we communicate with the boys and that if we go in with all guns blazing they will shut down and it kind of goes into more conflict and if you go with a more calm approach where you are supportive, you are trying to motivate them more than anything else and it will allow them to open up and try their best, basically it somehow works well.

I'm a practical-subject teacher here and I work with all the boys. I suppose with a practical subject there'd be more communication in the class so I would get to know the kids quite well, there'd be good communication. You can see that the communication skills are there and they are well on top of it and they tell you exactly what their interests are, they have no shyness about that and as a practical subject they are more inclined to talk to you and I suppose in some aspects they kind of look at you more as a role model because they are saying this teacher allows me to talk and after school I play sports as well so the kids who do stay on they can see other sides of the teacher and that helps communication work very well between us all.



The second photo I picked was the artwork. It was trying to be a metaphor for choice, the range where they come in and you don't just give them one task, give them choice and let them decide what they want to do and like that it will get them motivated, get them interested and you will have a more creative aspect throughout the class.



From my point of view of dealing with parents when good things happen and you tell them good things, how happy they are, how happy the kids are. Recently I had one of the mams and one of her boys had done tour guide for open day and he was amazing and people commented on how good he was to me, and I told her that and she was delighted.

Two parents came to the parent/teacher meeting and I had been talking to them on the phone and they weren't going to come but they did come and they were so happy and said it was not what they thought it was going to be. If they go back and tell other mams then they might come too. And then the wow factor when students from the Travelling community in the past several years have got their Leaving Cert and how proud their parents were for them coming to their graduation night and how proud the students are as well.



I chose this particular one because I see it as the battle and the fight that's constant in their lives. Certainly, the conversations I have with the parents that come to the school and the hurt when we are trying to encourage them from a progression perspective and we are [saying] this is what could be achieved.recently we had a child who wanted to do transition year and his mother said he's in a bubble, it's time that bubble burst and that in another year when he tries to get a job or tries to do anything when he mentions his address then nobody is going to call him for a job and he's not going to get work, so stop leading him up the garden path is basically what she is saying. That's her genuine fear for him as his Mum and I think that's really relevant because it's the battle the Traveller community has.

[A mother from the Travelling community who is a mentor in the school] spoke so well about the journey of the children and how the barriers to education were so great for her and how her son came to our school, he came from primary without any literacy at all and came through and went on to further education and got a job. So it's possible but it's a fight constantly and that's something we have to do something about because it's not fair and their voice needs to be heard and I think the parents feel they're not listened to.



"The provisions on the sites...is horrendous. We really don't understand it until we see it with our own eyes and feel the emotions, the dirt, the damp, the poverty, the illness....The government and council should be ashamed of themselves."



I saw the car and it reminded me straight away of the whole transport issue in the Travelling community. Numerous families this year and in the last term of last year missed huge amounts of school, months at a time because they didn't have the transport to get the children to school then linking in with the Education Welfare Officer who want the children in school but they can't get them there.

A few occasions I went down and brought them to school but that's not my job. They could walk but it's a long way and they might be late and they might have six kids, younger ones as well. There might be other issues like mental health issues that are affecting the family and they can't get out. I find that transport in the families I am dealing with is a huge problem.



I picked this picture for the isolation. The isolation. We don't see it so much in secondary school but when you go into primary school and you see the little kids, but especially when you go down to the sites and you see the wee toddlers and the vulnerability of those kids.....The provisions on the sites, the illegal sites is horrendous. We really don't understand it until we see it with our own eyes and feel the emotions, the dirt, the damp, the poverty, the illness and we can't do anything about that but the County Council and the HSE can do it and at government level policy.

Something should be put in place because there is only so much we can do here, if they don't address the electricity on the site we will not get the children, you know the kids are not coming into school if they are ill. The council should be ashamed of themselves. The government and council should be ashamed of themselves. They don't have running water on some of the sites.

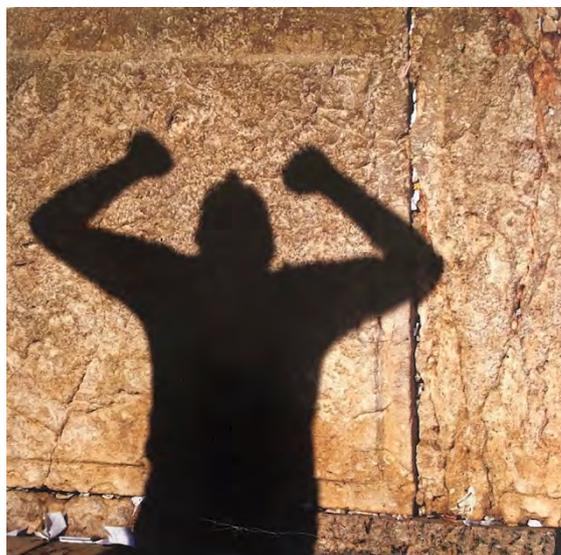
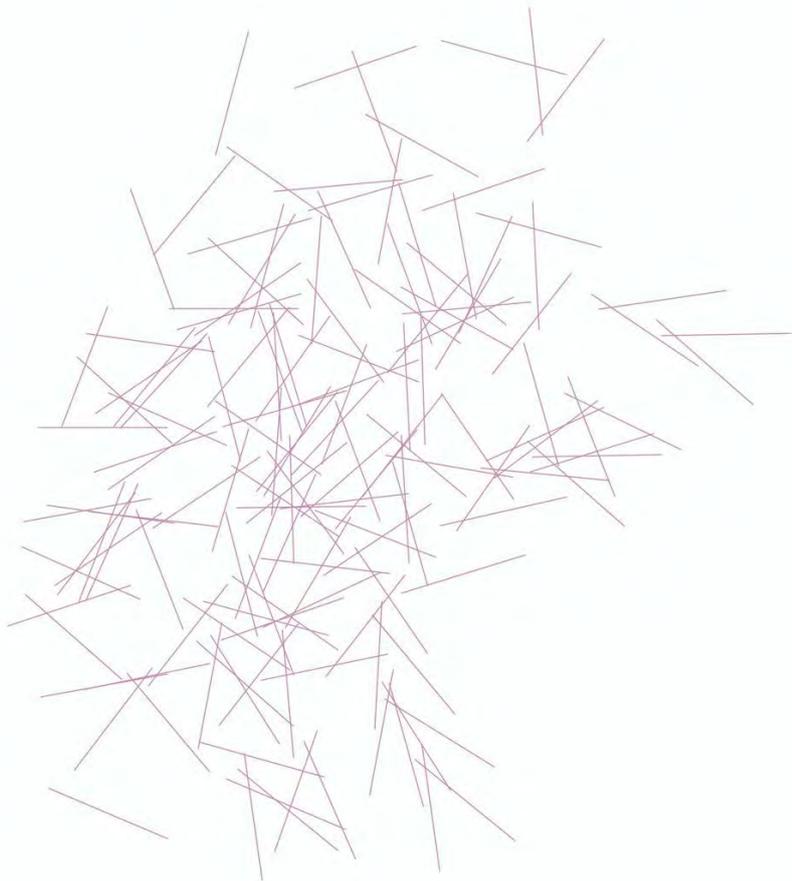


"They have to fight for so much. They are fighting to push, to change, to move.....I think the Traveller women are amazing, they are fighting to push their kids all the time."



When I was teaching, the students were in the room but they were disengaged and they were like shadows, they were not fully participating and with some of the Roma children there would be gaps in education and they just might appear and you would wonder as a teacher...you know the teddy bear here, how much of a childhood have they had?, because they are possibly taking on a lot of adult responsibilities at a young age.

As teachers sometimes you'd look at the students and realise you pay a lot of attention to the ones who scream and shout the loudest and as teachers we would have conversations in the staff room about the quieter kids who are dealing with a lot of trauma and sometimes we firefight and deal with the more vocal issues and there are some children who are in the shadows and they need to be minded too.

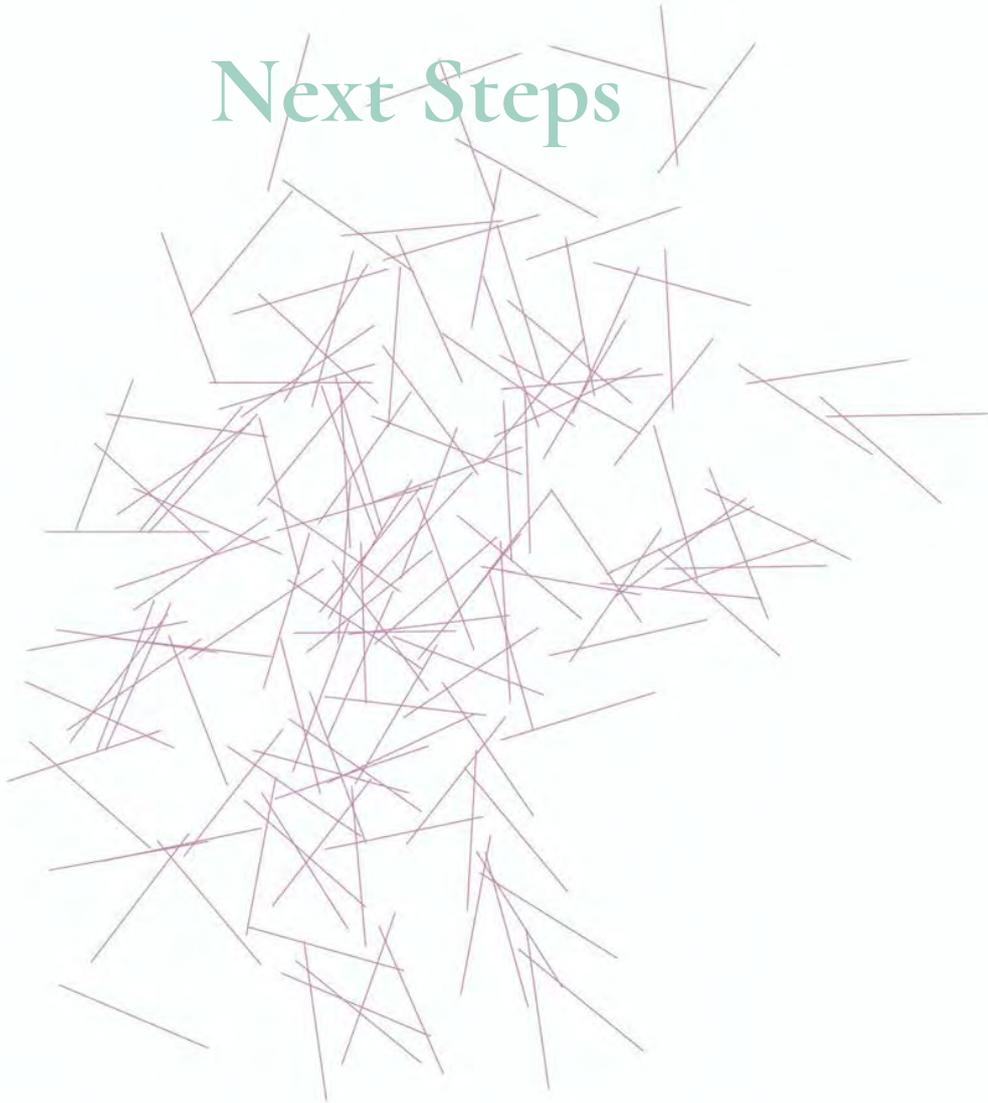


They have to fight for so much. They are fighting to push, to change, to move. When you do things that are different you can be ostracised from your family. There was a situation recently where a student wanted to go to college and he had to make a choice, college or my family. You know, horrendous choices like that. I think the Traveller women are amazing, they are fighting to push their kids all the time.



It's really horrifying but I think that having started this work and started to meet with lots of Traveller organisations, Traveller parents and giving them a really safe space for conversations there's a huge amount of harm and hurt that has been untold from parents and grandparents and inter-generational. I would believe that until that nettle is grasped, until there is a mechanism for that story to be told and for responsibility to be taken by the state around what happened..... some of the mothers telling me, they're the same age as me, that they were washed in school and had their uniforms changed and they had to sit with dripping wet hair down their backs all day just simply because of the fact they were a Traveller. They were the same age as me, that really struck a chord with me and some of these parents are very empowered and you wonder how they have made it this far with their children and we have an expectation that they will be able to engage with the state and with the school system and with professionals. With that baggage and that lack of responsibility that the state and organisations have taken how can we expect them to?

Recommendations & Next Steps



Recommendations & Next Steps

Leverage case-study insight for co-design

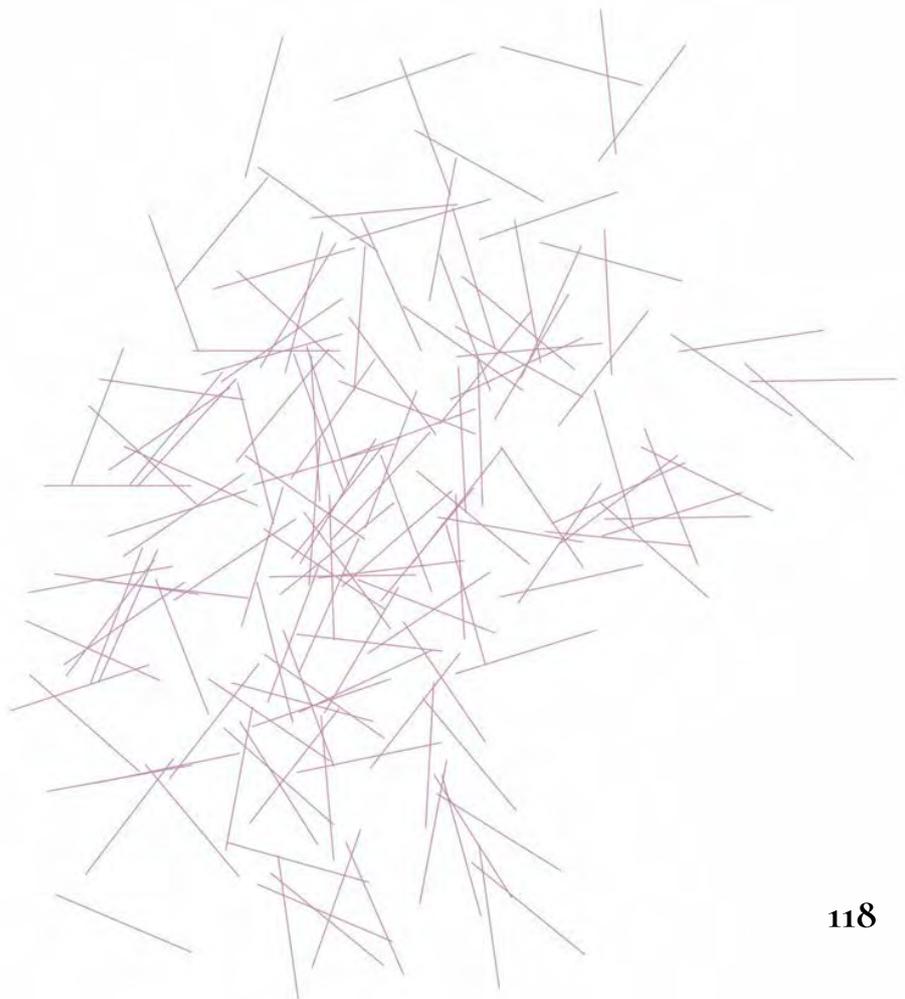
- The detailed case-studies produced in this project aim to provide the NTRIS project teams with a resource of baseline information which can be used as the basis of further co-design and formative evaluation of the overall NTRIS programme of interventions.
- In line with best-practice co-design approaches, any solutions which aim to improve the experience of Traveller and Roma children within school must centre their voices and be co-created by the communities. They are the experts when it comes to their lived-experience of engagement and participation in school. Their lived-experience provides the necessary insight to understand what the issues are and how they can be overcome.
- This expertise combined with the expertise and lived-experience of educators within the school system provides powerful insight which can form the basis of a truly co-designed solution which has the power to enact meaningful change.
- This requires the creation of safe spaces where all experiences can be heard, and which is facilitated in a way which is trauma-informed, and which acknowledges and mitigates against structural power-imbalances. An approach guided by a communication framework such as the Collaborative Way is suggested.[28]
- It is also suggested that the project identifies ways to embed inclusivity within the overall assessment approach by drawing on tools such as CARE's Community Scorecard Toolkit, as a means of providing parents and students from the Traveller and Roma communities with an opportunity to co-design and feedback their experiences and evaluations of the pilot interventions.[29]

Wider policy implications and recommendations

- There have been a variety of reports and recommendations produced which identify ways of improving and developing inclusive school systems; tackling both the inter-personal and structural discrimination and racism experienced by participants within this study. Such recommendations include the inclusion of Traveller and Roma community within curricula-design; gathering of feedback from the communities to inform Whole School Evaluations; ensuring mandatory anti-discrimination training is built into teacher-trainings, and ensuring compulsory Continuous Professional Development (CPD) anti-discrimination training for all teachers.[30] It is very important that the overall NTRIS pilot intervention is informed by the research and associated recommendations in this area.
- The aim and scope of this particular project is not to make a long series of additional policy recommendations to add to the pre-existing lists. The aim is to use innovative participatory research methods which give voice to marginalised groups, and to leverage and centralise their insight into service improvement. As such, the focus of this kind of project is the implementation of the recommendations which are often already well-known and in many cases well-documented, but which are not being implemented within the system. It also aims to uncover any implementation blind spots which may exist and new insight which is rooted in the lived-experience of the Traveller and Roma communities.
- Thus the key recommendation from this project is that the voice of the participants be given a chance to be heard firstly by leveraging the insight to inform NTRIS intervention co-design. Secondly to inform and promote wider understanding of the issue within the education system, and amongst the wider society, an exhibition of participants' photographs could be held. The photographs and accompanying narratives could be exhibited in schools and libraries nationally to educate, inform and promote awareness.
- The materials produced as part of this project aim to be easily accessible and deeply impactful, so that they can educate the wider community on the barriers and enablers to educational-engagement experienced by members of the Traveller and Roma communities in Ireland. The methodologies used within this project tap into the understanding that empathy and feelings are at the heart of implementation of change, and that people are influenced by information that makes them feel, rather than information that just makes them think.

Recognition of the complex multi-layered, multi-dimensional nature of the issue

- In order to move this conversation forward we need a nuanced, sophisticated understanding and discussion of race, ethnicity, and what it means to cultivate an 'inclusive' anti-racist educational culture, which is trauma-informed.
- This is a complex issue which require a multi-layered response – individual, school and societal level. Schools need to be supported in this by the wider society – the education system has a key role to play but needs to be supported with wider cultural awareness, recognition and discussion of racism and discrimination at a societal level.
- The Travelling community is not a homogenous group – rather there is a diversity of experiences, needs, challenges across the four pilot sites. The Roma community are further diverse in terms of their experiences and needs therefore the interventions need to take this into account rather than adopting of a one-size-fits all approach.



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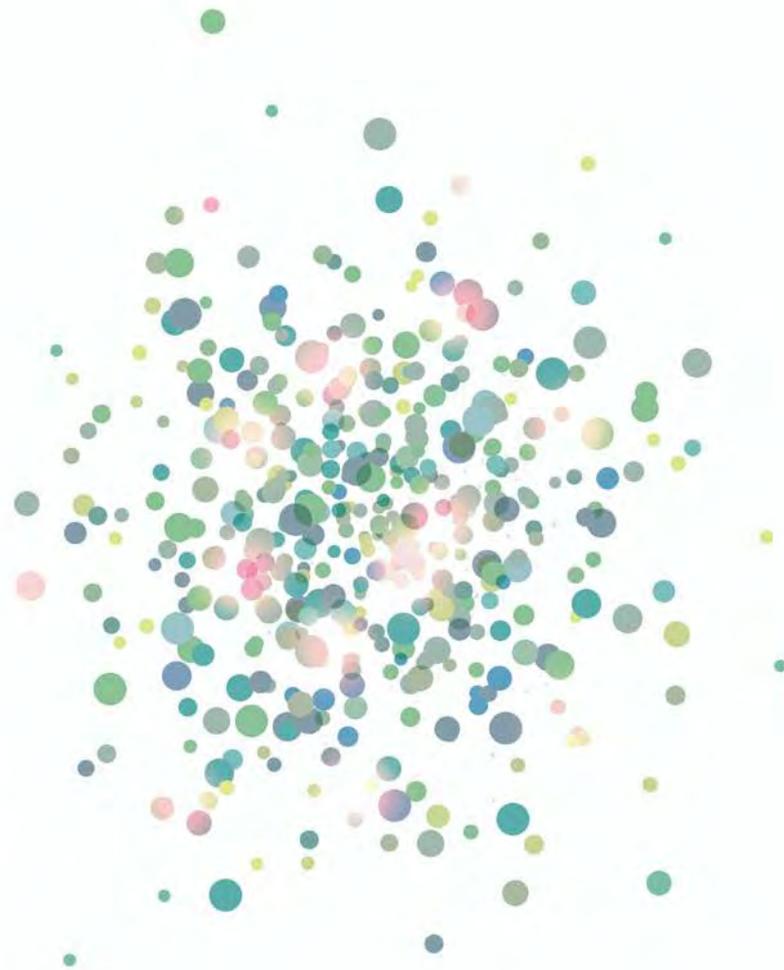
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