

Bernard Joyce Director Irish Traveller Movement Presentation to Joint Committee on Education & Skills

The Irish Traveller Movement founded in 1990 is a national membership organisation representing Travellers and their representative groups. One of its core principles and objectives is to challenge the racism that Travellers face in Ireland.

Education in historical context

We want to draw the committee's attention to the historical experience of Travellers within the state education system, not commonly known to the wider community. The importance of awareness of the historical experiences of the Traveller population is fundamental to righting the wrongs of the past and instilling confidences going into the future. From 1970s – right up to the present day segregated schools- where Traveller children are educated in Traveller only schools – were in existence. Traveller only classrooms also wide spread from 70s right up to 2000, from, this point Traveller segregation began to be phased out. Many Travellers today recall horrific stories of been washed when they came into school and having separate play times and lunch times to their settled counterparts. The expectations by their teachers were extremely low and with many left to draw pictures and play, leaving school unable to read or write.

Those experiences still influence how Traveller parents engage with the education system as well as respond to their own children's experience of racist bullying within school.

In January 2017 the Department of Justice and Equality commissioned Economic and Social Research report—*A Social Portrait of Travellers in Ireland* found that Travellers experience extreme disadvantage in terms of employment, housing and health and face exceptionally strong levels of prejudice.

The gap between Traveller participation and retention in education has worsened compared with their settled counterparts. I will refer to this further

The Threats To Progress

In 2011 Traveller-specific educational supports were cut by 87%. These included the withdrawal of the Visiting Teacher Service, Resource teachers for Travellers in primary schools, allocation of teaching hours in second level schools, and enhanced capitation for primary and second level. These cuts which were made at a time of the highest retention of Traveller pupils from primary to post primary in the State, decimated the support infrastructure for Traveller education and had a detrimental impact on Traveller's educational progression.

Reduced time tables

The Irish Traveller Movement has seen a rising trend in the practice of reduced timetables. In many instances it is Traveller parents who are monitoring and reporting to Traveller organisations and in turn who have brought these concerns to various Ministers and officials and recently to the Minister for Justice.

We are concerned that in certain areas, no school or conversely one school, is actively supporting the inclusion of Travellers. This school then informally becomes the school in the area that Travellers are directed to and becomes seen as 'the Traveller school'

Traveller children and their peers are denied the opportunity to learn about Travellers within the education curriculum. There is an opportunity through Senator Colette Kelleher's private members bill on the inclusion of Traveller History and Culture within the mainstream curriculum that has both government and cross-party support and has full community support..

The Irish Traveller Movement is very concerned about the practice of reduced timetables. Traveller children are on reduced times across the country and parents are reporting to us these concerns There is no monitoring of the practice by TUSLA or the Department of Education and Skills, instead the responsibility is placed on parents to take a complaint via Section 29 of the Education Act and this need to be addressed.

The majority of Schools have systematically failed to recognise Traveller culture and history resulting in Travellers and their way of life being invisible across the whole school setting. Also as a result non-Traveller children are denied the opportunity to learn about Traveller culture in a positive learning environment and increasing the chance of their views being formed by the negative stereotypical views of Travellers that persist in wider society and look forward to exploring other matters that we have raised in our submission to Travellers children progression with schools

Were happy to refer to other issues arising for Travellers in education and make recommendation's as referred to our submission