



Opening Statement by the Yellow Flag Programme to the Joint Committee on Education and Skills regarding the progression by Member of the Traveller Community to second-level and third-level education.

Chairperson, Deputies and Senators

Thank you for the opportunity to address you this afternoon on the topic of progression by members of the Traveller Community to second and third level education.

I am the Co-ordinator of the Yellow Flag Programme, the 8 step innovative whole school initiative which supports schools to, promote inclusion, challenge racism and celebrate diversity.

The programme guides schools to communicate the values and principles of equality and inclusion, access staff training on equality, diversity and anti-racism, survey students' and parents' current experience of the school and develop an action plan to put in place curricular and extra-curricular activities that promote interculturalism. They must also develop a whole-school diversity code, review and develop their policies to ensure that an inclusive, informed and respectful environment and robust mechanisms are in place to address and tackle racism. Schools must present documented evidence of their work which is assessed by an external panel on completion to determine achievement of the Yellow Flag.

The Yellow Flag was innovated by the Irish Traveller Movement given the long-time evidence derived from its members of the negative experience of Travellers within the education system and the need for schools based solutions.

Issues such as conscious and unconscious bias, exclusion on the basis of identity, historical prejudice, absence of Travellers in teaching and school management, institutional racism and poor awareness or knowledge of Traveller culture have a highly detrimental effect on young people's education and learning but also on their sense of identity and self-belief.

What informed the comprehensive, whole school and practical approach adopted by the Yellow Flag programme is recognition of the attitudes, policies and practices within schools and how they influence daily school life and the essential role to building positive inclusive educational environments, in addition to the adoption of national intercultural/anti-racism policies and regulation.

Traveller students continue to face discrimination in schools

An erosion of young Travellers identity is manifesting in many hiding their identity/changing their accent, for fear of being treated less favourably by teaching staff and their fellow students and or fear of bullying, racism and discrimination. An anti-bullying education programme, not just guidelines, should be introduced in every school.

Reports of discrimination in education settings are still evident to us – which range from name-calling, to physical assault, to social exclusion and institutional practices which reduce Traveller student timetables or segregate them from other students which are frequently reported to the Irish Traveller Movement.

Even with all of the resources the Yellow Flag can offer, it can be hard to challenge discrimination amongst teachers and school managers, which can be either conscious and sometimes unconscious or hidden bias. Mandatory anti-racist/intercultural training or continuous professional development for teaching staff has been proposed in a number of statutory policies but is not available in practice.

The Irish Traveller Movement is very conscious of the need to expand the Yellow Flag and to strengthen the impact it can have on the education system in Ireland. It is important to note that there are no other programmes like Yellow Flag currently operating in the country, it has worked with 88 schools across 13 counties, reaching over 30,000 students and in excess

of 2,500 teachers, however to date there has been no investment by the Department of Education or Children and Youth Affairs, both commensurate with aims across a range of objectives.

I am happy to answer any questions Committee members might have.

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