

Joint Committee on Education and Skills

Joint Committee on Key issues affecting the Traveller Community

Opening Statement

Enda Hughes, Principal Officer, Department of Education and Skills

3 December 2019

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

- Thank you Chair and Committee for your invitation to attend today to update you on initiatives to support Traveller participation in education.
- My name is Enda Hughes and I am Principal Officer with responsibility for Equity of Access to Higher Education in the Department of Education and Skills. Attending with me is Patricia Sheehan Assistant Principal Officer in the Department's Social Inclusion Unit.
- 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.
- Funding for segregated Traveller provision has been incorporated into overall school and other funding streams in order to provide supports for Traveller pupils in mainstream schools.

- **The DEIS Programme** provides for smaller class sizes and other supports including additional teaching posts, Home School Community Liaison Coordinators, DEIS grants, enhanced book grants, curriculum supports, priority access to Continuing Professional Development and the School Excellence Fund for DEIS. It costs €125m each year
- It is acknowledged that not all Travellers attend DEIS schools. The Department provides significant supports across all schools to students with additional needs including **Special Education** Teachers, SNAs and school transport. The spend in this area is over €1.9bn, an increase of 52% since 2011
- **NEPS** work with schools and are concerned with learning, behaviour, social and emotional development. Since 2011, sanctioned NEPS psychologist numbers have grown significantly.
- In addition all children including Traveller children can avail of support provided by **TUSLA** Educational Welfare Officers in relation to attendance in schools.
- The Department's commitment to improving education outcomes for Travellers and Roma is reflected in a number of key policies and initiatives, including the **National Traveller Roma Inclusion Strategy (NTRIS)**.
- The NTRIS **education sub-committee** provides an overall focus on improving educational outcomes for Travellers and Roma including the implementation of all education actions of NTRIS, of which there are over 30.
- A NTRIS pilot project has been established in four areas in partnership with Tusla Education Support Service and the Departments of Justice and Equality, and Children and Youth Affairs.

- This 2 year **Pilot project will** target attendance, participation and school completion in specific Traveller and Roma Communities regionally in Tuam; Bunclody and Enniscorthy; Finglas, Ballymun and Coolock; and Cork
- Each pilot area is being provided with 1 additional Educational Welfare Officer (EWO) provided by Tusla, 1 additional Home School Liaison Coordinator (HSCL) provided by Department of Education and Skills, 2 additional Traveller/Roma Education Workers through the Department of Justice and Equality.
- The teams will work together with parents, children and young people, schools, Traveller and Roma communities and service providers to remove the barriers impacting on Traveller and Roma children's attendance, participation and retention in education
- Expected outcomes of the pilot include improved attendance, participation and retention of Travellers and Roma in education and improved engagement with Traveller representative groups.
- These pilots will inform the development of policy and innovative solutions to issues identified as barriers to participation and engagement.
- A number of new initiatives to support increased participation in higher education by target groups, including Irish Travellers, are being rolled out across the higher education sector, including the Programme for Access to Higher Education (PATH).
- In the area of Higher Education, the Department is seeking to ensure the implementation of the Action Plan to increase Traveller participation in higher education, with the implementation partners, and ensure that students from the Traveller Community are supported to enter and successfully participate in higher education.

- While recognising the supports across the education spectrum that are already in place to support Traveller participation, the purpose of the action plan is to bring a focus of attention and afford particular priority to certain actions aimed at increasing Traveller participation in higher education.
- While it is evident that progress is being made, we still have work to do to increase educational outcomes overall.
- My colleague and I are very happy to take questions from the Committee on the subject.