

## **Joint Committee on Key Issues affecting the Traveller Community**

**3rd December 2019, Committee Room 1, Leinster House**

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### **Opening Statement**

**Minister Joe McHugh, Department of Education and Skills**

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#### **CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY**

I would like to thank the Chair, Senator Colette Kelleher and the members of the Committee for giving me the opportunity to appear before you this morning to discuss the issue of education and the Traveller Community.

As the Committee can see from the detailed submission provided by the Department, there are several initiatives underway to improve educational outcomes for Travellers at all levels. Part of this process includes identifying and addressing barriers to participation and engagement by Travellers in education.

One of these barriers is the practice of some schools operating reduced timetables. My Department has been working with DCYA and Tusla Education Support Services in drawing up guidelines which will address require schools to notify Tusla when a reduced timetable is proposed and help ensure that reduced timetables will be limited to those circumstances where it is appropriate.

I fully support actions to improve educational outcomes for Travellers, and that includes ensuring that the school setting is a more welcoming environment. I agree with the principles underlying The Traveller Culture and History in Education Bill 2018 proposed by Senator Kelleher to provide for the inclusion of Traveller culture and history in the curriculum taught by recognised schools in the State. I believe that recognising and respecting Traveller culture and history ensures that we can build relationships based on trust, respect, and understanding across all cultures.

Officials of my Department participate in the Steering Group which was established to oversee the development and implementation of the National Traveller and Roma Strategy published in 2017. The NTRIS provides a framework for interventions across a range of

Government Departments including education which is reflected in over 30 education actions from early years to adult education.

We, recognise that Traveller and Roma Communities needs more focused interventions to drive improvements in educational outcomes. For this this reason, a pilot project has been established to develop innovative approaches to address issues which impede educational attainment.

In the areas of further and higher education, through the Further Education Strategy and the National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education, we are working on breaking down the barriers for target groups to enrol in and complete their chosen area of study. A progress review of the National Access Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education (2015-2021) led to the recently published the Action Plan for Increasing Traveller Participation in Higher Education 2019-2021.

As part of the annual Further Education and Training service planning process between SOLAS and the Education and Training Boards (ETBs), ETBs are now required to consider the needs of a broad range of learners and disadvantaged groups, including Travellers in their planning and delivery of Further education and training provision.

I acknowledge that educational outcomes for Travellers fall short of what they should be. Nevertheless progress is being made as evidenced in the roll out of the NTRIS pilot projects and the Progress report on the Action Plan for Equity for Access to Higher Education and we will continue to build upon this. A lot of work is ongoing in the Department to address the ongoing needs of the Traveller community. In order to achieve better outcomes for Traveller students, all stakeholders, including parents, educators, Traveller representative groups, need to work together to overcome the barriers that impact on educational achievement.

I can assure the Committee that my Department is taking every action necessary to improve educational outcomes for Travellers.