

## Meeting of the Joint Committee on Key Issues Affecting the Traveller Community

18 April 2024 | Opening statement of Latisha McCrudden

### Latisha McCrudden – Education

Hello everyone, my name is Latisha McCrudden, and I am nineteen years of age. I am among the one percent of Irish Travellers that go onto third level education, and I've nearly completed my first year in my law degree.

In my own opinion I believe I've done well for myself in my education journey so far having got all A's and distinctions in my junior cert, a distinction in my transition year programme and the points needed in my leaving cert to study law in the University of Galway. I've done a vast amount of extra-curricular activities including BT Young Scientist, Gaisce, Scifest, The Climate Ambassador Programme of Ireland, Green schools, John Paul the Second award and the Student Council. But my school experience hasn't been as fulfilling and enjoyable as it should have been.

As a Traveller girl in school, I found it a very lonely and isolating place the majority of the time. I've been subjected to isolation, bullying, racism and discrimination and with very few to no consequences received to those that projected it upon me. Some examples include having derogatory terms said to me by fellow students such as the K word with no consequences for their actions. I know that if this type of language was used against another minority group there would be repercussions as there should be, but the same respect is not given to Travellers.

Throughout my so far 15 years of schooling I've not once been taught about my Traveller heritage or culture but had to study a short story for my honour level leaving cert Irish class that projected Travellers in not a positive light. I've been isolated and left out in school due to the morals and values I have for myself and what has been instilled in me while growing up. I found being an Irish Traveller in the school sector you had to have a large amount of willpower to keep going due to the way you are made feel, this is not how it should be Travellers should be supported, uplifted and encouraged to continue with schooling and to reduce the statistics of being a minority among a minority when they continue with education.

I live by the quote that the Late Martin Luther King once said, "our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter" and unfortunately there is a lot of things that should matter in education for Travellers that is not taking place. There is a vast number of barriers for Travellers in education that need to change now and not later.

- Eliminate barriers by a whole in the school practice by taking account of the need for pupil's, cultural identity, language and values to be upheld and visible, and seen in the environment, not just imaginary.
- Resources and supports need to be supplied at individual level to enable Traveller pupils to participate across school, transport, books, uniform, digital aids, additional

teacher, and after school supports, access to assessment and early intervention where needs are identified.

- Incorporation of anti-racism training and a Traveller cultural plan for teachers - as part of CPD, and at entry level.
- A time lined action plan is needed to deliver the curriculum components attached to the Traveller culture and history promises made across the curricula envisaged by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment including the need for teacher training to deliver those.

**For Traveller children and young adults to continue in education then support and opportunities must become equal.** Traveller youth shouldn't feel fear and worry that if they go onto third level education and get a degree that they would be turned away from jobs due to their identity which is happening currently in our society. For the percentage of Travellers that are employed in Ireland currently, vast majorities are employed by Traveller organisations which does not encourage the younger generations of Travellers to continue in education.

Extra supports and opportunities must be put in place for the current generation of Travellers and the upcoming generations around reading and writing as when Traveller children go home in the evening to do homework their parents may not be able to read or write due to the early drop out rate for previous Traveller generations in education, which automatically puts children from a non-Traveller background at an advantage compared to Traveller children.

I believe for a real change to come for the bullying, racism and discrimination that takes place against Travellers in school that our culture, heritage and traditions must be embedded into the school curriculum.

There also needs to be consequences to derogatory terms that are used in school against Travellers such as the K word, Tinker and Pikey as these are not words that should be said to children and young adults without repercussions to those that use this racist and discriminative language.

Society for generations has viewed Travellers as one, and not as the separate individual's that we are. Our heritage, culture and traditions could add a lot to society if people wanted to learn how we are as people, but instead they discriminate, isolate and judge even if they have had no encounters with Travellers.

Traveller children just want to feel value and respected and be in a fair environment something that should come automatically. Travellers want to go on and become members of the Garda, Solicitors, Doctors, Nurses, Vets, Senators, Youth Workers just like many of us already have. We have been changing as a community and progressing over time and its now time for society as a whole to change and progress so that Travellers are just as much a part of society as everyone else is. Traveller youth are just as much the present and the future

of this country as the rest of Ireland's youth, but the government and society need to realise, acknowledge and support this sooner rather than later.