

DÁIL ÉIREANN

AN COMHCHOISTE UM OIDEACHAS AGUS SCILEANNA

JOINT COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Dé Máirt, 26 Márta 2019

Tuesday, 26 March 2019

The Joint Committee met at 3.30 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Deputy Thomas Byrne,	Senator Maria Byrne,
Deputy Kathleen Funchion,	Senator Robbie Gallagher,
Deputy Catherine Martin,	Senator Lynn Ruane.
Deputy Tony McLoughlin,	
Deputy Jan O'Sullivan,	

In attendance: Deputy Gino Kenny and Senator Colette Kelleher.

DEPUTY FIONA O'LOUGHLIN IN THE CHAIR.

The joint committee met in private session until 3.54 p.m.

Traveller Education: Discussion

Chairman: We will now discuss No. 5 on our agenda, which is an engagement with stakeholders on the progression by members of the Traveller community to second and third level education.

On behalf of the committee, I welcome Mr. Bernard Joyce, Irish Traveller Movement; Ms Elva O’Callaghan, the Yellow Flag Programme; Mr. Martin Collins, Pavee Point; Ms Maria Joyce, National Traveller Women’s Forum; Mr. Clive Byrne, National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals; Mr. Feargal Brougham, Irish National Teachers Organisation; and Ms Nessa White, Education and Training Boards of Ireland. All of the witnesses are very welcome. Following that session, Mr. Ian McDonagh, whom I met a number of months ago, who is a student and who did work experience with one of the Deputies will be talking to us about his experience as a Traveller student.

The format of this part of the meeting is that I will invite speakers to make a brief opening statement to a maximum of three minutes. As we have a number of groups, I would appreciate if everyone stuck to that time. All the members of the committee will then have an opportunity to ask questions or make comments and will have a chance to come back in. I am aware Deputy Catherine Martin has another commitment in the Chamber and will have to leave the meeting. She will not have an opportunity to engage but she has asked me to point that out.

Deputy Thomas Byrne: Unfortunately, I have to leave at some point because I have agriculture questions to ask in the Chamber but I will be coming back. I apologise if I miss any of the proceedings.

Chairman: Before we begin, I wish to draw the attention of those in attendance to the fact that by virtue of section 17(2)(l) of the Defamation Act 2009, witnesses are protected by absolute privilege in respect of their evidence to this committee. However, if they are directed by myself, as Chairman, to cease giving evidence in relation to a particular matter and they continue to do so, they are entitled thereafter only to a qualified privilege in respect of their evidence. They are directed that only evidence connected with the subject matter of these proceedings is to be given and they are asked to respect the parliamentary practice to the effect that, where possible, they should not criticise nor make charges against any person, persons or entity by name or in such a way as to make him, her or it identifiable. I wish to also advise witnesses that any opening statements they may make today will be published on the committee’s website following the meeting.

Members are reminded also of the long-standing parliamentary practice to the effect that they should not comment on, criticise or make any charges against any person outside the House, or any official either by name or in such a way as to make him or her identifiable.

I remind members and witnesses to turn off their mobile phones off because when they are on they interfere with the recording equipment and make it difficult for parliamentary reporters and for those who may be watching proceedings at home on their laptops or on television.

I ask Mr. Bernard Joyce from the Irish Traveller Movement to make his opening statement.

Mr. Bernard Joyce: I thank the committee for giving me the opportunity to present to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Education and Skills. The Irish Traveller Movement was founded in 1990 and is a nationally-based Traveller-led organisation representing our members. One of its core values and principles is to challenge the racism Travellers face in Ireland today.

Setting out the historical context is important and I draw the committee's attention to the experience of Travellers within the State education system. Not commonly known to the wider community is the importance of awareness of the historical experiences of the Traveller population in terms of the fundamental rights and wrongs of the past and instilling confidence going into the future.

From the 1970s up to the present day, there were segregated schools in Ireland. Children were educated in Traveller-only schools and classes from the 1970s up to 2000. From this point, Traveller segregation began to be phased out. Many Travellers today recall horrific stories of being washed when they came into school and having separate play and lunch times to their settled peers. The expectations of these children by their teachers were extremely poor. Many were left to draw pictures and play and many today are unable to read or write. Those experiences still influence how Traveller parents engage with the education system, as well as how they respond to their children's experiences of racist bullying within school. In January 2017 the report commissioned by the Department of Justice and Equality from the Economic and Social Research Institute, *A Social Portrait of Travellers in Ireland*, indicated that Travellers experienced extreme disadvantage in employment, housing and healthcare and faced exceptionally strong levels of prejudice. The gap between Traveller participation and retention in education has worsened compared to their settled counterparts. I will refer to this aspect again.

Unfortunately, in 2011 Traveller-specific educational supports were cut by 87%. The cuts 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 payments at primary and second level. The cuts were made at the time of the highest retention rates of Traveller pupils from primary to post-primary institutions in the State. They decimated the support infrastructure for Traveller education and had a detrimental impact on Travellers' educational progression.

I also bring the committee's attention to reduced timetables, which is a real concern, of which some members may be aware. The Irish Traveller Movement has raised this matter, as have other organisations. In many instances, it is Traveller parents who are monitoring and reporting to Traveller organisations which, in turn, have brought these concerns to various Ministers. We are concerned that in certain areas no school or only one actively supports the inclusion of Travellers. Such a school then informally becomes the school in the area to which Travellers are directed and becomes seen as "the Traveller school". Non-Traveller children and their peers are denied the opportunity to learn about Travellers within the education curriculum. There is an opportunity to correct this through Senator Colette Kelleher's Private Members' Bill dealing with the inclusion of Traveller history and culture within the mainstream curriculum. We understand it has both Government and cross-party support. It also has full community support.

The Irish Traveller Movement is very concerned about the practice of having reduced timetables across the country. We know about these concerns because parents are reporting them to us. There is no monitoring of the practice by Tusla or the Department of Education and Skills; instead the responsibility is placed on parents to make a complaint via section 29 of the Education Act 1998. This issue must be addressed.

The majority of schools have systematically failed to recognise Traveller culture and Travellers' way of life is invisible across the school setting. As a result, non-Traveller children are denied the opportunity to learn about Traveller culture in a positive learning environment, thus increasing the chances of their views being formed by the negative stereotypical views of Travellers that persist in wider society. We look forward to exploring other matters we have raised in our submission on Traveller children's progression within the education system.

Ms Elva O'Callaghan: I thank the joint committee for giving me the opportunity to address it. I am the co-ordinator of the Yellow Flag programme, the eight step innovative whole-school initiative which supports schools in promoting inclusion, challenging racism and celebrating diversity. The programme guides schools in communicating the values of equality and inclusion and accessing staff training on equality and diversity. We ask them to survey students and parents on their current experiences of schools and develop action plans to put in place curricular and extra-curricular activities that promote interculturalism. Schools must also develop a whole-school diversity code and review and develop their policies to ensure an inclusive 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 is an initiative of the Irish Traveller Movement, given the long-term evidence derived from its members, as Mr. Bernard Joyce alluded to, of the negative experience of Travellers within the education system and the need for school-based solutions.

Issues such as conscious and unconscious bias, exclusion on the basis of identity or 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, and also on their sense of identity and self-belief. What informs the programme and its practical approach is the recognition of the attitudes, policies and practices within schools and how they influence daily life and the essential role they play in building positive educational environments, in addition to the adoption of national intercultural and anti-racism policy and regulations.

Traveller students continue to face discrimination in schools. We see that manifesting in many hiding their identity and changing their accent for fear of being bullied or treated less favourably by teaching staff and their fellow students. We recommend that an anti-bullying education programme, not just guidelines, be introduced in every school. Reports of discrimination in education settings are still evident to us, ranging from name-calling to physical assault, social exclusion and institutional practices which reduce Traveller student timetables or segregate them from other students. These are frequently reported to the Irish Traveller Movement. Even with all of the resources that the Yellow Flag can offer, it can be hard to challenge discrimination among teachers and school managers, which can be either conscious or sometimes unconscious or based on hidden biases. Mandatory anti-racist and 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. It is important to note that there is no other programme like the Yellow Flag currently operating in the country. We have worked with 88 schools across 13 counties, reaching more than 30,000 students and more than 2,500 teachers. However, to date, there has been no investment by the Department of Education and Skills or the Department of Children and Youth Affairs, both of which have aims across a range

of objectives and policies which are commensurate with our own. I thank the committee and am happy to answer any questions members may have.

Chairman: I thank Ms O’Callaghan and call Mr. Martin Collins, who is co-director of Pavee Point.

Mr. Martin Collins: On behalf of Pavee Point Traveller and Roma Centre, I appreciate this opportunity to speak to the committee about the challenges facing Travellers in the education system. Pavee Point Traveller and Roma Centre has given central importance to pursuing full and equal participation for Travellers throughout the education system since our inception in 1985. This continues to be based on our understanding of education’s key importance for human dignity and rights. It was previously part of our name, which was Dublin Travellers Education and Development Group. Our work more recently expanded to include Roma and this has significantly enhanced our work. I hope we can come back at some stage in the future to talk about the specific experiences of Roma within the education system.

These are challenging times globally for all concerned with rights and equality, as we remember the terrible tragedy in Christchurch, New Zealand, this month and ongoing racism and exclusion in Ireland. A direct provision centre in Rooskey was burned and a house in Clonmel allocated to a Traveller family was vandalised. These incidents demonstrate the need for a new national action plan against racism. However, it is also a time of opportunity for Travellers with the recent recognition of Traveller ethnicity by the Taoiseach and Dáil in 2017. There is also the formal adoption of the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy, 2017-2021, NTRIS, which sets an agenda, including in the crucial area of education. Its aims have yet to be realised and urgent attention is needed to ensure its full implementation.

The disadvantage and poor educational outcomes for Travellers have been well-documented. We know that 13% of Travellers complete secondary education compared with 92% in the majority population. Some seven out of ten Traveller children live in families where the mother has either no formal education or primary education only. The national action plan on access to higher education has set a target of having 80 Travellers in third level education by the end of 2019. To date, the figure has risen from 35 to 61, which is 26 additional Travellers. This points to the fact that we need to intensify our efforts in this regard but it also demonstrates that targeted interventions and resources are effective. We also know this from the Royal College of Surgeons, which has an affirmative action programme where a number of Travellers have the opportunity to study medicine and become doctors.

With regard to recommendations, we need to create a more inclusive learning context that promotes respect for diversity and interculturalism and addresses racism at individual, structural and institutional levels. We would like to make a number of recommendations in this area. All educational personnel, including policymakers, need to receive training on interculturalism and anti-racism, with an explicit focus on Travellers. For far too long, there has been a culture of low expectations among teachers and principals with regard to Travellers. This means that many Travellers have missed out on achieving their full potential and goals in life. In this context, we welcome the amendment to the Education Act before the Dáil, which proposes that Traveller culture and history be reflected in the school curriculum. While the 2017 integration strategy of the Department of Education and Skills provides basic principles for inclusion, we also need respect for cultural identity and social and economic inclusion. The proposed amendment will require concrete programmes and materials for schools on Traveller history and culture. We believe this is a fundamental step in the right direction. It is only a first step, as we need to include other cultures and identities in the school curriculum.

Now that we are post recession, we would like to see the restoration of support services for Travellers attending schools. These services were savagely cut by 85%, as Mr. Joyce outlined. Direct and targeted resources are needed to promote Traveller inclusion in mainstream education. One size does not fit all. Another important action in the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy 2017-2021 is to promote affirmative action opportunities to support Travellers who want to become teachers. This is essential in promoting positive role models and influencing the culture and ethos of schools. Direct engagement with Traveller organisations as equal and key partners in the educational system and developing policy is essential. We have worked with the Department of Education and Skills in the development of the Traveller education strategy. We do not know the status of this strategy. The Traveller education consultative forum, or equivalent, needs to be re-established as we do not have forums to feed into policy development with regard to education for Travellers. We know the issues the community faces and we know what works.

We cannot deal with Traveller education in isolation from poor living conditions, high unemployment, low health status, exclusion and racism. A multifaceted approach is required. The NTRIS is designed to do that but its recommendations and implementation plans have yet to be fully realised. Mainstreaming on its own will not work. We fully support having targeted special measures to complement the inclusion and participation of Travellers in the mainstream.

I will finish with a quote from Sonia Sotomayor, the first Hispanic woman to be appointed associate justice of the Supreme Court of the United States, who stated: “Until we get equality in education, we won’t have an equal society.” That is very true.

Chairman: I thank Mr. Collins for sharing that quote, which I think we would all agree with. I ask Ms Maria Joyce, who is co-ordinator of the National Traveller Women’s Forum, to address us.

Ms Maria Joyce: I thank committee members and welcome the opportunity to highlight the issues and experiences of Travellers in education today. The National Traveller Women’s Forum is a national network of Traveller women and Traveller women’s organisations from throughout Ireland. We recognise the oppression and racism experienced by Traveller women in Irish society. There are stark inequalities between Traveller girls and women and the general population in participation, attendance and attainment in education. This has wider human rights consequences by exposing Traveller girls and women to low educational attainment, future unemployment, poverty and social exclusion. The two key barriers for Traveller women and girls with regard to education are racism and a lack of implementation of positive policy developments. I will not name them all as they have been identified by previous speakers. However, while we have policies and actions, we are not seeing implementation or monitoring. While the committee’s role is to examine the progression of Travellers through second level and third level education, it cannot do so in isolation from the very negative experience of many Traveller children in primary school, not just historically but also today. There is an absence of positive visibility of Traveller culture in the curricula and the whole-school environment. Bullying and racism are experienced by Traveller learners from their settled peers and also from educators. Discriminatory practices are still evident such as enrolment processes that exclude Traveller children. Moreover, as has been said, a growing number of Traveller children are placed inappropriately on shortened and reduced timetables. This impacts significantly on their educational opportunities and outcomes. Expectations of Traveller learners are incredibly low. Transfer rates from primary to second level are less than 100%. Given that this is illegal, it is an incredible statement to make. Many Traveller children who have completed eight years in

primary school or even secondary school do not know how to read and write.

Based on the data we have from the 2016 census, limited as they are, we know that seven out of ten Traveller children live in families where the mother has either no formal education or a primary education only. The census also shows that only 13% of Travellers complete secondary education, in comparison with 92% of the general population. It is essential that Traveller girls be supported in primary and secondary school to ensure opportunities at third level will be taken up, as they are the future mothers and role models who will influence and shape their children's education. Fewer than 1% of Travellers are in third level education. Five times more Traveller women than settled women are needed for an equivalent proportion to hold a basic degree. The attainment and retention levels of Traveller students in second level education should be a source of serious concern for the committee.

I will outline some ways forward. Proactive initiatives and programmes are needed to support Traveller teachers within the education system. We welcome the recent scholarship put in place to support them, but it is tiny and a huge amount remains to be done. As Mr. Collins highlighted, that kind of targeted initiative is also highlighted in the national Traveller and Roma inclusion strategy, NTRIS, but implementation and prioritisation are needed. Traveller children within the school system must see teachers who are the same as them and a curriculum in which they are reflected, rather than solely the wider settled society. We need to ensure discriminatory practices in schools are identified and swiftly brought to an end. The process of addressing these practices is too drawn-out and often does not happen at all. An implementation plan must be developed for all 14 education actions in the national Traveller and Roma inclusion strategy in a real and equal partnership with Traveller organisations. Outstanding recommendations in the 2006 education strategy should be addressed in a similar manner.

The reality is that we have policies, but we are not seeing action and implementation. One of the key reasons is the institutional racism which has been spoken about. Compulsory anti-racism and intercultural training is required for all teachers as part of pre-service and continuous in-service teacher training. It should not be an add-on but a core component of training, with visibility of Traveller culture in the curricula. Appropriate desegregated data collection needs to be prioritised within the education system. Analysis of the data is needed to ensure targets and actions are having an impact for Traveller women and girls in education and put the necessary appropriate targeted initiatives in place. There is data collection within the education system, but we are not seeing the statistics and figures from it.

We need adequate resources. As has been said, there have been huge cuts across the education sector. They have been combined with the huge cuts across all areas of Traveller life such as accommodation provision and health services. We need to see practical supports such as uniforms, books and lunches. Programmes such as the social inclusion and community activation programme, SICAP, and the education and training boards need to ensure they are meeting targets set out for Traveller engagement in education, but they are not doing so. The Higher Education Authority must set ambitious targets for Traveller access to third level education, with a range of supports to ensure the targets are met.

Third level institutions must build on the knowledge they are developing in their current work with Travellers. They are beginning to identify and support Traveller learners returning to education, but they must apply that learning in developing stronger links with the community to ensure collective and sustainable outcomes for Travellers in third level education.

Mr. Clive Byrne: I wish to make a few brief points. The National Association of Principals

and Deputy Principals is the professional association for second level school leaders. We have been on record in promoting the role of school leadership in fostering a climate of tolerance in schools. The NAPD supports inclusive admission policies and school policies. We are very much in support of the Yellow Flag Programme and representatives from our national executive serve on its steering group. It is very important that ways are found to cut down on the experience of discrimination faced by Travellers in school. This does not consist of just bullying and name-calling from students. We must also recognise that among many members of staff there are unconscious biases that could be reflected in low expectations of the Traveller children in our schools. We need to put supports in place for parents. We know the importance of mothers in educational outcomes for their children at second level. We need to put appropriate supports in place for parents so that they can see the value of continued education for their children. We feel that it is vital to have good home-school links at second level, recognising the context and the climate of the school itself as experienced by the Traveller children in attendance. It is vital to highlight the importance of attendance in encouraging achievement and progression. It is important that all students, including Traveller students, experience appropriate curricula and pathways as part of schools' educational offering. Appropriate pathways for the progression of Traveller students must be put in place.

We in the NAPD have articulated our belief that there are too many second level schools and primary schools in the educational system. If schools were amalgamated it would be possible to offer different subject choices and different programmes. These could include arts and music programmes. Moreover, the junior certificate school programme and leaving certificate applied curriculum could be offered in more schools to meet students' particular needs. The experience colleagues have expressed to me in preparing for today's meeting is that students in primary school seem to get on very well in terms of inclusion and all other aspects until fifth class. Issues then begin to arise which can cause literacy and numeracy problems as the students go into first and second year at post-primary level.

Schools are expected to cope with issues of accommodation, mental health and access to supports to prevent suicide. We have to recognise the reality of high levels of unemployment in the sector. It is difficult for schools to be able to do this on their own. The association calls for the restoration of supports for mainstream schools. Funding which has been cut should be made available to schools again to reflect the economic reality faced by parents trying to send their Traveller children to schools. This is particularly relevant to the new initiatives that exist at the moment. Many of the students live in areas without access to broadband or other technology which is regularly used in schools. Children face disadvantages at second level by not having a resource teacher or a visiting teacher for Travellers. Travellers attend all schools, not just those that are part of the delivering equality of opportunity in schools, DEIS, programme. In many instances, the lack of access to home-school liaisons is very important. Good links between the home and the school go a long way to resolving some of the issues. Supports from welfare services such as Tusla are also important. Schools should not have to wait the minimum of 20 days absence before making an announcement or a report to Tusla which can be followed up by the welfare office. I look forward to exploring some of the other points made in my submission, but these are the key points which I feel should be emphasised in this part of the discussion.

Mr. Feargal Brougham: The Irish National Teachers Organisation, INTO, which is the trade union for primary school teachers, thanks the committee for allowing me to speak this afternoon. As stated already, austerity measures imposed in 2011 led to a substantial reduction in investment in Traveller education. As also stated already, there were cuts of almost 87% in

that period. There can be no overstatement of the effect this has had on Traveller citizens in our schools. Education cuts have a particularly significant impact on Travellers, where participation in education has traditionally been fragile. In particular, there was expertise and knowledge in the visiting teachers for Travellers, VTTs. There were approximately 40 of those and they would have spent much time communicating with parents and going to the different houses of pupils. That was lost to the system. There were approximately 400 resource teachers for Travellers, RTTs, and the withdrawal of those services has been a noticeable loss to the system. The visiting teachers offered a specific skill set and had developed an in-depth understanding of the Traveller communities and their culture, providing a valuable liaison between Traveller families and schools in developing relationships and advocacy support.

Responding adequately to the particular needs of Traveller pupils continues to concern teachers in both DEIS and non-DEIS schools. Approximately 50% of pupils from the Traveller community do not attend DEIS schools. The Department of Education and Skills states that the home school liaison teacher could absorb this work but that is not true. Home school liaison teachers are not available in non-DEIS schools and are not available in rural DEIS schools either. Given that only approximately half the Traveller pupil population attend DEIS schools, there is an obvious discrepancy in the system. Moreover, the home school liaison teacher does not currently have the capacity to fulfil the duties previously held by the visiting teacher service.

It is widely acknowledged that Traveller enrolment in education declines as pupils move through the system. A provision of specific supports and additional resources must be made available to Travellers across the continuum of education from preschool to third level education to ensure that they have the opportunity to participate in our education system on equal terms with the rest of their peers. As has been stated, it would be wonderful to see primary school teachers from the Traveller community teaching and reflecting the curriculum in schools. Huge disparities remain between the educational attainment of Travellers and the settled population according to Dr. Cormac Forkan's 2006 work. The expectation that a school's special education team would be able to fully compensate for the loss of the RTTs is also completely unrealistic. The needs of Traveller pupils must be clearly reflected in a school's educational profile, which now determines a school's allocation of additional teachers to support special and additional educational needs.

There continue to be many barriers for Travellers in education particularly around attendance, retention and completion. The additional targeted support offered by the VTT and RTT service had a positive impact on Travellers in terms of these key challenges, particularly at primary level. In 2011, there was confirmation of improved educational enrolment, with 100% of Traveller children being enrolled in primary education. We doubt that is the case today and, anecdotally, there are reports from teachers that the figure has declined significantly. There is a need for clear, robust, independent research on the outcomes for Travellers in education following the withdrawal of Traveller-specific supports and the implementation of the Traveller education strategy.

The INTO notes the recent announcement by the education welfare service at Tusla to pilot a project with the aim of improving the inclusion of Travellers in education. Whereas the move to develop a pilot project is welcome, there remains the need for an immediate response to fill the gap left following the withdrawal of Traveller-specific supports across the system. A colleague who works in a DEIS school has told me that with the cuts implemented since 2011, it will take at least a generation to undo the damage that has been done. We thank the committee for allowing us to speak today.

Chairman: The final speaker in this round is Ms Nessa White, general secretary of the Education and Training Boards Ireland, ETBI.

Ms Nessa White: I thank the committee for the opportunity to address it today and I am very pleased to make a statement on behalf of ETBI and the 16 education and training boards, ETBs, we represent. Much of what is included in my submission has been covered by previous speakers so I will be brief.

Our response was submitted as two separate submissions dealing with progression to second level education and progression to third level education, taking in further education and training. ETBs are statutory authorities with responsibility for education and training, youth work and a range of other statutory functions. ETBs manage and operate community national schools, second level schools, further education colleges and a range of adult and further education centres in communities throughout Ireland.

We looked at progression in preparing for today and there is evidence that members of the Traveller community have access to a range of further education programmes within our ETBs and they are a priority target group in programme planning. In evaluating the progression of the Traveller community, it is noted that there are high levels of participation recorded within the Youthreach provision. Youthreach programmes cater for young people over the age of 16 who have dropped out of mainstream education.

The challenges of literacy and participation have been mentioned. Despite literacy levels being frequently cited as low within the Traveller community, participation of this group in literacy and numeracy programmes remains a challenge. Many of the other programmes delivered in ETBs across the country, like the back to education initiative, skills for work and apprenticeship programmes all aim to support adults who have low education attainment who wish to progress further or to develop personally, but these are still challenged with low participation rates within the Traveller community. However, some community education programmes are delivered based on the requirements of a community and we see strong and positive engagement in programmes like men's sheds and women's sheds and other areas in the community identifying a need.

With respect to second level education, education and training boards have a long-standing tradition of supporting the educational development of members of the Traveller community. As State schools, ETB schools are open to all pupils, regardless of any aspect of their identity. Our school cultures are underpinned by the core values of excellence, care, equality, community and being multid denominational. However, as always, today is a setting providing me the opportunity to learn and be reminded of the issues. Ongoing research, including evidence from today, indicates that engagement with parents is crucial in order to bring change. As mentioned earlier, the negative experience of Traveller parents in schools and their possibly low rate of educational attainment are key influencers in determining the progress of their own children. The links between home and school are crucial.

We can look at the barriers to education in further education as cited in a 2017 SOLAS report, which cites low confidence and self-esteem, a negative experience of education, childcare issues, transport, a loss or reduction in benefits, the suitability of courses and a lack of awareness of what is available as barriers. Many of the barriers contained in the report could also be identified as barriers in post-primary education. The Action Plan for Education and many Government policy documents outline targets but as was mentioned earlier, some of those targets are not being met.

While the participation of the Traveller community is low in some areas, as referenced above, continued engagement with SOLAS, the Department of Education and Skills and key stakeholders, some of whom I have met today, will help in bringing improvements. There should be consideration of the provision of an allowance on a pilot basis to those programmes that do not currently attract an allowance and interventions need to be in place at the early stage of education and on a continuum to encourage ongoing participation with education. Clarity should be provided on the retention of social welfare and other benefits, as on occasion, this can result in non-participation in education programmes. Schools need support in identifying and accessing services and resources beyond those provided by the Department of Education and Skills, and a mapping exercise should be conducted in this regard. As was mentioned on a number of occasions, there should be training programmes and continuing professional development for teachers. There should be a reintroduction of a repurposed support officer for Traveller services, thus strengthening the links between home and schools. There should be a framework to encourage schools, further education and training colleges and centres to evaluate and measure the current practice of engaging and supporting students. There should be a system for tracking pupils as they go from primary to post-primary levels and on to further and higher education. There should also be a review of childcare provision to support the Traveller community in accessing education, and we should address the challenge of transport costs in terms of rural provision and access.

I thank the committee for the opportunity to engage, listen and learn this afternoon.

Chairman: I thank Ms White for her interesting contribution. There were many very practical recommendations from the stakeholders. We all agree that direct targeted intervention is very important to help young students from the Travelling community. The respect for diversity which several witnesses mentioned is very important in schools. It is also important to support the schools, their staff and the families and the Travelling community. The notion of having positive role models is extremely important.

I want to acknowledge those in the Public Gallery, who are from the different groups including Councillor John Hogan, the national chairperson of the ETBI, Eileen Flynn, from the National Traveller Women's Forum, Anastasia Crickley, Dr. Máirín Kenny, Kathleen Lawrence and Tracey Reilly from Pavee Point, Margaret McDonagh from the Yellow Flag and Helen Brogan and Jacinta Brack from the Irish Traveller Movement. Ian's parents, Patrick and Julia McDonagh, are also with us. They are all very welcome and we hope this meeting proves a fruitful experience for all of them.

Committee members will now have the opportunity to ask questions and stakeholders can respond.

Senator Lynn Ruane: I thank the witnesses for their presentations. A few people have mentioned the reinstatement and resourcing of what was there before, as if that was adequate, which does not acknowledge the damage done to the Travelling community since the early 1960s. We also need to acknowledge that when austerity budgets destroyed aspects of the education system it was a disaster for the Travelling community. If we are recommending the reinstatement of a visiting teacher the question is whether that was enough. Are we just saying that is what we had before and we will do the same again, or are we saying Travellers deserve a lot more than this and need a much more targeted approach than was there because it was not working? It might have been an extra bit of help, an extra resource and that might have been positive but was it achieving the goals the Travelling community needed to achieve? We should not herald the initiatives that existed before austerity as a golden chalice that was moving the

Traveller community through the education system and into third level because I do not think they were. They were not enough.

Funding is given to universities if they increase access for minorities and working class students. Apart from the Yellow Flag programme and initiatives, what would it be like if there was funding attached to how good a school was at meeting the needs of minority groups such as Travellers or Roma or other ethnicities? If 50% of those children are not in delivering equality of opportunity in schools, DEIS, schools should the funding for special category groups in educational deficit, to follow the children, rather than the schools, from primary to third level education? Should it focus on families rather than try to recreate something in schools that was not really working in the first place? Anyone can answer that question.

People have got used to the word racism and do not understand what is behind it and the impact it has on people. People in schools are so afraid of racist attacks that they change their identity. I have said in the Seanad that my consciousness of this was raised when I went into the home of my friend William, who unfortunately is now dead, and he spoke like a Traveller. I had been friends with him for 12 years and said I had never heard him speak like that. It was as if I heard a new person, a side of him that I had been deprived of. I had been missing out on his culture and identity. A person tries to go through a system suppressing their identity and then we ask why so many Traveller people die by suicide. We have completely denied their identity since the 1960s. There has to be some sort of redress due to them for that.

A person does not have to be inside four walls to be institutionalised. The State has institutionalised the Travelling community for far too long. What was there was not good enough even though it might have been a positive resource at the time. What would the witnesses prefer to do and should the funding follow the child?

I speak to women in my community, not necessarily in the Travelling community, who are really struggling to get their children to go to school past junior certificate level and then the State takes their children's allowance away. There are groups already living in poverty and this is something that was never supposed to be attached to the educational journey but the State refuses to give them the children's allowance if the child is not in school. What impact does that have on the poverty of women in the Travelling community? Are they losing the children's allowance at second level if they cannot get a form stamped in the school to say their children are still attending? I know that is happening to other groups which increases the levels of poverty in some households.

Deputy Thomas Byrne: I apologise that I will have to go to the Dáil in a few minutes but I will read the responses in the Official Report. The submissions are very helpful, very clear and concise and there is a lot for us to follow up on. I will follow up with parliamentary questions, as I am sure my colleagues will do as well.

There is not much I disagree with. Notwithstanding Senator Ruane's comments on the pre-2011 supports, it seems they did some good. At a minimum I would support bringing them back but I accept what Senator Ruane is saying too. That probably needs to be considered.

Mr. Collins and I corresponded yesterday about Senator Kelleher's Bill and I have discussed these issues with her. Mr. Collins invited me to ask why that Bill is important to Travellers and the community. I set out our views publicly; we do not like putting curricula into law even though we support compulsory subjects. I have no difficulty with this being on the curriculum, I support it, but it is not written into law that any other subject should be on the curriculum.

It is not written into any law that Irish, English or mathematics have to be taught. Could the witnesses set out the reasons they would support Senator Kelleher's very noble Bill? I have no difficulty with its principle but legislating for this is a problem. We have had this problem before, famously with sex education and history. One of my colleagues wanted to make history compulsory and I said we supported it being compulsory but not in law. The reason is that it then becomes a political football and other issues come in, as they do around the world. That is a side issue. I will follow up on many of the important points the witnesses have raised.

I would like the representatives from the Traveller organisations to respond to a question that arises from Mr. Brougham's submission. He mentioned that primary enrolment was 100% before 2011 and then it may have dropped, anecdotally. Do the representative groups have evidence of that or do they support that contention? Is that correct? What are the reasons for that? Does the State have a responsibility to rectify that or are there other reasons that people are not attending primary school?

I am sure the committee will issue a report taking on board what has been said and each party will do its own thing on the issue too.

Deputy Jan O'Sullivan: I thank the witnesses for their presentations and written contributions. We do need to write a report and to direct a lot of questions to the Department of Education and Skills. There is no excuse for reducing timetables. I am not sure who makes those decisions. Is it the schools? Where does that decision come from? We should very clearly state that no school child should have his or her timetable reduced for any reason. All children should be entitled to the same amount of time in education while in school.

The yellow flag scheme is a very good one, but it should really be in place in all schools. Perhaps Ms O'Callaghan could comment on that. Only a relatively small number of schools participate at the moment, and it is voluntary. One of the issues that arose was that some schools find ways of making Travellers feel unwelcome, even though they are not supposed to act in such a way under equality legislation. Schools should not act in this way, but they do. Perhaps there is a way of putting the principles of the yellow flag scheme into all schools and achieving that culture of inclusivity in all schools. This does not just apply to Travellers; other groups feel excluded from particular schools. We all know schools that write it into their enrolment policies even though they are not supposed to. If the witnesses have any views about how we can achieve a more inclusive culture in all of our schools I would be happy to hear them. It would address some of the issues raised by Senator Ruane around people feeling that they have to hide their identity. I support Senator Kelleher's Bill, because until everybody knows about the culture we will always have to deal with ignorant people who do not have knowledge or information about the subject.

The opportunities the witnesses have to consult on this matter and to feed into policy was raised. Many people also mentioned the implementation of policy. I believe Ms Joyce said that we have many policies but that we do not have feedback on the implementation of those policies or the information in terms of statistics. We do not have the data that the witnesses would like us to have. The national Traveller education strategy is from 2006, and I believe a review is being carried out in the Department at the moment. Have the witnesses had the opportunity to feed into that review? Mr. Collins referred to the need for a consultative advisory forum of some kind. Do the other witnesses agree with that? Would that be an ongoing engagement between the representative groups and the policy makers and those implementing those policies?

I believe Senator Ruane referred to bursaries and incentives for staying on in further and

higher education. Perhaps Ms White would have a comment on further education in particular. Do we have any statistics available in that area? While we have worrying statistics in terms of transfer from primary to post-primary we also have very low statistics in terms of participation at third level. We want to see significant progress in that area, but we cannot measure that progress unless we have the statistics. Many of my questions will have to be raised by this committee elsewhere. I believe the Higher Education Authority, HEA, is supposed to be carrying out a bursary review; perhaps it will be able to provide numbers on that.

Deputy Kathleen Funchion: I thank the witnesses for their presentations. It is really good to see presentations featuring recommendations, solutions and suggestions; it makes it easier when we are trying to fight for resources. Many of the questions I was going to ask have been covered, and I do not want to be repetitive. I totally agree with the idea proposed for the education system. The classroom can be a very judgmental place, and if one does not fit into a certain category or box school can be a very lonely place. It leads to people trying to get out of the education system as quickly as possible. People lose all their confidence in many instances. It is very damaging. Children spend a lot of time in school, and face a battle every single day if they do not have a positive experience. Parents also face a battle in that regard. They have to send their children to school, and it is not easy sometimes. We should not underestimate how difficult that is and the wider implications it has for one's entire life and self-confidence, as well as how one sees oneself in the world. Mr. Brougham made the point that it would take a generation to rectify the cuts. A bleak picture has been painted today in terms of progression and opportunities. This committee has to take that on board and perhaps raise the issue at Dáil level via a report. The witnesses have the answers, and that must be taken on board.

Could each witness suggest one key starting point? It is hard to pin it down to one thing, but can they make suggestions?

I welcome Senator Kelleher's Bill and the very good work she has done in this area. I commend her on that.

Senator Robbie Gallagher: I welcome all the witnesses and thank them for their straightforward and though-provoking presentations.

Mr. Joyce outlined the history of this issue and how we arrived at this point. He mentioned the 80% cut in funding for Traveller education in 2011. Senator Ruane made the point that that in itself was not a target, but the Government has to address that issue at the very least. We are now eight years past that date, and have been told that the economy is flying and that we have the fastest growing economy in Europe. It is time for our citizens to see the benefits of that.

The statistics speak for themselves. Only 13% of Travellers complete secondary education, as compared to 92% of the settled community. Mr. Collins summed up the matter for many people. We are discussing attempts to increase education for the Travelling community. All of society would benefit from increased education in this area.

Some of the points that jumped out at me include the importance of having teachers from the Traveller community. What can we do to encourage children and young adults from the Traveller community to take up teaching? Are there any incentives we can put in place to address that?

The home is vitally important for all our children, be they Travellers or otherwise. There is no doubt that Traveller children are very much at a disadvantage in that respect. What can we

do or what incentives can be put in place to encourage parents to re-engage, or engage for the first time, with education? What the child is taught in the home has serious implications for the child going forward. What measures can we put in place to address that particular issue? People spoke about the facilities available and the obstacles that Traveller families come up against by simply trying to get their children to school in the morning. They might not have transport, or access to broadband might be non-existent, or costs associated with schooling might be prohibitive. Would some form of breakfast club or after-school facility, where children from the Traveller community could get targeted attention, help to address the issue? What are the thoughts of the witnesses on this? Deputy Byrne asked me to mention the reduction in timetables. Are there case studies on this that would help us? I acknowledge the work done by my colleague in the Seanad, Senator Colette Kelleher, on this issue. She has done great work and it is clear that more needs to be done.

Senator Maria Byrne: I thank the witnesses for their presentations. Much of what I was going to ask has been asked. Ms White of ETBI spoke about the payment of an allowance for some classes. Is this similar to the Youthreach programme? Would students in mainstream education get an allowance? I read the submission from the Presentation Secondary School in Limerick, which I know well from having visited on several occasions, and I noted with interest that it pointed out that because some of the parents do not have a high standard of education it is not a priority for the school-going children because there is no encouragement from the parents. Another school in Limerick attended by a number of Traveller children brought the parents into the system. They got them engaged in the board of management and worked with them in a think tank. They ran classes for parents with numeracy and literacy problems to encourage them to work with their children. This was a good way to integrate them. I worked with the Traveller committee during the ten years I was a member of the local authority. There was a lot of good interaction between both sides. Some of the cuts made must be looked at. We need to encourage the Department to reinstate some of the supports that were in place because they were working at one stage but now they are not. Encouraging the parents to get involved in the school might be a way to start and I would like to hear the comments of the witnesses on this.

Senator Colette Kelleher: I thank the Chairman and the committee for giving time to this pressing issue. Every time I look at the statistics and consider them they continue to shock me. I do not think we can in any way as a society, committee or Oireachtas be satisfied with what is happening. The presentations have been excellent and very constructive, and it is nice that the Traveller culture, history and education have been endorsed. Deputy Byrne and I might disagree on the tactics but tomorrow we will speak with Traveller advisers and activists who will be advising on the national curriculum for assessment. This would not have happened without the Bill. We may disagree on what should or should not be on curricula. It is terrible that it takes a Bill to get this level of attention.

The statistics are worth repeating as they are compelling. Ms Joyce drew attention to the fact that 13% of Travellers complete secondary education as opposed to 92% in the general population, with 1% in third level and 167 Travellers ever in third level education. We speak about Traveller teachers. They require third level education so what hope do we have of making progress until this is addressed? It is very concerning that the transfer from primary level to second level has fallen from 100% to 80%. This tells us something.

I am concerned about the teaching profession's responsibilities and role in all of this. I would like the witnesses to think about what report card they would give themselves. Would it be an A+ or an F? When I look at the statistics I must say it would have to be a fail and not

a pass. I would like to hear particularly from Mr. Byrne because principals and deputy principals have responsibilities in making decisions on reduced timetables, an issue raised by Mr. Joyce. Where does the buck stop? Will people here give an undertaking that this practice will be eradicated and eliminated without waiting for the Department of Education and Skills or a Bill to be told to do it?

In terms of the Traveller culture and history, there are ways and means that schools can do now what the Bill proposes but it is just that it is not happening. We have to go to extraordinary efforts to make sure ordinary things happen for children, such as finishing primary school and secondary school and going to university. These are ordinary things. I would like to hear specifically from Mr. Byrne, Mr. Brougham and ETBI. Youthreach is fine but it is an exceptional service. It is great that it works for some Traveller children but it should not be the norm. We have to have an urgency about this. I am interested to hear about what training teachers need so they know how to make schools warm and welcoming places where Traveller children will want to go and where they can thrive alongside children from settled backgrounds so we can make a society that is inclusive and not exclusive or segregated.

I am a visiting guest to the committee and not a member, but I know it will make strong recommendations about the role of the teaching profession and raising its game. Cuts must be addressed, as must other issues. If I were a teacher looking at the statistics, I would not be very proud of my record on this.

Chairman: I thank the Senator for her contribution. I have no doubt about her good intentions but I would not want to call into question the reputations of our excellent teachers. The committee always recognises the very good work done by teachers at primary, secondary and third level.

Senator Lynn Ruane: I would like to-----

Chairman: I am making this comment as Chairman. We need to work with teachers and the teaching professions to ensure they are better resourced. We cannot lay it at the door of just teachers because, obviously, in terms-----

Senator Lynn Ruane: I am sorry but-----

Chairman: The Senator will not interrupt me.

Senator Lynn Ruane: Hang on a minute. The Chairman laid it at the door of Traveller homes-----

Chairman: I am chairing this meeting.

Senator Lynn Ruane: -----and through conversations we spoke about parents-----

Chairman: The Senator had her say.

Senator Lynn Ruane: We spoke about Traveller parents and Traveller homes and if the home does not-----

Chairman: She had 15 minutes.

Senator Lynn Ruane: The Chairman wants to speak up for teachers but did not do so for Traveller mothers two minutes ago.

Chairman: I am responding to Senator Kelleher. Please give me this opportunity as Chairman of the committee. We need to work with teachers and teacher organisations to make sure Traveller children and other vulnerable children have the best opportunity to learn within and outside the school environment. We need to look at a number of resources that can and should be put in place to support the children and teachers. This is very important. I did say at the start of the meeting that members should not make any criticism of people outside of the House and I will put this on the record again.

Deputy Gino Kenny: I will be very brief because most people have covered the questions and I do not want to be repetitive. I thank everybody for their very insightful presentations. As Senator Kelleher has said, the statistics speak for themselves and they are pretty shocking. The witnesses will probably comment on them. The cuts since 2011 have had a very detrimental effect on the Travelling community, particularly on educational needs. Has any of those cuts been reversed? The witnesses are indicating that none of them has been at all. That says everything.

Chairman: If the Deputy has no other questions, I will comment briefly. Most of the issues have been addressed by my colleagues. We know a number of statistics from the 2016 census that are horrific. Only 13% of Travellers complete secondary education in comparison with 92% of the general population. Less than 1%, I think it was only 41 last year, are in third level education. Some 17.7% of Travellers have no formal education whatsoever, compared with 1.4% of the general population. As Deputy Gino Kenny said, the statistics speak for themselves. Anecdotally, we know that an increasing number of Traveller students are leaving schools with poor numeracy and literacy skills. What can we do, not just in terms of making sure the resources are there but also in terms of monitoring this on an ongoing basis? That is very important if we are to get some progression.

A number of people have spoken about discrimination within schools. Certainly the Yellow Flag works around that. I agree with Deputy Jan O'Sullivan that we need to see it in more schools. Are there other initiatives that the witnesses feel would be helpful? There was also comment about the relationship between early years education and future life outcomes. We know from the research that the longer somebody spends in education, the better health outcomes they will have and the longer they will live. They will also have better opportunities of attracting employment. Would it be useful to have an extra year of early education for Traveller children? Pavee Point identified weak engagement between education providers and Traveller society. That should be addressed. Would Pavee Point like to make any other comment on it?

Some of the other submissions from people who are not here today raised the issue of gender roles. Ms Joyce would refer to this also. It is important. I have spoken to teachers who have experience teaching girls and boys from the Travelling community. They see this as a major issue. They have a very good relationship. One of the teachers is a home school liaison teacher who has a fantastic relationship with many of the Traveller mothers who want the best for their children. They say, however, that there is the issue about wanting their daughters to get married at an early age and not seeing other opportunities for them as also being viable. It is about how we try to address those issues. I agree with the possibility of funding following children. That 50% of our students are in non-DEIS schools definitely is a problem. We should have more resources. The capitation grant for Traveller children is far too low. It is only €240 per child unless there is a special class, but it is two to three times lower than grants for other vulnerable children. That should be one of the recommendations we would make.

If witnesses have any thoughts on anything the members have said, we would like to hear them. I will go in reverse order starting with Ms White. I apologise. I had not seen Deputy

McLoughlin indicating.

Deputy Tony McLoughlin: My apologies. I was late coming in as I was at another meeting. I would like to pick up on some of the questions asked about resources and the cutbacks since 2011. Perhaps Mr. Joyce might expand on that. He indicated to my colleague that there has been no improvement since 2011.

I support what the Chair said about the teachers. People can complain or whatever else but the resources should be in place for the teachers. Perhaps we might get some comment on that as well. This is not the place to start criticising teachers. I know where some of my colleagues are coming from, but if additional resources are needed for teachers, this committee is here to listen and, it is hoped, to assist. The statistics we have on students going from national school to secondary school are alarming. With statistics, we have all the facts there. What can be done? How can we improve that?

Deputy Jan O’Sullivan: I have to interject. It is legitimate to be critical of teachers. They are not immune from criticism. There are great teachers but it was legitimate to raise the question. There have been a couple of voices, and in fairness we need a bit of balance.

Chairman: There is balance now, so it is fine.

Deputy Jan O’Sullivan: That is why I interjected.

Senator Lynn Ruane: It does not take funding to create aspirations in children. We can talk about funding all we want. It does not take funding not to be racist. It does not take funding to be non-discriminatory. That stuff does not take funding and that stuff exists within the teaching profession. It just needs to be acknowledged. I am not saying it applies to every teacher.

Chairman: The vast majority of teachers certainly are not like that.

Senator Maria Byrne: I do not think we can tar everyone with one brush.

Chairman: That is the point I am making.

Deputy Jan O’Sullivan: We should be entitled to raise the question.

Senator Lynn Ruane: We get very exercised when we are being quizzed about middle-class white teachers from rural Ireland. Look how exercised we are. Can my colleagues now transfer that feeling to imagine what it would be like to be a Traveller?

Chairman: If we can continue with the meeting, I have asked Ms White to respond, please.

Ms Nessa White: It is probably timely to provide some balance to the points that are being made. I agree. Making school an environment where people want to go irrespective of their background is what we are all about. That is what we do and what we should be doing. One of the questions was what our starting point would be. I love these opportunities to hear about initiatives like Yellow Flag. I am not in the role a long time and it is something I was not aware of. For me, that is a starting point to explore and to follow up from today in response to the question of how we can expand that and make it happen.

I will try to cover all the questions and ask the members to come back to me if I have missed one. The issue around timetabling again is certainly new to me. It is certainly not a position

that the ETB sector or ETB schools take when it comes to how we deal with things, because it is not dealing with things. I will certainly explore that to see the situation in our sector. It is certainly new to me today. On continuing professional development, CPD, for teachers, this is a very good example that I can add to a list of examples of areas in which we need to provide CPD. In ETBI, we are very well placed to provide that for our sector and it is something that can be delivered upon. There are many other areas, like a multidenominational approach to making school a welcoming environment, where we can tie in all of these things as a good practice approach to how we look after children in our schools. That is something I will be taking from today to address the real challenges that have been outlined by people in our schools and all schools, but also to support the teachers who sometimes just do not know and sometimes bring their unconscious bias to interactions they have. It is about acknowledging the good work that is being done by our teachers and acknowledging that sometimes there needs to be support in terms of CPD to change what we are trying to change. I certainly can take that on board and will do something in that regard.

On the incentives and what they would look like, I agree with the point that Youthreach should not be the norm. Youthreach is put up as an example of what works, and absolutely it works, but if our system was working, Youthreach would be plan B for children of any background who need it. That is what it should be. All the initiatives, action plans and policy documents we have need to be implemented to make it plan B for everyone and not simply a plan B that we have put up as a gold star towering achievement. I take that on board.

Reference was made to reinstatement from the level of cutbacks. It is valid to point out that we think sometimes that going back to what we had is all we should expect. It was certainly a learning point for me in the sense that sometimes we need to think differently. The idea that because we had something does not mean it worked anyway. It is certainly something we might consider and add in to something that we could bring back to the committee, especially if there were different thoughts around the bigger picture and looking forward rather than looking back.

Reference was made to education and training boards being well placed to deliver quickly, and we heard the suggestion of collaboration at school level with parents. Literacy and numeracy services go hand in hand with what we are trying to do. We could implement pilots and initiatives quickly in that area. If it could work, why not try to do it? It is a very good idea and something that I am going away with. I do not think I can change the world, but much of what has been recommended is practical and we can explore it. I had the opportunity to meet, listen and talk to some of the other stakeholders who know better than I ever would what will and will not work. There will be follow-up with the stakeholders outside of this environment to look at some practical pilots and some measurement. Mr. Collins said to me that we need to get better at measuring whether policy is working. We put it up there as something we have done but we do not really get to the point of measurement. That is where we are moving to in our sector. We like to talk about good practice. Baselines and measurement are the only way to know whether something is good or working.

Mr. Feargal Brougham: As a school principal, an educator and especially as a trade unionist, I consistently strive, as does the teaching profession, and work at trying to make schools as inclusive as possible. Of course we do not always succeed because these are complex issues. Educators must not be hypocritical and must be open to listening to advice from wider society and communities. We must listen and learn because that is the nature of our profession. There is nothing a teacher wants more than to make the experience of education as beneficial and positive as possible for the members and pupils they teach.

Deputy Funchion asked about some of the practical issues to take from listening to everyone today. When we consider the restoration from the level of cuts, one of the key things we are talking about is trying to respond to and understand a community. The visiting teacher worked at different levels as a bridge between schools and the wider Traveller community. It was about the chance to break down some of those barriers. When that was taken out of the system, it had an effect on those schools with some of the issues we are talking about now. This is especially relevant if parents had a bad experience at school, because the visiting teacher was able to relay that directly to the school whereas the home school liaison teacher has not had years of experience doing that. The role was simply cut overnight and that had a dramatic effect.

The idea of the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment is wonderful. I am involved with the Irish National Teachers Organisation in a project called global citizenship school. We are trying to promote all social justice and human rights issues in programmes. We are trying to embed these in the curriculum. I am 100% supportive of the Yellow Flags project because it is a great idea.

I was reflecting on an idea before I came to the meeting today. It dawned on me as a teacher of 30 years that I do not think I ever taught a lesson on the Traveller community. It is really only when a teacher is hit with that and then a person comes from the community that the teacher will question himself. That is quite stunning. I must have taught thousands of lessons over the years on all kinds of issues and all types of countries and yet the topic was never in a book that I either chose to or had to deliver to a class.

Reference was made to grants following the children. The school I work for in Ayrfield is not part of the Delivering Equality of Opportunities in Schools, DEIS, programme. One particular cut was implemented and there has been little talk of it being restored. As a non-DEIS school, we used to get a grant to help supplement children who we believed were in need. That is something to be looked at when we are looking at the 50% of schools that are non-DEIS. Reference has been made to how the capitation grant only covers 80% of the heating and insurance costs in a school. Restoration of a particular grant earmarked to help children who need greater access to the curriculum is worth considering.

Reference was made to how we were not exactly in nirvana in 2011. It is certainly better now although child poverty rates have risen 11% since those cuts. I am unsure whether that is a direct result.

A suggestion was made about some element of the visiting teacher for Travellers service. It is important regardless of whether we increase the number of home school liaison teachers or by providing other ways of getting out and bringing the community into the school or bringing the school out to the community and bridging those gaps.

Mr. Clive Byrne: I thank the Deputies and Senators for their comments and questions. I am grateful for the endorsement of teachers but I am not too precious as a leader of second level schools to pretend that issues will not arise from time to time. In any event, the endorsement of the teaching profession by the committee is good because, by and large, we do very good work in our schools.

Many of the members expressed surprise about the issue of reduced timetables. In my opening remarks I mentioned how, from what we could glean from our commentary with second level principals and deputy principals and their links, there seems to be good interaction with Traveller students at primary level until fifth class. At that stage it seems issues of attendance or

discipline begin. These are mainly to do with puberty or growing. In any event, by the time the student comes to second level if he or she was in a situation involving a reduced timetable, the chances are it was because of emotional or behavioural difficulties or anger management issues within the school. In many instances, a reduced timetable would be agreed between the school and the educational welfare service or National Educational Psychological Service. What we do not want is for that to become the norm. It should only be for a reduced or short period. It should not be seen as nirvana to have the child on the school books but not to be benefitting from the system. It is important that most of the students on reduced timetables are working on particular individual plans to ensure they are getting back to the full timetable. Irish education is characterised in some schools by competition rather than collaboration when it comes to admission policies, soft barriers and so on.

Senator Ruane is absolutely right about supports that existed in 2011. How much has changed in Ireland since then? My view is that we need to consider whether something is named in the context of education and how things have not moved on in recent years if the needs of the Traveller community are to be seen as a priority within the system. If particular resources are allocated, they can be quantified and judged to see if they need to be adapted.

Deputy Funchion referred to nirvana earlier. I would like to see our society and schools being governed by inclusion. We should have a positive climate of respect for everyone within schools, but we need to look at it. I wore another hat as chairperson of the board for senior cycle in the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment.

In another context and wearing another hat, I worked as the chair of the board for senior cycle in the NCCA. The level of consultation that has taken place with the various education partners is designed to try to bring about a senior cycle that meets our needs for the students in our society in the current climate. The level of subjects we have, where success at leaving certificate level is seen as one's ability to get through a leaving certificate and move on to third level, will not meet the needs of the Traveller children in our system. We must look to put in place the necessary supports to encourage home-school links where education is valued.

I was very taken by what my colleagues on my right said about the influence and the educational attainment of mothers. Students feel discriminated in their schools because they cannot associate with their own culture. The Senator's Bill is welcome in that regard.

Deputy Byrne's point about putting it into law or making it compulsory is another issue. I hope I have explained to members that the reduced timetable is used as a mechanism to try to cope with a particular issue when it arises, largely due to emotional or behavioural difficulties within the schools, and should never be seen as long term. As an association we look to use the educational supports and the resources of Tusla and NEPS to make sure that an individual plan is put in place to meet the needs of every student, Traveller or non-Traveller. I assure members there are far more non-Traveller children operating on reduced timetables than there are Traveller children but it should never be seen as the norm.

I agree with the points made by Deputy O'Sullivan that the number of schools participating in the Yellow Flag project must be much greater. From our point of view, we have participated in the steering committee and we are very active in the Yellow Flag project but it is inherently difficult to get school leaders - principals or deputy principals - to be willing to become involved in the project because of a lack of recognition and resources from the Department of Education and Skills. If the Department was to recognise that as an important initiative to promote the Traveller culture within schools, as part of Senator Kelleher's proposals on Traveller

culture, their lifestyle and circumstances, that would be very welcome.

The biggest issue is coping with the invisible discrimination and our own unconscious biases. Whether it is through continuing professional development, CPD, within the education and training boards, ETB, sector or within the Teaching Council through its Cosán framework, and its involvement in CPD in the coming years, it should be possible to raise the issue of bias and unconscious bias within our education system and tackled within that.

That type of bias against Travellers is becoming an issue for students of different races - the new Irish and so on - in other parts of the country. It is difficult for schools to cope with that issue. In many instances, integration issues within our schools are key challenges that school leaders are having to tackle. Much of the difficulty is that it is not named or spoken of and, as a result, we try to move things around because that is what we do in education in Ireland in many instances. Issues are because they have always been thus, but Ireland is a different society now. We have to have a vision for society that promotes the values we want from our young citizens leaving schools and entering society. If we are not in a position to help our indigenous Travellers cope better within our school structures, it will be very difficult for us to move within the changes that may come.

In doing research for this presentation, I found that there are more than 30,000 Travellers in Ireland, more than 10,000 of whom are in the labour market. There are high instances of unemployment and so on. In many instances, Travellers do not see the benefits of what they can get through education and training. We need to make that very clear within schools so that we can encourage people to buy into it.

There was a meeting last Friday about the ongoing review of the Traveller and Roma communities at which our organisation was represented. I hope that will quantify the issues that need to be tackled. Given that is a Department of Education and Skills initiative, I hope there will be progress within that.

Colleagues mentioned bursaries and other such areas. On the payment of an allowance for programmes, that is a good development but it is also a bad one because if Traveller children are not happy in school, there is almost an incentive for them to move into a programme where there is a payment of an allowance rather than stay on in formal education. They do not have experience of the concept of deferred gratification in that if they stay in the education sector they will be able to get a better job. One of the briefing documents from my colleagues outlined people's aspirations to work as farriers, with other animals or to get involved in sports such as boxing and so on. All those issues are setting the barrier very low. Even though the numbers are small, we know from the quality of Travellers who have moved on to further and higher education that when they are offered the opportunity, it is important that they are able to take it and act as role models. On the point Senator Kelleher made, if only 100 plus people from the Traveller community have got involved in higher education, it is difficult to see how we could incentivise people to become involved in the teaching profession.

I have gone on a good while. I am not sure if I answered all the questions or addressed the comments made but I am conscious of our colleagues who want to contribute.

Ms Maria Joyce: If we want change in education, we need to be honest about the realities of the education system today with regard to Traveller children. I will make a point about teachers. In the earlier part of his contribution, Mr. Byrne spoke about the principals and recognised the bias that can exist among teachers in their views of the Traveller children in front of

them. As a Traveller woman who went through the education system in the 1970s and 1980s, and as a Traveller mother who put her child through the education system in the 1990s and 2000s, I know there is blatant racism among some teachers in those education systems. I have had to listen to my son tell me that a teacher in the school told him to go home and take off his knacker's dog chain because he had a thin bracelet on his arm.

Based on my work in our organisation and listening to Traveller women who are engaging in those spaces at local and national level, I know I am not unique in that view. There are many examples of Traveller children in the education system experiencing racism and discrimination. That is the reality. I am not saying every teacher is doing that but there are many examples of Traveller children having that experience in schools today. If we are being honest about the realities of the situation, one of the key barriers across the board in terms of education, and other areas of policy, is the issue of racism. We cannot do the change of addressing those conditions in isolation.

There are challenges within the community but it is unfair to say that Travellers do not see value in education. Travellers are not seeing outcomes from education in terms of employment or further opportunities, whether it be in education or elsewhere.

We are beginning to see Traveller children coming through secondary school and when that trend starts to happen, it usually picks up, grows and more and more children come through. In some families it is harder to get younger siblings to the end of that process because they are seeing older siblings coming through the secondary school system with no outcomes from that system.

We have to be very careful that in the work we are doing we do not generalise or stereotype. There are challenges within the community but we need to be very careful that we do not blame the community because of the reality of the education system. Questions arise if one child from a group of children comes through an education system without being able to read and write. I refer to a group of children going through the entire primary school system and coming out unable to read or write. That is the responsibility of the education system. Let us be frank about that. I spoke earlier about women and girls going through education as role models. I want to be clear in that context that the majority of Traveller women we engage with and who engage with schools want their children to have a good education. They want them in the education system and they want them to get through it. The reality is, however, that they are not seeing the fair and real outcomes they should be getting in employment, as I said.

We need to be careful that the community does not get blamed here. The conditions need to be created from early school right up to further and continuing education at third level to address this. There is a need for targeted initiatives right across the board. Someone asked earlier if there was an additional school year for younger Traveller children. Targeted initiatives and ensuring they are appropriately and adequately resourced is very important. We do not want a segregated provision. We have had that as Travellers and it has not worked for us. As someone who has come through Traveller-only classes in schools, I am telling the committee it has not worked for us. Albeit I have gone through third level, segregated provision has not worked in the main for Travellers. However, we need targeted initiatives. One cannot mainstream if everyone is not at an equal starting point. Travellers are not at that equal starting point which is why targeted initiatives are needed across the board. Scholarships and bursaries are needed for Traveller teachers. We have Travellers teachers. I do not doubt that there are Traveller teachers out there. However, the reality is that they are not identifying as Travellers, which tells one all about conditions for Travellers who have gone through and are in teaching spaces.

I heard a Traveller woman speak in the Houses of the Oireachtas when we were looking at the recognition of Traveller ethnicity about a cousin who was a school principal and petrified it would become known that she was a Traveller. That is the reality of it. Those conditions are not conducive. Racism and discrimination feeds into that which make those conditions continue.

There is a need for implementation. We have a range of actions. While we may need more, the reality is that if we implemented what we had, we would at least begin to see the change that is needed. Most important is implementation and monitoring. The role of data in that context is crucial and our access to that data is equally important. The ethnic identifier at primary level needs to be right through the system but there needs to be serious additions to it and the training attached to all of it. The engagement with Traveller organisations must be real and meaningful. A question was asked earlier regarding the review of the education strategy. As far as I am aware, a desk review is taking place and we are led to believe there will be some engagement with Traveller organisations around it. That engagement must be real and meaningful.

Senator Ruane mentioned the punishment related to the children's allowance. I will need to check that. A stick approach to penalising the community does not work when the conditions are not in place to ensure equality of access at the school door and to ensure participation and outcomes. A transfer rate from primary to secondary school of 80% when the majority of children are in and around the age of 12 and the legal age to be in school in this country is 16 is very telling about an education system that is failing to meet the needs of an entire group of people. It is happening. Schools say there are no places, do not offer them or offer them where it is inappropriate for the children to go. Those practices need to be stamped out. An 80% transfer rate from primary to post-primary level is not the fault of the parents in all those circumstances. We have seen countless examples of schools refusing to accept children. That is the reality of it. The greater element of that statistic arises on foot of that practice as opposed to any kind of parental involvement.

Mr. Martin Collins: As I said as part of the opening statement, there is a wider context to Traveller access to education at all levels. We need a multifaceted approach to deal with poor living conditions. Many Travellers are living on the side of the road or on sites with no access to water, electricity or sanitation. Despite those very difficult circumstances, they are making tremendous efforts to get up in the morning and get their children ready for school. That has to be recognised. There is ambition there and a general feeling that education is important. It is valued. It is important to challenge the myth or stereotype that Travellers are uninterested in education and lack ambition. We do not lack ambition; we lack opportunities. Quite often, these opportunities are subject to what one might define as racism at both the individual and institutional level. There has been no acknowledgement of the fact that we have an educational system that promotes an ideology of homogeny. It reflects only one world view and does not encompass respect for cultural or human difference. That is why I commend Senator Kelleher on spearheading the Traveller Culture and History in Education Bill 2018 which will have a profound impact when it is implemented in schools. It should be compulsory. I disagree with Deputy Byrne. Compulsory is compulsory. If that means putting it on a legislative basis, that is what it means. If there is no legislative basis to it, it is not compulsory; it is discretionary. Teachers and principals could decide whether to implement it. That goes back to the point that we need an institutionalised policy response to creating an inclusive educational context for Travellers. We have very sympathetic teachers and principals. We at Pavee Point get invitations all the time, more than the other Traveller groups, to attend schools for a human rights day or to talk with staff. That is not sustainable however. We are an NGO with few resources. As such, we need an embedded culture of respect for human rights and diversity built into our

curriculum. That requires anti-racism and intercultural training in the teacher training colleges.

Someone asked me recently about education and how one knows one has made a difference or achieved success. I measure it as follows. Recently, Sindy Joyce received her PhD from the University of Limerick. It was a great achievement for her personally and for her family. Why are we celebrating that, however? Why is it so special? Why has Sindy been on so many chat shows, radio shows and in the media? We should not be at that stage. We should be beyond that to where it is the norm that Travellers graduate from universities with diplomas, degrees and PhDs. It is a very sad indictment of society that we are still at the stage of rejoicing in these types of achievement. While they are, of course, important, we need to move beyond that. Schools are not a very welcoming place. It is a microcosm of the wider society in terms of racism and discrimination.

I will finish on this point. When he was sitting his leaving certificate in Rathoath community college, my own son was called a “knacker” on three different occasions. This was right in the middle of his leaving certificate and he came home very emotional and upset. The school did not deal with it properly. I have always taught my son to be very dignified in fighting racism. The third time, he lashed out. I do not condone it, obviously. My wife and I were summoned to the school by the principal and what came across at the meeting was that the racism was marginalised and got lost. What became the focus was this stereotype of a young, aggressive male Traveller. That became the focus and I found myself getting really frustrated. There are those issues that need to be contended with.

There are two things that need to happen. What we had before or its equivalent must be re-established. We have no mechanism to be involved in consultation on Traveller education policy with the Department of Education and Skills. We need a forum or other mechanism to engage with the Department. We have that lived experience and know what works. We must be allowed to inform policy development and implementation. I was disappointed to hear that there was a meeting last week on the review of the Traveller education strategy to which no Traveller organisation was invited. Certainly, we were not at Pavee Point. It is indicative of the systemic problems we are having with the Department of Education and Skills, in particular.

Ms Elva O’Callaghan: I will try to address the specific questions of relevance to the Yellow Flag programme. Senator Ruane commented on the visiting teacher-Traveller service. She asked whether it was the right thing to revisit and what supports were involved. Mr. Brougham addressed that very well and indicated the service was in place to bridge a gap. However, other supports are needed to target the majority communities and schools as the delivery point of the institution of education. That Yellow Flag programme has a multi-layered or an eight-step approach which seeks to do that. In that respect, we are examining both the activities within the school and within the curricular programme and how well informed teachers are in that regard, what celebratory activities are in place, as well as what is being done at a management and policy level. This is the idea of asking the schools to review their policies on bullying but also on anti-racism and to develop anti-racism policies. We are trying to address this at a number of levels.

I acknowledge what Mr. Clive Byrne said about leadership within the schools. Where we meet principals who are open to achieving a culture of change within their school, is where the Yellow Flag programme is most effective. Usually what follows from that is that if the teachers within the school are open to saying that something about their system needs to change and if that is their starting point, they will achieve change. That is really important and that having a several stranded approach works to that.

To address Senator Byrne's point on involving the parents in the school, that is a step within the Yellow Flag programme. We invite all parents, particularly parents of minority ethnic children, to join the diversity committee, which takes a leadership position in the school. It is made up of mostly students together with teachers and parents, and Traveller parents are invited on to that. We also promote that schools engage with the Traveller community locally so that they engage with Traveller parents but not in the sense of addressing individual issues relating to their children but by talking and developing relationships over time. Senator Gallagher mentioned the development of relationships that are properly about listening to what those families need. Where those relationships develop in schools is where we are seeing outcomes. Where relationships have been built up year on year between the Traveller community through the parents and through Traveller representative organisations in local areas, of which there are many across the country so it is possible to develop those relationships, change can happen.

When Mr. Clive Byrne spoke about issues arising at fifth class level, it occurred to me that they may not relate only to puberty concerns as this is when bullying starts to become a big feature, as does the issue of identity. Children reach the age where they recognise their identity and that it differs from other people's identity. We have asked the schools to survey their students and their parents about their experiences in school and if they or their children have had experiences of racism. We have found that "Yes" is always the answer. During the past two years, 31% to 35% of children who took part in those surveys reported experiencing racism and a very high number reported that it was a regular occurrence. As is the case throughout our society, racism is prevalent in schools at every level. We find it surprising that schools often are totally amazed by the results of those surveys and they do not want to believe that it is true. This is something teachers need to understand and they need support to understand it.

We have built up many relationships with teachers in schools over the past ten years of working on the Yellow Flag programme. We have found that teachers reflect everybody in society. They range from being people who are open and have some awareness to people who are closed-minded and believe that is the way it is. Because awareness raising around interculturalism or understanding equality is not a part of or indeed compulsory at the teacher training level, sometimes those issues are not addressed. We find that even where teachers want to be supportive, they have quite paternalistic attitudes towards Travellers. Some of what we are all talking about today is about the expectations of Travellers. People have very prejudiced expectations of Travellers. Their expectations for them are not high. They do not expect Travellers to achieve the same educational outcomes. That can be found to be a feature across the board within the education system and it is something we need to address. Many of us in different parts of the organisations would say those are the things we want to address.

Training is a big part of what the Yellow Flag programme seeks to achieve. It is a step within the programme but it is only a two-hour training session within the schools. All the schools tell us it is not enough, that they really like the training and want more of it. We have developed a different tool to add on to that training, which is a 30-minute six-step module on self-awareness training for teachers. All adults and people within the school system can access it. It is about looking at one's own self in terms of prejudice and bias. This is a feature we have just added to the Yellow Flag programme to address that issue. It facilitates people in looking at their own value system, at any prejudice and bias they may have and at what we are talking about, whether it be institutional or unconscious biases. We believe it will be of help and we can make it available to schools that have the Yellow Flag programme.

Deputy O'Sullivan will be aware of the Yellow Flag programme. We have been seeking re-

sources for many years to continue it and to grow it. Our vision is that the programme would be included in every school across the country. We believe it should be targeted at not only schools that have high levels of diversity or at DEIS schools, which are the schools that tend to apply to us for it because they need it, but that every school in the country should be able to access it. It is an issue of resources. We are conscious there is a great deal of solidarity among the organisations in support for the Yellow Flag programme, including, politically, among members of the committee. We are seeking opportunities to continue to grow the programme into the future.

Chairman: I thank Ms O'Callaghan for that. Finally, I call Mr. Bernard Joyce.

Mr. Bernard Joyce: We have had a very good discussion between the Deputies in terms of some of the agencies and ourselves. As non-governmental organisations, NGOs, we are constantly reaching out and working with agencies. We are always seeking to highlight the issues but also to bring forward tangible solutions. In some ways we have been very innovative and creative in doing that. The Yellow Flag programme is an example of that in terms of examining racism within the education system. We have also examined other areas in terms of addressing some of the issues that underpin inequality in Ireland. I would have to bring the discussion back to the historic context of Travellers' segregation, which I would equate to apartheid in South Africa. That was not 100 years ago; that was during the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, and even today, there are some schools that are still Traveller specific. That should not be accepted in any circumstances.

As Ms Maria Joyce pointed out, and we are of a similar generation, we have found ourselves in segregated schools in the past, in special classes with special resources. The expectations of us during that time were very low in that there was no requirement on us to fulfill the whole junior certificate or leaving certificate curriculum. As a father of five children of different ages, I note that today we still see the low expectations of our children today but we also see their confidence being completely diminished when they go school because they find their identity is not acknowledged. They do not feel school is an inclusive, safe environment. They cannot self-identify.

In terms of identifying some of the key areas that we would press, I would say that every child needs to feel valued and important and to have a sense of fulfilment and satisfaction. They need to feel that they are a part of and embedded in society but also that their culture is very important not only to them but to their peers, their teachers and society in general, but unfortunately that is the case now. That is a fundamental element in terms of the prejudices that exist within wider society. Mr. Collins has pointed out that even before reaching school, many children live in substandard, inhumane conditions, without water, electricity or sanitation. They are in temporary accommodation and yet their mothers and fathers bring their children to school every day because they have belief and want their children to succeed. They want them to have the opportunities they did not have and to do the junior or leaving certificate, but they encounter many barriers and challenges when trying to succeed. What is expected of them remains so low and there is a view that Travellers will not be able to fulfil requirements or achieve different objectives, which stems from the fact that only 167 Travellers have obtained a third level education. On top of that, there have been cuts of 87%. While there are issues such as racism, the cuts were significant, not least on the level of progression through primary and post-primary education, as well as on the level of third level education. Today, 82% of Travellers are unemployed. The situation is at crisis point. In addition, the turnover from primary to post-primary again has been reduced significantly. We are concerned that the strategies, policies, resources and everything else have not progressed in the way that we would like. I am also concerned

that there could be a review of the education strategy without Traveller representation. Perhaps there has been such representation but we would need clarification in that regard.

In future, there must be clear, tangible recommendations with clear outcomes for Traveller education, and the inclusion of Traveller culture within the education curriculum is fundamental. We have spoken about the ethnicity status of Travellers being granted in 2017 and the symbolic statement, but that statement must now become meaningful both to our children for the future and to the wider society, given that there still seems to be a lack of understanding of Traveller history and culture. The onus has always been on us to deliver that message but, in future, that message should be delivered not by us but by the curriculum, in which it should be embedded.

I thank the committee members and the Oireachtas for giving us the opportunity to attend today. We look forward to working with the committee and others in future.

Chairman: I thank Mr. Joyce. If any of the stakeholders wish to make any further submissions to us, they can do so in writing and we will consider them. I will not invite anyone to comment further at this time because Mr. Ian McDonagh still has yet to take centre stage. If any of the witnesses have any further comments, I would be happy to receive them by email and to pass them on to all the other members. We will bear them in mind when compiling the final report and recommendations we will make. I greatly appreciate all the time and effort the witnesses put into their submissions and opening statements, as well as their attendance to engage with all of us. It was a useful engagement and it will certainly help us as a committee in making our recommendations to the Department.

We will suspend briefly to allow Mr. Ian McDonagh to take his seat, although the other witnesses are welcome to remain if they so wish. The following part of the meeting will be shorter. Mr. McDonagh will make an opening statement and members of the committee will have the opportunity to engage with him.

Sitting suspended at 5.59 p.m. and resumed at 6.02 p.m.

Chairman: We will resume in public session and hear from Mr. Ian McDonagh. He is a student and is interested in politics. I met him when he was on work placement with one of my colleagues. He has a wide range of views on all aspects of life. Today, he will discuss his perceptions of education.

Mr. Ian McDonagh: I am 17 years old and I attend Merlin College, Doughiska, County Galway. It is my honour to be here today to speak about my views of the education system as a young Traveller doing the leaving certificate.

Merlin College is a great school with a fantastic atmosphere where there is a genuine respect between students and teachers. I have received much encouragement and help from my teachers, as well as from my scholar's den homework club which I attend every day. It provides a study area for Traveller children.

In January 2016, I became the first Traveller to ever take part and to win an award at the BT Young Scientist and Technology Exhibition, winning second prize in the biological and ecological category. My project was entitled, Does the lunar cycle play a role in equine birth patterns?

In January 2017, I won an award at the BT Young Scientist and Technology Exhibition, winning the Jack Restan award. My project looked at the cures and folklore of the Irish Traveller

community.

Over the past number of years, I have been campaigning for more speed ramps and play facilities in my local area in Galway city. This gave me a great interest in the world of politics. I am hoping in the coming years to become a member of government and to be able to give the people the voice they need.

I am proud to be a Traveller. I hope that being recognised as an ethnic minority will enable other young and old Travellers to feel proud of their identity. I hope that after being recognised as ethnic minority that our Traveller culture, language and history will be taught in schools and will bring about positive changes for the future. The Yellow Flag has been a great part of our school not just for the Traveller community but for all communities.

Up to 13% of Traveller children complete second level education compared to 92% in the general population. Of those Travellers who drop out of second level education, 55% have left by the age of 15. The number of Traveller children who progress to third level education represents just 1% of the Traveller community. The majority of Travellers, 70%, have only primary or lower levels of education. My dream is to join An Garda Síochána. I say that as a young Traveller who is open about saying that I am a Traveller. Travellers exist in all aspects of work but some of them are afraid to open up because they do not know what will be said about them in their jobs. As a young Traveller, I feel that paints a bad picture, leading to Travellers being further marginalised in society.

Traveller children's futures depend entirely on them and their increasing participation in education and the workforce, which must be seen as a priority. For me, education has built self-confidence, awareness and an ability to participate in society. Low levels of education may lead to poor self-esteem, poor job opportunities, poor health and depression, the level of which, as the committee will be aware, is seven times higher among those in the Traveller community. The answer to why Traveller people suffer from depression is that they are not educated. We Traveller children need to stay in school and progress. Someone might say that he or she has been through school and does not feel wanted, but we need to stay on the ground and wait there because we are giving other people the opportunity to take it away from us. We do not take it away from them and, therefore, they should not take it away from us. That is why I remain in school and why I will keep standing on the ground. I do not care if I do not fit into the stew of the education system. I will ask my teacher for more resources and demand them because it is my future. Teachers have their future because they have obtained their leaving certificate and degree. I do not have such qualifications thus far, however, and I will demand whatever I need to get to where these people have been.

Parents need to encourage and push their children to obtain a leaving certificate. Some parents may find it hard to push their children. I need school principals and the Department of Education and Skills to take active steps with Traveller parents to increase participation in second level and third level education. I welcome any questions.

Chairman: Thank you, Ian, you are a remarkable young man and I have no doubt that your parents are incredibly proud of you. We appreciate that they took the opportunity to travel to the committee with Ian and support him, which is not easy to do. I remember being on that side of the room and making a presentation before I was a Deputy, but I was much more nervous than you. Thank you for having the courage and confidence to tell us your story. I have no doubt you will succeed in your ambition, first to be a garda, where I know you will make a valuable difference and, second, to be a Member of the Oireachtas. I wish you well in the latter

ambition because you have a strong voice and should keep speaking. You will make a difference no matter where you are.

Senator Robbie Gallagher: As Ian noted, he is an inspiration and he should be proud in that regard, as I am sure his parents also are. What came across in his presentation was his determination to succeed. He is an inspiration to all young people throughout the country and I wish him well. He stated he wants to be a garda and that he wants to end up in Leinster House. I was a member of An Garda Síochána and I am now a Member of the Oireachtas. It can be done, therefore, and I have no doubt that he also will do it.

Senator Lynn Ruane: I had no idea. I would not have spoken with the Senator all this time if I had known.

Deputy Jan O’Sullivan: It is valuable to hear Ian’s experience because we are all speaking about what should happen for Travellers in the education system but we need to listen to someone who has gone through it. I am impressed by his success in the Young Scientist and Technology Exhibition because it is a positive experience for all young people in how it allows them to think for themselves, do research and so on. It is not just about developing the examination subjects but rather about developing the kinds of skills to succeed in life. What was it in Ian’s school that gave him the opportunities which it is clear he has taken? I acknowledge that much of it is probably within his own self and personal determination. We listened earlier to people saying schools do not have enough ambition for Traveller children, that they do not expect enough from Traveller children, and so on.

What aspects of Ian’s school should we as a committee recommend be made available in all schools? Is there anything Ian believes we should recommend to the Department? He stated that they should monitor Traveller students to a greater degree and seek the correct information. Is there anything in particular? We are here to write a report and make a difference so Mr. McDonagh’s experience is really important.

Deputy Tony McLoughlin: I welcome Mr. McDonagh and thank him for his presentation. It was inspirational to listen to what he had to say to us as members of the education committee. I take from his contribution that he is not going to take no for an answer. He mentioned fellow students whose education ended at 15. How can we address this? I hope Mr. McDonagh will become a Garda superintendent. He may finish up in politics. I am sure there are many in Galway who will be getting worried about his political future. I wish him well.

How can we encourage more people of Mr. McDonagh’s age to proceed from national school to secondary education, and perhaps to third level? Deputy Jan O’Sullivan asked a valid question on how we can encourage more students to continue. Mr. McDonagh will have heard the debate earlier and noted there are many issues to be resolved. How can we achieve this and be successful?

Senator Lynn Ruane: I join my colleagues in congratulating Mr. McDonagh on his achievements and on the fact that he will hang on to the cultural part of him that will say, “I am a Traveller and also other things.” The journey I made through life was often quite lonely because a person can end up living in limbo between two worlds. On moving so far, Mr. McDonagh may ask all of a sudden whether he is still part of the Traveller community or still part of the new community in the university he is going to. Sometimes it can be really difficult to get one’s head around that and find where one fits in. All one can do is try to maintain one’s identity and hold it. We need to get to a point where individuals like Mr. McDonagh are not the exception

but the rule. Sometimes when someone from a minority group is so successful, an establishment will laud him or her and ask why everyone cannot do the same. It sometimes happened me because I left school so young and had children so young. My advice to Mr. McDonagh, a young man who seems extremely intelligent and confident, is to demand that establishments do not do that. By doing so, they place full responsibility on the individual to overcome his or her own poverty and barriers. The issue is regarded as associated with an individual rather than one that might affect a community. My advice to Mr. McDonagh, in all his successes and when he becomes an amazing garda, is that he should remind people that this matter will not be addressed until he is not regarded as an exception and until he is not a story, when Travellers have achieved true equality and when he can sit at a staff meeting in a Garda station and see himself reflected in the people who work around him. I offer this advice because it is based on something that I, being who I feel I am and being where I am from, had to struggle with when entering politics. I hope he can take this small piece of advice with him on his journey, which sounds like it will be tremendous.

Chairman: Mr. McDonagh heard us talking about role models and how important they are. From my previous conversations with him, I have no doubt he is a role model in his community. Does he have a role model he looks up to? On Mr. McDonagh's own role as a role model for his peers, Deputy Tony McLoughlin touched on the subject of young people of Mr. McDonagh's age who might feel like dropping out. How does he believe he can encourage them to stay in education? Education, as Nelson Mandela said, can change the world. What advice can Mr. McDonagh give us on how we can make better recommendations to help his neighbours or younger brothers and sisters to stay in education?

Mr. Ian McDonagh: On role models, I dreamed of being a garda. I fell in love with the uniform. That is what I always wanted. When I was younger, I did not realise one had to work to get the uniform. I just believed one put it on and had the job. It is not until one enters the education system that one realises it is tough to get the uniform. My parents may not have worked in the education system but they have been role models for us. They have helped us and got us up every morning. They brought us to school and showed us the values they never benefitted from. This is what kept me in the system.

To help young Travellers stay in school, resources are required. Some Traveller children may feel lost because they are ashamed to open up in the classroom and say they do not understand something. Addressing this does not have to involve a front-line initiative or rubbing it into everyone's face. If a Traveller child has somewhere to walk into, such as a homework club, it is beneficial. I can bring any question or part of my homework to my homework club teacher and say I need help with it because I could not understand it in class. This is what has kept me in school. The teacher has shown me the value of not sitting at home and that one can change the world if one uses one's voice.

In colleges, there is a Traveller participation rate of 1%. This is because Travellers are not given a hand to get to the colleges. We need the resources. It is rare to see Traveller girls stay in the education system but it is great to see when they do. They also have a role at home and do not want to kill their culture at home. They have to go home and look after their siblings but the education system does not recognise this. It operates on the basis of giving out homework that is to be done the next day. That may be fair in some homes but, in others, the girls and the lads, like me, need to help out. We also need to prioritise our homes and get them up to a high standard. Our lives cannot just revolve around saying we need to go up to the room, lock ourselves in and get the homework done. We need to help our parents because they are the ones

that put us on our path. We need to give something back to our parents. The only way of doing this is to get the resources from the Department.

On keeping Travellers in school, I find it hard myself. Some individuals ask me why I am still in school. The answer is that I want to be. Traveller children need to be tough and stand up to peers who have left school and tell them that was their choice. They need to say their own choice is to stay in school or, in my case, to go on and be a garda. I know many individuals who say I will never become a garda. I will fight to do so. I will have until I am 35 to enter the Garda. If I do not get in, having applied year in, year out, I can ask why. There has to be a reason if I keep applying and do not get in. Traveller children usually put in the effort first but when they get knocked, there is no one to lift them back up. If the resources are in the school, a teacher can always walk over and offer help. If I fall, I have my homework club teacher to pick me back up. It is great. My parents do not have the education to help me when I come home but I have the homework club. If there were more homework clubs, Traveller support groups, etc., we would see an increase in participation. Traveller children want to move through the system but they do not want to change their culture; they want to stay living as Travellers but need to see the value of education.

Travellers may stay in school but when they look for jobs, employers might ask whether they should be given one because they are Travellers. I have worked in hotels and now work in a nursing home doing activities. I walked in and said I am a Traveller. I never hid it in the interview. It was up to the employer to give me the job. My cousin is a senior carer in the home. She walked out of school at 15 and later participated in Youthreach. She had children and then became a senior carer. In September, she is going back to education to do nursing. Changes can be made but the resources have to be put in place. It is great to have the yellow flag programme in schools but we need the resources in the classrooms to keep the children there. We have the resources. I got resources. Throughout my schooling, I had resources. When starting the leaving certificate, all the resources got taken away because I needed certain subjects. There was no time to provide the resources given my timetable but I can always walk up to my year head and say I do not want to do PE on a certain day and want instead to do additional biology, for example. The teachers will help me because they know I have the potential to go on and they want to see this happen. It is fair and well to blame the teachers and say they do not want to teach Traveller children, but children have to fulfil their roles too. It is a 50-50 road here. Children and teachers need to push together if any goals are to be met. In life, there are two sides to every story and agreement must be reached. In this case, resources need to be invested to keep these Traveller children in school.

My role models are my parents and the community gardaí who I see walking around every day. I used to ask them how they got into the Garda - about the requirements, etc. - which may have been the wrong question. By the time I was 11 years of age, I knew all the requirements for getting into the Garda. Every time I watch gardaí passing out, I wonder whether any of them are Travellers. I want to get there. I would not take any other job. I do not want any other job. I want to join the Garda. I want to make a change. As we can see, sometimes there is discrimination in the Garda. Some gardaí may discriminate and others may not.

I want to join the Garda to show that there can be a member of the force from the Traveller community. That would enable me to build links with Traveller children and other disadvantaged children and see whether I can make changes in their lives and inspire them to keep going to school and keep working. I think education is the weapon of life. If one does not have education, one will find life tough. My parents got through life. In the 21st century, we cannot

sit back and say we do not need education. We need education for everything we need and for anything we want. The Government needs to get resources in place for Traveller children and indeed for all children. There is no point saying we will give everything to Traveller children while isolating other children. We need to get these resources for all children.

We do not know what is happening behind closed doors. It is great for us to go to school every day with a clean uniform and a happy face, but what is inside us? We can all show off these happy faces, but what is inside us? These children may want to do well, but they may have to walk out of school for other reasons. If the resources were there, every Traveller child and every other child would do well. The main thing is to provide the services, get children into school and keep them in school for as long as possible. No pressure should be put on children because suicide may arise and stuff like that. The main thing is to educate children. When they are educated, it will be up to themselves to make their own opportunities.

Chairman: Good stuff.

Senator Lynn Ruane: I would like to ask Mr. McDonagh about the homework club he mentioned. There is a group of homework clubs in the large community I live in. The clubs are run by a service rather than by a non-governmental organisation. They are organised at specific locations like halting sites. Is the homework club that Mr. McDonagh attends run by the school? Is it a Traveller-specific club in a particular region? It is strange that, in this day and age, the homework clubs in Tallaght do not even have broadband. I wonder whether Mr. McDonagh's homework club is run by the school or by an organisation.

Mr. Ian McDonagh: The homework club is run by Galway and Roscommon Education and Training Board. It is specifically for Traveller children. It was established approximately 20 years ago. It is sad to report that it took 20 years for the club to get one boy to do his leaving certificate. Another boy is coming through to do his leaving certificate. The two of us are not as friendly as we were because we are killing each other for the points. We have been together the whole way through. Now that we are coming into fifth and sixth year, we are competing head-on to see who gets the most points. It took over 20 years to get two Traveller lads to stay there.

Chairman: Two graduates of the homework club.

Mr. Ian McDonagh: Hopefully we will get more Traveller boys to stay in the homework club. If this facility is taken away from our community, no other boys will stay in education. It is tough enough to stay there with the homework club. If the club is taken away, these people will not stay in the system.

Chairman: How many children are in the homework club?

Mr. Ian McDonagh: Approximately 35, most of whom are primary school students. Very few of them stay on as far as the junior certificate. I can email my homework club teacher any day of the week, at any time, and she will help me. That is the main thing. She is more like a mother when I walk in there. She is the mother of the education. That is what I call her. She is my mother when I walk in there. If I tell her I need help with something, she is always there. If I realise after being in school that I need help with biology, she will come in the next day with a big lump of biology notes. This allows me to make sure I know the topic before the teacher even opens the book. These resources need to be provided. It is up to the teachers to have a great insight as well. Our teacher will go a mile for us just to get us there.

Chairman: How big is the geographical area? Is there much travel involved in order to get

to the homework club?

Mr. Ian McDonagh: No, it is around the corner from where I live. It is less than five minutes walking.

Chairman: Is it the same for all the others? There are no barriers in terms of transport.

Mr. Ian McDonagh: No. One girl comes from Knocknacarra but her mother brings her to the homework club.

Chairman: Great.

Deputy Jan O'Sullivan: Mr. McDonagh said it was with the education and training board.

Mr. Ian McDonagh: Yes, the Galway and Roscommon Education and Training Board.

Deputy Jan O'Sullivan: Perhaps we should look to other education and training boards on this. Ms White and her colleague, Mr. Hogan, had to get the train but it would have been interesting for them to hear that. It is something we can investigate to see how other education and training boards deal with the process. The homework club seems to have been a key focus in supporting Mr. McDonagh, which is great.

Senator Maria Byrne: I missed Mr. McDonagh's presentation and I apologise as I had to take a call. The few minutes I heard demonstrate that he is certainly an inspiration, so I compliment him and his parents. He clearly has great family support so I wish him all the best for the future. He is a role model in his own right to the Travelling community.

Chairman: I thank Mr. McDonagh and we are ending on a high note. Keep in touch with us and let us know how you get on. Let us know when you are going to Templemore as well.

The joint committee adjourned at 6.30 p.m. until 3.30 p.m. on Tuesday, 9 April 2019.