



Irish Traveller Movement in Britain

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Research report on London Traveller education support service staffing levels



An Irish Traveller Movement in Britain Report

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Introduction

Many Local Education Authorities (LEA's) have developed a dedicated service for supporting the education of Gypsies, Roma and Irish Travellers. Known as Traveller education support services (Tess), these small teams of teachers, advice workers, consultants, outreach workers and teaching assistants have been a feature of Traveller education since the 1970's.

Tess have worked in the context of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils being the lowest achieving groups within schools in England. These poor outcomes are not just limited to education but are also present in areas such as health, child poverty and economic inclusion.¹ Education is a key factor in addressing these issues and the root causes of the wider socio-economic inequalities that Gypsy Roma and Traveller communities face.

Through its contacts with the education system, the ITMB has become aware that Tess appears to be undergoing a radical change. Driven by funding cuts, many Tess's have been deleted with responsibility for Traveller education being subsumed into other council education departments, such as 'Vulnerable Children' or 'Black, Minority and Ethnic' teams. Considering Gypsy Roma and Traveller pupil's extremely poor education outcomes, ITMB hold that such drastic cuts will have a disproportionate impact on these communities.

The ITMB carried out the research to find hard evidence to support what was overwhelming anecdotal evidence. These are the findings of the ITMB research into the London LEA's.

Methodology

Freedom of information requests were sent to 31 London LEA's in May 2011 and May 2012. Westminster and The Corporation of the City of London were excluded from the research because of the lack of a Traveller population.

The requests sought to capture the number of staff working in a role dedicated to Traveller education and to find out how Traveller education support services were faring under the current period of economic austerity. Staffing levels were requested for the academic years 2007/8, 2010/11, 2011/12 and projected levels for the start of the new term in the academic year 2012/13.

The information requests asked for a snapshot figure for the number of roles/jobs in dedicated Traveller education support. An additional question asked for clarification of their roles (e.g. consultant, teacher, home school liaison etc); their full-time equivalent commitment to the work (eg ft; 0.5fte; 0.25fte etc); and if the support was part of a wider

¹ EHRC 2009, *Inequalities experienced by Gypsy and Traveller Communities*, Cemlyn, Greenfields, Burnett, Matthew and Whitfield for the Equality and Human Rights Commission, particularly pages 5-34 http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/uploaded_files/research/12inequalities_experienced_by_gypsy_and_traveller_communities_a_review.pdf

role, the council was asked to estimate the proportion of their time allocated to it as full-time equivalent (eg ft; 0.5fte; 0.25fte etc).

This additional question was vital in clarifying what was a potential grey area – as a number of education workers within an LEA will have some contact with Gypsy, Roma and Irish Travellers. This question allowed an analysis of the LEA responses to pinpoint dedicated Traveller workers and track the changes to it over the time-frame of the research.

Findings

Enfield did not respond to both sets of research despite repeated requests to do so. So – excluding Enfield - the key points from the findings are:

Staffing cuts

- In 2007-8 there was 57 Traveller education support staff (ftse) in London – not including Bromley and Brent, who did not provide the relevant data for this academic year.
- By 2010, the staffing level had dropped to 39, not including Bromley and Brent.
- By 2011-12, the staffing level had dropped further to 25 – or staffing cuts of over a half since the academic year 2006/7.
- The staffing levels, by the LEA's own estimations for the new academic year 2012, show a further drop to 20 staff (ftse) – or cuts of just under 2/3, not counting Ealing who said that their projected staffing levels were unknown.

LEA's deleting services

- Out of the thirty one London LEA's that replied, only Islington and Wandsworth did not have a service during the academic year 2007/8 – and both still do not have one currently.
- By the start of the new academic year 2012 (September), 14 LEA's – or just under half – will have deleted their service – although Tower Hamlets and Lewisham will be providing minimal consultancy cover during an unspecified transitional period.
- This means that 16 London LEA's – just over half – do not have a dedicated Traveller education support service. These are: Barnet, Barking, Bromley, Camden, Greenwich, Haringey, Hillingdon, Kingston upon Thames, Lambeth, Lewisham, Newham, Southwark, Tower Hamlets and Waltham Forest. All these have deleted and subsumed the service. Islington and Wandsworth did not have a service in the time-frame of the research.

Staffing levels

- 15 LEA's retain a dedicated service. They are Barking and Dagenham, Bexley, Brent, Croydon, Ealing, Hackney, Hammersmith and Fulham, Harrow, Havering, Hounslow, Kensington and Chelsea, Merton (under Sutton), Redbridge, Richmond and Sutton.

- Of these 15, four have suffered severe staff losses (over 50%) during the time-frame of the research. These are Bexley, Hackney, Hammersmith and Fulham and Harrow
- Four more have suffered from some loss of staff (up to 50%). These are Ealing, Hounslow, Kensington and Chelsea, and Richmond.
- The largest remaining Tess's, in terms of ftse, are Brent (3.0) and Sutton (3.1). Sutton takes the lead for a consortium that also provides for the neighbouring borough of Merton. Two other south London LEA's indicated in their response that they sometimes contact Sutton for advice.
- The smallest remaining Tess is Redbridge, with 0.6 ftse. A figure that has remained constant since 2007/8.

Notes

Replacing Tess

Some LEA's who had deleted their service indicated in their responses how the functions of Tess were going to be covered.

Camden provided a full explanation, saying that: *“Traveller Education has been subsumed with other post's listed below: 0.8 Primary Consultant for Vulnerable Groups (including strategic responsibility for Gypsy, Roma and Travellers) employed by the London Borough of Camden 1 fulltime Secondary Consultant for Vulnerable Groups (including strategic responsibility for Gypsy, Roma and Travellers) employed by London Borough of Camden 3 days per annum (1 per term) GRT Consultant - independent consultancy and advice, updates on national guidance and data analysis.”*

Southwark also gave a detailed breakdown of how Traveller education would now be covered, saying that: *“All settings and schools have dedicated link officers from the local authority, who work to ensure the needs of any targeted groups of children are being met. Travellers are one such cohort. All schools and most Academies have an Education Welfare Officer, who works with the school to identify and intervene in cases of Traveller nonattendance and welfare issues. They also have the support of an Educational Psychologist and access to a behaviour specialist to meet the learning and emotional/social needs of any Traveller child or young person who is not achieving their potential or who require additional support.”*

Statutory versus non-statutory functions, and the responsibilities of the individual schools

Waltham Forest, who has deleted their Tess, pointed out that: *“Traveller education advice to schools is a non-statutory function,”* and that it had transferred the statutory aspects of its former Tess to *“the council”*.

Two services indicated that the responsibility for Traveller education lay with the individual schools. Kingston, describing the subsumation of its dedicated service into B&ME, replied: *“Academies and schools are responsible for the teaching and support for travellers who are on roll. In the financial year 2011/2012 we employed a 0.8 teaching and learning adviser with expertise in the education of B&ME groups including*

Traveller, Gypsy and Roma children and a total of 8.5 FTE teaching and learning advisers to support school improvement for all children including travellers.” Later in their response, Kingston also indicated that the B&ME team would be cut by a third in the next financial year.

Another sign of responsibility for Traveller education being devolved to individual schools is Bromley’s response. Bromley indicated that they retained a “*sold service*” which could be contracted by local schools.

Traveller population claims

Three LEA’s who were cutting their Tess, or had never had one, indicated in their response that they did not have many GRT children.

According to Lambeth: “Currently, (2011/2) there is no dedicated Gypsy Roma Traveller team and no staff. The numbers of Gypsy, Roma, Irish Traveller, New Traveller, Fairground and Showmen families are very small (in total 0.1% of the school population). Specific enquiries are dealt with by the Schools and Education Improvement Service (SEIS) depending on the school, area and by school phase. We also refer to neighbouring Traveller education services (Merton and Sutton; Southwark) for general advice”

Wandsworth replied: “The Council would note that there are comparatively few traveller children in Wandsworth or its schools and that consequently, there are no staff are employed solely for this purpose.”

Islington, who have never had a Tess, indicated that: “The January 2012 Pupil Level School Census identifies just nine pupils in the borough’s schools from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller backgrounds.”

Voluntary agencies

One LEA; Southwark, noted the help of local voluntary agencies, saying that: “The Council does not contract staff to support traveller children, however, there are voluntary agencies and external to council support which engage with traveller communities in Southwark, e.g. the Peckham Settlement. The number of staff is not known.”

Traveller Education Grant

Islington claimed that it had never had a Tess because it had never received the Traveller Education Grant, stating that: “Please be advised that Islington has never employed any staff to work on traveller education because it was never in receipt of the Traveller Education Grant or any of its predecessor grants. My understanding is the lack of a grant stems from Islington’s exemption (on the grounds of lack of space) from previous legislation requiring Councils to provide sites.”

Conclusion

ITMB's research reveals the extent of the ongoing cuts to Tess, with LEA's themselves identifying future staffing reductions of over 60 percent in the new academic year. Such cuts are disproportionate to those being experienced nationally and disproportionate to the specific educational needs of the Gypsy, Roma and Irish Traveller community.

Whilst this report focuses predominantly on quantitative evidence based on FOI requests, ITMB has also received important and widespread anecdotal data from those working on the ground. In a minority of cases this has been positive information, such as the London Borough of Brent re-advertising a vacant Tess post. However, the majority of information we receive is dominated by negatives such as Kensington and Chelsea apparently not replacing a vacant post after the previous worker left and Lewisham choosing to not use dedicated funding for a part-time Traveller education post for an academic year to help with 'transition' (i.e. from having a Tess to not having one).

ITMB and those working on the ground have specific concerns regarding London Boroughs positions on pupil populations. In some cases Boroughs have stated that because only a small number of Gypsy, Roma and Irish Traveller pupils are ascribed, there is no need to maintain or develop Tess. However, such Boroughs fail to realise that a key issue for these communities is non-ascription and non-attendance and that LEA's and London Boroughs have a duty to ensure these children's right to an education is fulfilled. Tess have played a key role supporting and encouraging Gypsy, Roma and Irish Traveller pupils into education and ensuring LEA's can and do identify these highly vulnerable groups.