



Date	July 2016
Key stages	KS1 - KS2
School type	LA maintained, primary
Themes	Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils

Supporting the integration of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils and families

Oaklands Primary School

Context

Oaklands Primary School is a smaller than average-sized school situated in Welwyn, in an area falling in the least deprived quintile in Hertfordshire. The population of the school is diverse. In October 2015 there were 176 pupils on roll of which 15% were from a Gypsy, Roma Traveller (GRT) background, 64% were white British and 21% were Black and minority ethnic (BME) pupils. Within half a mile of the school is an established Traveller site and additionally Travellers come from a second site in Codicote village, two miles away. The school has seen an increase in the number of pupils from these sites on roll; from 2 pupils in 2013 to 26 pupils in 2015. The area is fortunate to work in partnership with an outstanding children's centre group which has workers that regularly access the local site. GRT families now engage in pre-school activities both on-site and at local pre-schools and children's centres.

Brief description

The school has worked hard to identify the barriers to learning for GRT pupils, many who may not have had the same early opportunities as their non-GRT peers. Staff have established a positive relationship with parents who themselves have not had the opportunity to become fully literate as children and may not yet value the opportunities that school led education offers. This case study will identify the challenges presented to the Oaklands School community when high mobility Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) pupils are on roll. It will outline how the school has worked to develop strong relationships with the Traveller families and demonstrate how it has created a school community that values and celebrates diversity, respecting and accepting everyone's background and difference.

Supporting the progress of GRT pupils

Julie Petitt, Headteacher at Oaklands School has summed up the school's efforts to support GRT pupils in the following: 'At our school every child is treated as an individual and aspirations are high, regardless of a pupil's background. The ethos of mutual trust between families and the school is imperative in removing barriers and this allows learning to take place. It's not about squeezing square pegs into round holes.' The school has taken several steps to ensure that this remains the case.

Attendance

Almost all GRT pupils at the school have high attendance levels. This success can be attributed to the school's ongoing partnership with both the Attendance Improvement Officer (AIO) and Traveller Access to Education Officer. On admission every family must meet individually with the Headteacher, marking the start of the relationship between the parents and the school. At this meeting the expectation of regular attendance and the difference between travelling and truancy is made very clear. Where possible the Traveller Access to Education Officer is also present. Both the parents and the child are read the home/school agreement and must sign to indicate that they agree with the statements.

GRT pupils demonstrating a good level of attendance are rewarded through whole class attendance awards and house points, in addition parents are praised by a member of the SLT on entry to the school in the morning. Regular time dedicated for communication with the families builds an ethos of trust and responsibility. As a result parents feel confident to contact the school to advise them when they are going travelling and there is a significant rise in the integrity and honesty of the conversations between the families and the school.

Engagement with parents

In understanding that many GRT parents have had little or no experience of school and that they may view the system negatively, the school has put a lot of work into welcoming the families and setting clear expectations. The school believes that once a good relationship has been built the families will be more open to supporting the vision of the school.

This term all GRT parents attended consultation meetings. Many attended class and achievement assemblies and provided cakes and support for a recent Macmillan coffee morning. Five parents also attended a reading talk, despite their own high levels of illiteracy. This demonstrated a real willingness to improve the outcomes for their own children.

Daily communication at the gate with the Headteacher and class teachers, has allowed GRT parents to feel more familiar with the staff. Because of this parents have given their children permission to attend school trips including one via coach to the Science Museum in London, weekly swimming offsite and parents have come in to offer lifts to local sporting events.

Supporting pupils with additional needs

It is notable that many GRT pupils arrive with significantly lower attainment than their peers. Establishing whether a pupil has special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) or if they are simply behind is crucial in deciding what support is needed. Additional phonics sessions for older pupils and small group catch up for basic numeracy and English, has allowed the pupils to gain confidence and remain in class with their peers. Additionally, the school has worked very closely with Education Support for Medical Absence (ESTMA) for one GRT pupil who was diagnosed with a brain tumour. Through joint planning from the class teacher and ESTMA's tutor the pupil has continued to receive 1:1 tuition for 5 hours per week on the Traveller site during her treatment.

Pupils' behaviour

On entry to the school pupils and parents are made aware of the school's expectations and behaviour policy. The class teacher's presence on the playground at the end of each school day ensures that behaviour (both positive and negative) is immediately addressed with parents. This is further reinforced by strong communication with parents, rigorous enforcement of the school behaviour policy and teacher use of classroom trackers. As a result the occurrence of disruptive behaviour from GRT pupils has been minimal, and less than that of their non-GRT peers. Pupils have demonstrated that they are able to follow the school's behaviour policy and that they understand the consequences of any breach.

Impact

Increased attendance figures

Gypsy, Roma and Traveller families understand the opportunities on offer at the school and this is reflected in the attendance rates. One family has 100% attendance, another 97% and a third 89%. Overall, school attendance since September 2015 is 93% including GRT pupils (97% without). Only one family has been served a fixed penalty notice where a pupil dropped to 58% attendance. Following the fixed penalty notice warning letter, the family have indicated they can improve attendance and this is evidenced by an 8% rise in the month following the communication.

Parental engagement in the school community

GRT parents at Oaklands are actively involved in the school community, attend parents evenings and other events and allow their children to be involved with off-site activities. They are aware of the importance of education and support the school's ethos of high aspirations. At parents evening, one parent was so thrilled to see the level of writing presented by her year 4 child, she sent her husband into school the following day to celebrate and confirm his success. Another example of a parent's voice through feedback from parent consultation is: *'My son's teacher was very nice and he took his time telling me about him. I can see a great difference in my son's reading and writing since he started coming here. Thank you. Thank you to all of the teachers for making us feel so welcome, it isn't always like that.'* The school has found that the stories of success spread within the community – where one family buys into the value of education others quickly follow.

Achievement and pupil confidence

Traditionally attainment of GRT pupils has sat significantly lower than that of their peers. However the most current GRT pupils, due to high attendance rates, good quality teaching, support from home (with homework being returned regularly) are making good progress.

The school currently has 2 GRT pupils in their reception class and baseline data indicates that both pupils sit at 30-50 months entering in most areas with neither dropping below this. Their data is in line with the majority of their cohort which is significant both in terms of attainment and evidence of pre-school learning. The majority of GRT pupils who have been with the school for at least one term have made progress in line with their peers at an expected 1 step (Herts for Learning assessment steps) per term. In other classes teachers have seen an increase in times tables test results from 0/12 to 12/12.

Pupil confidence and integration

GRT pupils play an active role in the school community. The raised aspirations and expectations of the school have had a very positive effect on the pupils' attitudes to learning and confidence.

Examples of soft outcomes demonstrating this include:

- Pupils wanting to lead assemblies to talk about their culture
- Pupils sharing and discussing their class work in achievement assemblies
- Pupils taking on roles of responsibility including classroom monitors
- Pupils taking part in after school summer productions
- Pupils attending off site sport events and trips to London

During a recent annual review, the schools' local authority improvement partner interviewed a selection of GRT pupils. One boy said that he really wanted to learn how to read and write and that this school had taught him this. Another child said that her mum and dad are happy that she comes to this school because she goes home every day and says 'guess what I learned at school today!' They all said that their parents are proud of them and that they can read and write now.

Next steps

The school will develop the following strategies in the future to support GRT pupils and families:

- Develop a programme of adult literacy at the school to allow the parents to be part of the educational journey.
- Offer pictorial cooking sessions
- Run a GRT history day during June's GRT month

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Related documents and links	<p>http://www.oaklands.herts.sch.uk/home</p> <p>http://www.thegrid.org.uk/learning/bme/traveller/goodpractice/index.shtml</p> <p>http://www.foundationyears.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2011/10/Developing_Trust.pdf</p> <p>http://www.irespect.net/CIRCLE/TES/documents/Welcoming-Traveller-Children.pdf</p>

If you have an aspect of interesting practice that could be shared or are interested in finding out more about a case study please get in touch by emailing exchangingexcellence@hertsforlearning.co.uk

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