



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

Successful and positive integration of Roma pupils

St Nicholas C of E VA School

Context

St Nicholas Church of England VA Primary School is a smaller than average-sized one form entry school situated in Elstree in the Hertsmere district of Hertfordshire. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds is higher than found nationally, as is the proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language.

Brief description

In April 2015 the local authority integration team approached St Nicholas School to admit five pupils from Roma backgrounds who all speak Romanian as their first language.

In order to support the new pupils and their families the school adopted several strategies to help them settle in and feel welcome. The school uses the Department for Education's 'TARGET model' (Traveller And Roma Gypsy Education Tool) to help channel their thoughts and consider the constructive conditions needed to impact positively on the educational outcomes of the pupils. The Headteacher, Kate Johnston-Grant, believes that a shared staff understanding and appreciation of the Roma culture is crucial to realise the impact that external variables can play on the families, some of which she is aware cannot be influenced by the school. By recognising the existence of these influences and their impact, it is suggested that schools may feel better equipped to target their efforts on overcoming certain contextual barriers, whilst capitalising on other positive influences (DfE 2010).

Integrating Roma pupils into the school

Staff training

To ensure that staff have the appropriate knowledge to foster positive relationships with Roma families the school organised some immediate training from Herts for Learning for all the teachers which was then followed up with a non-teaching staff training session. The training was beneficial at giving staff a better understanding of Roma families, dispelling any preconceived ideas about their heritage and background and spreading awareness of any prejudice which the communities may face.

Effective partnerships with parents

Initial meetings with the Roma pupils and their families were crucial for putting them at ease and building an effective partnership. Staff made a point of showing the new families around the school and encouraged a few of their Romanian speaking pupils to do so, demonstrating their pupil friendly approach. At this meeting all key people and services involved with the families were present so that key information could be shared, especially where there were medical related matters.

The school office acts as an important link with Roma parents. Office staff assist parents with filling in uniform orders, trip and milk forms, pre-ordering dinner choices for the children until they became more familiar with the food options and parking arrangements to avoid lateness. Office staff ensure that the children and families are greeted in the morning and keep parents up-to-date on how the children are settling in. In the past the office quickly realised that one key relative had a good grasp of English and encouraged this person to act as the main translator for communication with other parents before school. Often when Roma pupils have had issues with attendance, both due to illness and holidays, the office began to regularly encourage parents to phone up the school if the children were off; this became habit for parents after a few reminders. Office staff and teachers regularly check that Roma parents understand the newsletters and correspondence, which is especially important regarding school trips to reassure that families were aware of exactly what is happening.

Flexibility

The school implemented a phased start for some of the younger Roma pupils who were anxious, upset and tired in their first few weeks. Initially these pupils attended school for mornings, then mornings with lunch and then for the whole day. To begin with Roma pupils were dropped off at the school office where they could meet staff and feel more settled but after a few days they were introduced to the daily routine of being dropped off to the classroom.

Due to the travelling distance from home to school and the likelihood that Roma pupils could be late as a result, the school offered parents parking to ensure the children had a settled start to the school day as well as providing access to breakfast club for free, so parents could get to work without delay. Roma families were also offered support with school uniform whereby the school was flexible and patient with pupils who took time to wear the correct attire daily.

Ensuring safety and trust

The school works hard to ensure the safety of the new Roma pupils which allows their families to feel secure sending their children to school. All staff are aware of the new pupils, particularly lunchtime staff who ensure that they are provided with the correct meals, are eating well and feel happy and safe on the playground.

Parents are reassured about the safety of their children through regular communication. In the past an unrecognised carer came to collect Roma pupils after school and staff rang home to check if this was fine with the parents as part of school protocol. In addition when some Roma pupils appeared to be uncomfortable when changing for PE staff discussed it with their parents to ensure that this was acceptable with them and their cultural expectations. The families were pleased that the school had made that communication which consequently increased their trust.

Great care is taken to ensure that Roma pupils feel safe in their new environment. For example, when a Roma pupil was due to go swimming with their class, in order to build up their confidence and understanding they were introduced to the process slowly, by first travelling on the coach and observing swimming lessons for a few weeks before starting; this lessened their fear of the unknown.

Support in the classroom

In class, teachers amended planning to differentiate for the Roma pupils, often using objects and visual images to help understanding. It was important not to put a ceiling on expectations as the children were excited by school and keen to learn. As the children had not been

to school before the teachers' initial expectations were different to the rest of the class. However as the teachers became more familiar with the pupils and as pupils became more aware of the school systems it became apparent that they needed routine. A 'new to English' group was set up for the pupils to help give them some key words and make them feel more confident to interact with staff and pupils.

The school employs a variety of strategies in class to support access and inclusion and minimise barriers to learning for Roma pupils. These include:

- Visual timetables
- Mark making resources
- Personalised project books
- New to English group
- Early phonics work to develop phonics skills
- Pupil mentors who could speak Romanian to support peer translations
- Picture dictionaries
- Additional TA support in class
- Using manipulatives to learn e.g. Numicon, bead strings

Impact

The welcoming culture at St Nicholas School has ensured that all of the new Roma pupils at the school have settled well. Through good communication the school has built the trust of families who appreciate the school's efforts to keep them informed on the progress and safety of their pupils. Increased emphasis on different cultures and lifestyles at initial teacher training has ensured that all staff have a good understanding of the Roma community and the needs of the pupils which reflects on how they deal with sensitive issues surrounding the community.

Next steps

The school will continue to develop the following strategies in the future:

- Ensure all the information from the local authority is sourced as sometimes families come over and leave the country and then come back again; especially regarding medical notes
- Support families with form filling for absence related to sickness so it is authorised and encourages good attendance
- Support after being on holiday over summer as language acquisition is likely to be affected
- Develop support for junior aged Roma pupils to socialise with more able pupils e.g. using gesture and other means

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Related documents and links	http://www.stnicholas610.herts.sch.uk https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/

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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