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## Roma Children in Hampshire Schools FAQs

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In keeping with Hampshire's commitment to the Rights of the Child, the contents of this document should be read alongside the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), specifically the following Articles:

**Article 3 (best interests of the child)**

The best interests of children must be a top priority in all things that affect children.

**Article 8 (preservation of identity)**

Children have the right to an identity – a name, a nationality and family ties.

**Article 28 (right to education)**

All children have the right to a primary education, which should be free. Young people should be encouraged to reach the highest level of education of which they are capable.

**Article 29 (goals of education)**

Children's education should develop each child's personality, talents and abilities to the full. It should encourage children to respect human rights as well as respect for their parents, their own and other cultures and the environment.

**Article 30 (children of minorities/indigenous groups)**

Every child has the right to learn and use the language, customs and religion of their family, regardless of whether or not these are shared by the majority of people in the country where they live.

## Preamble

There is an increasing number of Roma children coming into Hampshire schools. Often these children are a hidden minority due to their reluctance to identify themselves as members of the Roma community, hence it is not possible to provide any accurate figures of the Roma population in the county.

Most Roma families prefer to identify themselves by their country of origin, Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia and Romania being the most common ones. They do this because of their fear of discrimination and prejudice.

The linking of 'Gypsy' and 'Roma' in ascription documents is an unhelpful pairing as many Roma do not wish to be allied with Gypsies. Their ascription as 'White Other' (WOTH) or 'Any Other Ethnic Group' (OOTH) means that Roma children in Hampshire schools are often seen only as EAL pupils and do not receive support for their Roma background and all the cultural barriers to learning that Roma peoples may experience. The biggest known issues are attendance, attainment and retention and how we, as schools and services, tackle these.

We need to promote a Rights Respecting ethos within our settings, working closely with families and outside agencies to ensure the very best support for this vulnerable group of children and young people. We need to be aware that many of these children will have no formal experience of schooling or a very interrupted education. Many find it difficult to settle in one area and are at risk of becoming 'lost in the system' because of their relatively high mobility. We should also be aware that our Roma communities are themselves diverse in terms of language, culture and religion (they may be Roman Catholic or Muslim, quite different from our indigenous Traveller groups).

It is important, therefore, that we think creatively how best to support these children and their families to enable them to develop fluent English and a comprehensive skill set so that they can be successful within their education.

**The following list comprises frequently-asked questions and answers in relation to children and young people of Roma heritage**

**Who are the Roma children and young people currently in Hampshire?  
Where do they come from?**

Roma live in all European countries and across the border on the African continent. France has a large, native Roma population and all European countries, including western ones, have native Roma. Most Roma migrants to the UK are from Eastern European countries such as Poland, Hungary, Romania, Czech Republic and Bulgaria.

**How are our Roma families different from other Gypsy/Traveller communities?**

Roma do not regard themselves as Gypsies and do not like to be classified with Gypsies although many of their customs are similar. European Roma call their language Romanes and UK Gypsies call theirs Romani. Whilst English Romani and European Romanes have vocabulary in common, the grammatical structures used may vary considerably and the languages are not necessarily mutually intelligible.

**How will schools be aware they have Roma pupils on roll?**

Most Roma families will ascribe according to their country of origin and not their ethnicity. They do not like to be classed as Gypsies and Travellers and will rarely ascribe to these groups (WROM). They will instead identify themselves according to their country of origin and tick the WOTH box. Staff should be circumspect when thinking about a pupil's background and look for similarities to other Gypsy/Traveller children e.g. interests, attendance, disrupted schooling. If they believe the child may be Roma, staff need not ask them outright unless the relationship between the school and family is robust enough to support this but rather ensure they have a full package of support that addresses both EAL and GRT-related needs.

It should be noted that although many of Hampshire's Gypsies and Travellers have a predilection for living in caravans and mobile homes, many Roma have never lived in caravans and have always lived in housing.

### **Why do Roma parents not ascribe in the ethnicity box Gypsy/Roma/Traveller (WROM)?**

Many Roma families have come from Eastern Europe where they have suffered persecution because of their ethnicity. This makes many Roma frightened to admit their Roma ethnicity for fear of discrimination and prejudice.

### **What should I do if I think a child who has just joined our school may be Roma?**

The child should be treated as any other new arrival. If they have little or no English and require EAL support, they should be referred to EMTAS in the usual way by filling out the referral form on the EMTAS webpage. If staff believe the child may be Roma they may also need GRT support for their learning and with transition. The child should not be asked outright if they are Roma as the family may have instructed the child to hide this fact and they may have a cover story to hide their past. Involve parents as much as possible to find out about the child's prior education and health care but do this sensitively and carefully as the parents may be wary of authority. Try to gain the trust of the whole family through open conversations and involving them in school life.

EMTAS staff have a great deal of experience in talking with Gypsy and Roma families and are confident in raising issues around ascription and ethnicity in a sensitive manner. If you are concerned, please contact EMTAS for advice and support.

### **What is good practice when dealing with Roma children and families?**

- One key person in the school that links with all the families.
- Inviting the families into school for informal meetings e.g. coffee mornings to explain about the English education system.
- Helping with uniforms and school meals, including applications for free school meals.
- Providing each new arrival with a starter pack comprising basic equipment.
- Introducing the New Arrival Ambassadors and/or Young Interpreter Schemes into your school and including the Roma children in these programmes.
- If aware of any issues, ensure families are provided with appropriate and accessible information about outside agencies e.g. EMTAS.
- Giving out local information to the families in their language telling them where local amenities are e.g. doctors and dentists.
- Helping the family to fill out any forms they may need help with – they may not be literate and be embarrassed to divulge this.
- Involving the pupils in the life of the school as much as possible.



- Not labelling Roma children as 'SEND' due to a lack of literacy and/or their status as learners of English as an additional language (EAL).
- An understanding of Roma cultural practices that may impact on the child and parents. For example, parents' evenings and PE. For further advice, contact EMTAS.

### **What is Roma pupils' typical educational experience in their country of origin? What are the implications?**

In many European Countries, Roma children are segregated from the wider community and educated separately in 'Special Schools' for Roma. As a result, when they move to the UK parents may ask if their children can attend a special school, but this does not mean the child has SEN.

Many Eastern European countries actively discriminate against Roma children in schools and there are many recorded instances of separate schools for Roma children or separate classes for Roma children in mainstream schools. There is often the expectation that Roma children will not and cannot achieve academically and there are therefore low expectations from their teachers - which leads to low aspirations and attainment from Roma students.

### **How can the curriculum incorporate/reflect Roma culture?**

Roma children often do not have a sense of belonging and developing a welcoming, accepting curriculum and setting will encourage and promote their learning, progress and achievement. EMTAS has a number of resources and can work with your SLT and class teachers on effective ways of celebrating the diversity within the school without singling out any students.

**Hampshire EMTAS**

July 2020

