

FAQs about Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) cultures for teachers and other professionals

This information was written for education, teaching and support staff who work with children of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) heritages. It aims to cover questions that are frequently asked about Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities.

FAQs

Some call themselves Gypsies, others Romany. What do I call a Traveller so I don't cause offence?

It is best to use the umbrella term of 'Traveller' and then ask the pupil or parent/carer what they like to be known as. Some Travellers want to be known as Romany while others prefer Gypsy or Traveller.

Showmen are business people who travel for work and therefore might not want to be known by any other name. Showmen are not an ethnic minority group like Gypsies or Irish Travellers; they have a separate identity and culture and are members of the Showmen's Guild.

People from Roma communities like to be known as "Roma" and prefer not to be referred to as "Gypsy" or "Traveller".

New Travellers have made a lifestyle choice and do not have ethnic minority status.

I know there is a Traveller child on roll at my school but the family has told us they're White British and they haven't ticked the GRT options on the form. Does this matter?

This is an ascription issue. Families make choices about ascription for themselves and you can't change the box they ticked without their consent. There are ways of supporting them to be more open about their GRT heritage, however, and sometimes a supportive conversation about ascription in which they can express their doubts & concerns and ask questions can help.

See the [Ascription page](#) of the EMTAS website for more information about this.



If I am telephoning a Traveller parent/carer, how should I address them?

Telephoning a Traveller parent/carer is no different from telephoning any other parent/carer. Be aware that if you say 'Hello, my name is John Smith from School...', the Traveller parent/carer will often then address you by your first name. It is usually preferable to remain professional and to continue to call the parent/carer 'Mr', 'Mrs' or 'Miss'. Some Traveller mums do not take their husband's name when they get married so always check the name of the parent/carer before making the call; not using the correct name can cause offence.

Is it okay to send letters home to Traveller parents/carers?

Yes it is. However remember that some – but by no means all - Traveller parents/carers may have difficulty with reading and writing. If you want to be extra sure that the Traveller parent/carer knows about the letter, it is a good idea to telephone them. Explain that you have sent a letter home with their child and you know (s)he isn't very good at remembering to give their mum/dad/carer letters from school, so the letter says... If the parent/carer is happy, ask them to sign and return it by the given date. This saves any embarrassment on the part of the Traveller parent/carer and you are reassured that the Traveller parent/carer is fully informed about the letter's content.

Are Traveller children allowed to go on school trips?

This depends entirely on the Traveller parent/carer. Some Traveller parents/carers are happy for their children to go on trips. However, some Traveller parents/carers do not like their children using organised transport and will keep them off school on the day of the trip. If possible offer the Traveller parent/carer the opportunity to bring their child to you by car if they would prefer to do this. You might want to consider a similar arrangement for residential trips if Traveller parents/carers have concerns. Many Traveller parents/carers will not allow their children to go on residential trips but they might be prepared to bring them for a day to join in with their classmates and collect them at night to take them home. If possible you might want to encourage this as it keeps the Traveller child included and able to join in discussions and follow up work when the class returns. Schools may also invite the Traveller parent/carer to go on the trip as a parent/carer helper to ensure the Traveller child does not miss the trip.

If a Traveller parent/carer does not want to send their child on a school trip, make it clear that the child still needs to attend school and that you have a curriculum planned for them for the day - they will not just be sitting with a different class or year group.





Why are Traveller children taken out of PSHE/RSE?

This is a choice for all parents/carers, not just Traveller parents/carers.

Some GRT families have strict rules around imparting knowledge about puberty, relationships and reproduction in any form including, for some, plant and animal reproduction. It is a good idea to phone and speak with the Traveller parent/carer before a PSHE lesson because if the focus is on Stranger Danger then they may want their child included. If it is a session on Sex Education, many Traveller parents/carers will not want their child to take part. However, Relationship Education is statutory; this may be something you will want to talk to your GRT parents about with a view to finding alternative/acceptable ways of delivering the core content.

What issues or concerns might a Traveller parent/carer have about Relationships and Sex Education (RSE)?

The level of concern experienced by some GRT parents/carers about RSE can result in them choosing to keep their child(ren) home from school on those days when RSE is taught or to withdraw them from education completely to Electively Home Educate (EHE). It is therefore important that schools take proactive steps to work with families in a sensitive way around the issues that can arise.

Before RSE lessons take place, schools are advised to speak to the GRT parent/carer about the content of the lesson(s) so they can make a decision whether or not to allow their child to participate. It is advisable that male members of staff do not have conversations with or make phone calls home to talk to Traveller mums about RSE. Where possible, ensure a female member of staff has this conversation or makes the phone call to a Traveller mum.

EMTAS has two model lesson plans, one for girls and one for boys. These were developed in collaboration with Hampshire's GRT communities and they cover the topic of puberty. The lessons focus on the changes in the body that occur during puberty without going into detail about why those changes are happening. EMTAS can train staff in how to use the lesson plans or deliver the session as part of a GRT child's support package. The lessons can be delivered to small groups or to a single-sex class of either girls or boys; it would be inappropriate from a Traveller perspective to deliver the content to a mix of girls and boys. We advise delivering these lessons to GRT parents/carers first so they are confident about the content and the delivery and can make an informed decision about whether or not to allow their child to participate.





So what should we do if a member of staff at school is pregnant? Or if a Traveller mum is and her pregnancy starts to show?

Pregnancy is not usually discussed in the Traveller home and although some Traveller children will know about conception and gestation, they will usually respect GRT cultural practices by not engaging with or discussing this subject. Therefore, if a member of staff is pregnant, it is advisable not to discuss the pregnancy while a Traveller child is in the classroom.

Some GRT parents/carers tell their children that babies are bought from shops and Traveller children will often help their parents/carers to save up to buy a baby. Traveller children may be told that a pregnant mother is simply eating too much and then after the birth of her baby they may be told she has been on a diet. It is important that staff do not discuss the pregnancy in front of/with the child and that they keep any conversations about it private between them and the GRT parent only.

Are Traveller children allowed to be removed from Science lessons which teach reproduction (human, animal or plant)?

While Science is a statutory subject, it is at your discretion how you choose to discuss this with GRT parents/carers. To avoid them keeping their child off school on the days when reproduction is to be taught, it might be better to allow them to do other science work outside the classroom during lessons that focus on reproduction. In this way the child can still access a full day in school.

In KS4 it should be explained to GRT parents/carers that if they choose to keep their child out of a science lesson, they risk jeopardising their child's GCSE results as the child will not have the appropriate knowledge to answer the question and therefore will lose marks.

Why is homework an issue for some GRT children?

Many GRT children lead very adult lives outside school and are expected to contribute to the family business or help run the home. If there is a large family, sometimes the girls have their 'own children' for whom they assume carer responsibility. These 'children' will be their younger siblings. The older girls are often responsible for feeding, bathing and putting the children to bed before being able to start on their homework. Children's sleeping arrangements are governed by gender and when living on a site, boys and girls often sleep in separate trailers. If an older child is in charge in the trailer, they may not get an opportunity to study because younger siblings need to sleep. These aspects would equally apply to housed Travellers. It is important that schools are aware and can provide alternative solutions for Traveller children to do their homework in the school environment.





I have noticed that some GRT children in my Foundation Stage classroom find it difficult to master pencil control and other fine motor skills like painting and cutting out. Is there a reason for this?

Some Traveller children do not access pre-school education so when they first start school, their fine motor skills may be less developed than other children's as they may not have had much opportunity to develop them through the use of pens, crayons, scissors, paint, Play Doh and pencils. Many Traveller parents/carers do not allow these resources in their homes as they are considered messy so some GRT children may not have had the experience of learning to hold a pencil properly or how to cut out. In contrast, a GRT child's gross motor skills may be very advanced as they often engage in outdoor pursuits such as quad biking, fishing, looking after livestock and learning to drive on their privately-owned land.

My Primary phase GRT children do not seem to be reading at home. Why might this be?

Many GRT children do not come from literacy-rich backgrounds and may not have support with their reading through lack of materials or parent/carer's literacy.

Try to find time to hear your GRT children read each day if you believe they do not have the opportunity at home. The EMTAS GRT and Showmen Literacy Ambassador programme can help with this.

What if a Traveller pupil does not want to do PE?

The initial barrier to taking part in PE for a Traveller child is the arrangements for changing into their PE kit. Traveller people are very private and would not get changed in front of anyone so it is important to provide a Traveller child the opportunity to change in a private place. If you notice one of your Traveller children always avoids PE, have a chat to them about why they don't like it. Very often it is something really simple and with an easy solution.

In Secondary phase, try to include the sports that Traveller children do outside school in your lessons so they feel more included. For example, the Bleep Test is very similar to the Boxing Exercise Programme many of the Traveller boys follow. Many Traveller children enjoy fishing and horse riding and a growing number of them love golf and rugby. All of these sports can be taken into consideration at GCSE level and count towards their practical mark. Acknowledging participation in these sports, even if they cannot be performed in school, recognises the skills and abilities of GRT children and encourages participation in organised school sports.



How do I make my school and classroom more inclusive without making the Traveller pupils feel different and embarrassed?

Don't just focus on your Traveller children; find opportunities to celebrate everyone's similarities and differences. Talk about identity and what is important to the child. Include texts about Traveller families in lessons and in the library. Keep a copy of Travellers' Times in the school foyer and in the Library (contact EMTAS for information on where to obtain this magazine and other resources). Make sure Traveller children are represented on the school council and have a pupil voice.

Below is a table showing examples of ways GRT cultures may be included in the curriculum.

Subject	Topic	Relevance
English	Literacy – class readers like: 'Tyso's Promise', 'Tansy Smith', 'Runaway Rescue', 'Nothing but Trouble' (KS2 and KS3) Shaun's Wellies (KS1)	This allows all pupils to gain a greater understanding of GRT cultures and communities, thereby building up greater tolerance and acceptance.
Maths	Area – looking at a fairground – sizes of rides and stalls and how they have to be placed. Problem solving – looking at the cost of rides and how many rides it takes to pay for buying the ride eg. 1 dodgem car costs £7000. Ask pupils to consider how many people fit in one car and what is the cost for 1 go on the ride. Tessellation with a link to Traveller occupations such as hard landscaping.	By using an example that is known by the whole class, GRT children are included in the lesson and other children are made aware of the logistics of typical Traveller occupations.
Science	Dwellings and living places – insulation – looking at different dwellings, how they are insulated and what is most effective. Try to include tents, trailers and chalets in this.	A GRT child will feel more included in the lesson if their home is included as a dwelling along with all the other children's homes.
PHSE	For GRT children in Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1, work with Persona Dolls can be a good way of including GRT cultures in the mainstream curriculum offer. EMTAS have GRT Persona Dolls available to loan to support this work.	This can support conversations about similarities and differences with young children, helping to break down any barriers and to promote understanding.



<p>PHSE: Transition</p>	<p>Transition/in year admissions: EMTAS has a selection of Persona Dolls that can be borrowed and used to support younger GRT children transitioning mid-year.</p> <p>For older children, the EMTAS New Arrivals Ambassador Scheme is a useful resource schools can use.</p>	<p>Raises the cultural awareness of the other children and to show the new GRT child that the school has an understanding of their culture.</p>
<p>Humanities</p>	<p>History - Studying Porajmos (Roma Holocaust) to highlight that over 500,000 Roma deaths were recorded during the Holocaust.</p> <p>Looking at GRT war heroes in WWI & II as well as heroes from other cultures.</p> <p>Geography - Explore the migration of Roma and Gypsies. Explore motivation and push/pull factors.</p> <p>RE – Study the changes in Christianity in Britain today eg the rise in numbers attending Catholic churches; the emergence of the new Traveller Christian movement - Light and Life Evangelical Church.</p>	<p>By including GRT History in the curriculum it allows GRT pupils to find their identity and place in history. It is good if children are encouraged to bring in stories from home about relatives in the wars.</p> <p>Looking at migration gives pupils a better understanding of changing demographics.</p> <p>Religion is an important part of GRT culture and it is a changing picture in Britain at present.</p>
<p>Technology</p>	<p>Designing fairground rides and making them work using Knex and similar materials. As a precursor, invite your Showman children to bring in photos and artefacts to link this directly to their culture and experience.</p>	<p>Draws on the technical skills and practical experiences of the showman child, which would be gained from an early age.</p>
<p>Art, Music, Dance and Drama</p>	<p>Study artists from different cultures, including GRT artists, actors, musicians and dancers.</p>	<p>Makes all children aware of some of the contributions to the arts of famous GRT people, such as Charlie Chaplin, David Essex, Elvis, Cher Lloyd, Picasso and Michael Caine.</p>





Is it okay to set work for Traveller pupils to do on a computer at home?

Yes, but like any pupil in your class, you should first check they have access to a computer and the internet.

Many Traveller pupils have access to computers, iPads, smartphones etc. but do not have printers at home so always make sure they know how to send their work to you or to the school to be printed. Not all Traveller children will have a personal email address so consider signposting them to free email providers (Gmail, Yahoo etc.), but only with the parent/carer's consent.

Any Traveller children who do not have access to computers at home could be encouraged to attend a lunch time or after school homework club.

Some of my Traveller families don't want their children to go on to secondary education. Is there any way I can try to change their minds?

Some schools hold coffee events with members of the EMTAS Traveller team and a representative from the local secondary school so Traveller parents/carers can ask any questions they would like answered about the school and secondary education. It is a good idea to arrange a visit to the catchment secondary school when Traveller children are in Year 5 so parents/carers can begin to think about what they want to do about transition and what support they need. This can reassure Traveller parents/carers who may have had negative experiences at school themselves.

Some Traveller parents/carers may find the online forms challenging and it is helpful if a member of school staff can offer support with these.

EMTAS offers a transition programme to support GRT children moving into Y7. Contact EMTAS for more information.

I am concerned that many of our GRT students don't stay in education. Some leave before the end of Year 11 and others don't go on to college. What can I do about this?

EMTAS staff are able to support secondary schools in various ways to keep GRT students accessing education and to make sure they know about the options open to them post-16.

Creative approaches to timetabling in Key Stage 4 can help ensure GRT students continue to attend school, gaining recognised qualifications at the end of Year 11.



Support with transition to college is also available. This is offered on a case-by-case basis. Contact Claire Barker or Sarah Coles for more on this.

See also [Kushti Careers](#) on the EMTAS website. This section comprises a selection of real-life success stories in which GRT individuals from Hampshire chose to stay in education and/or pursue careers that required high levels of qualification and/or skill.

One of my Traveller children is going travelling. How do I code this and what do I have to provide?

You can code this as 'T' on the register if the family is travelling for work purposes. The child must have previously maintained good attendance (90%+) and they must be travelling with their parents/carers; the 'T' code may not be used if they are travelling with grandparents or other family members. The family should tell you when they are leaving and give a provisional date for their return and, if possible, destinations when travelling. As a school you must supply distance learning whilst your pupil is travelling as you receive funding for all children on roll. See the EMTAS website for more information about [distance learning](#).

Remind parents/carers that if the date of their return is delayed they must contact the school with the new date. Ensure parents/carers are aware that if the child does not return by the given date and school do not hear from the parents/carers with a new return date, then their child could be reported as a Child Missing Education which may result in them losing their school place.

Other useful information about EMTAS GRT guidance support

The [EMTAS Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Excellence Award](#) is a whole-school online self-evaluation tool that supports practitioners to audit current practice in their work with GRT communities and to identify areas for development. It is available to Hampshire-maintained schools through the SLA and to other settings through EMTAS Sold Services.

The [EMTAS Guidance Library](#) includes a section on GRT comprising resources and links that schools may find helpful. This is an open access resource.

EMTAS offers the New Arrival Ambassador (NAA) Scheme which is an excellent scheme for supporting the in-year admission of Traveller children and young people, Children in Care and Service children. [Details are on the EMTAS website](#).



Hampshire
Services

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Further information about our Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities may be found on the [EMTAS website](#) and the [EMTAS blog](#).

For ad hoc queries about any aspect of practice or provision for GRT pupils phone 0370 7794 222 or email claire.barker@hants.gov.uk or sarah.c.coles@hants.gov.uk.

Hampshire EMTAS

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