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# Traveller & Showmen Attendance Project

## 2023-2025

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Over the last two years, the EMTAS Traveller Team has worked with Hampshire schools to see if targeted interventions can improve the attendance of Traveller and Showmen children. The attendance project included 5 schools, 1 secondary and 4 primaries, and involved a total of 52 children. The Traveller children who were included did not represent all the Traveller children in the schools, only the ones with current and/or previous persistent absenteeism<sup>1</sup>.

In 2023-24, the first year of the project, 29 Traveller or Showmen children's attendance was tracked. Tracking continued for the full duration of the project, with a further 23 children joining for the second year, 2024-25.

### Strategies tried by the schools

#### Traveller clinics

At the secondary school, half-termly clinics were implemented which supported students build positive relationships with staff and reflect on the benefits of regular school attendance. During a clinic, discussions around attendance, attainment and aspirations took place with individual students. These sessions also encouraged students to consider the potential disadvantages of non-attendance. The school reported a positive response to the initiative and plans to continue the clinics into the next academic year.

#### Phone calls

Fortnightly phone calls were made by the EMTAS Traveller Team to all the parents to discuss the latest attendance figures and offer support or praise as appropriate. These phone calls helped to foster good relationships with the parents.

#### Coffee events

Several primary schools implemented coffee events as a strategy to strengthen relationships between families and the school community. These informal gatherings aimed to build trust, reduce barriers to communication and reframe contact with school eg phone calls as supportive rather than concerning.

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<sup>1</sup> The Department for Education (DfE) defines persistent absenteeism as when a pupil misses **10% or more of their possible school sessions**, covering both authorised and unauthorised absences, and requiring schools and authorities to provide extra support to address barriers to attendance.

In one school, Traveller pupils were encouraged to take an active role in the coffee events by baking cakes and preparing refreshments. This approach was successful in improving attendance; parents came to support their children. The sessions included some fun activities eg building model vardos, which fostered a sense of pride in the Traveller families' cultural heritage and friendly competition between families.

Another school adopted a more informal approach, inviting parents to stay at pick-up time and providing toys and activities for younger siblings. Coffee events at this school featured visits from external agencies including the Elective Home Education Team, local medical practitioners and a social worker. Attendance was a focus at every session.

In another setting, the Headteacher played a pivotal role by personally inviting parents to attend, helping to create a welcoming and inclusive atmosphere.

It is worth noting that coffee events were not held in the secondary school. Instead, the focus there was on encouraging students to take ownership of improving their own attendance.

### **Creating roles and responsibilities around the school**

Some schools introduced specific roles and responsibilities for their Traveller and Showmen pupils as a strategy to encourage punctuality and a sense of belonging. These roles required students to arrive early to school each day to fulfil their duties. For example, one pupil was appointed as Head Gardener and was expected to be in school by 08:45 to water the plants. In another school, a small group of children took responsibility for feeding the school fish each morning. These initiatives helped foster a sense of ownership and routine among the pupils involved, as well as improving punctuality.

### **Attendance awards**

Some pupils received printed certificates from their schools in recognition of improved attendance. This form of positive reinforcement contributed to increased self-esteem amongst recipients and served as a motivating factor for their peers to strive for better attendance.

## Findings

Across the two-year period, 48% of the participants (25 children) made an improvement in their attendance. One of the biggest impacts of the project was the building of relationships between the pupils, parents, schools and EMTAS. After an initial settling in period, attendance was viewed very much as a team effort by all involved.

Students from the participating secondary school showed a small improvement in their attendance – ranging from 1% to 4%. Two students from the setting did not improve their attendance during the project. All the students in the secondary school were of Romany heritage.

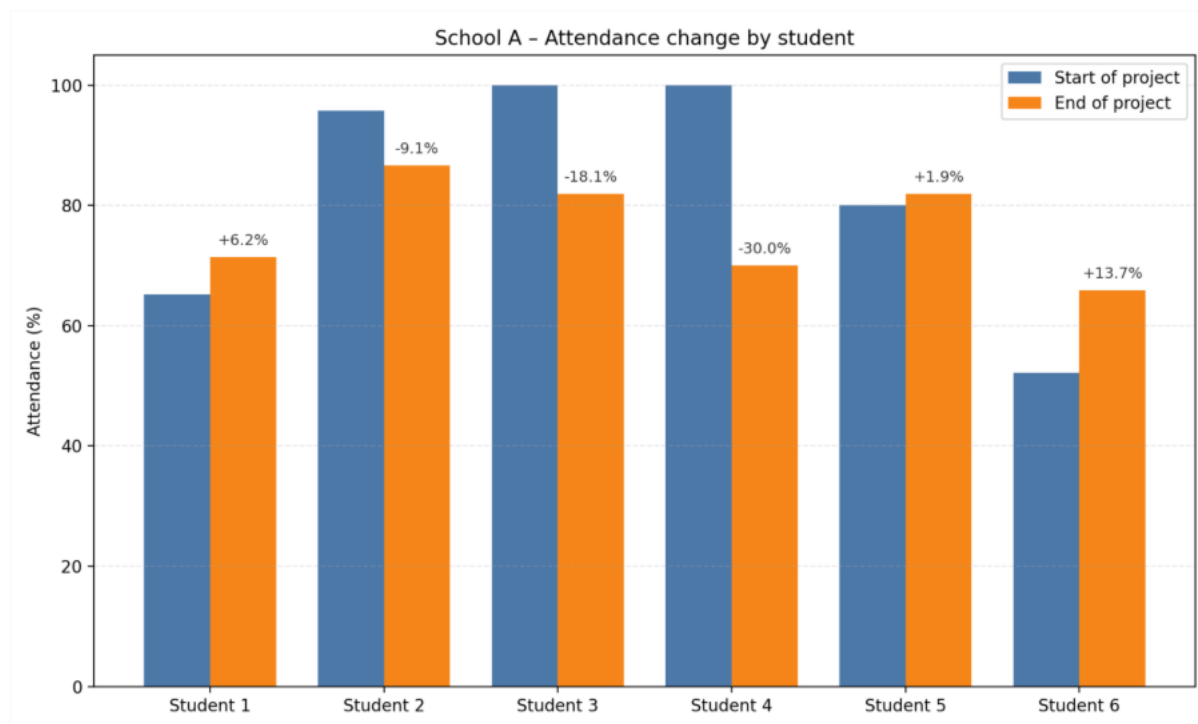
The primary schools all showed a rise in attendance for at least 2 of their tracked pupils. In the primary phase it was interesting to see the difference in attendance between pupils of Romany heritage and those of Irish Traveller Heritage. The Romany pupils made significantly more improvement than the pupils of Irish heritage. 10 Romany pupils (19%) had attendance of 90% or more at the end of the project compared with only 2 Irish Traveller pupils (4%) whose attendance was 90% or over at the end of the project. Based on these findings, it is apparent that

different strategies may be required to engage Irish Traveller families and this is something which could be explored further. Note there were not any Irish Traveller pupils in the participating secondary school.

## Individual school data: School A

School A is a secondary school and 6 students were tracked over two years. All of the students supported were of Romany heritage. In December 2023, 50% of the students had over 80% attendance and whilst this headline figure remained the same in March 2025, it was not from the same 3 students. Whilst some of the students did improve their attendance, it should be noted that the difference was small. For those whose attendance dropped, students 2 and 3 were siblings who were experiencing some social issues in school. They have now moved to a new school. Student 4 was a year 10 student who became disengaged but is still in school.

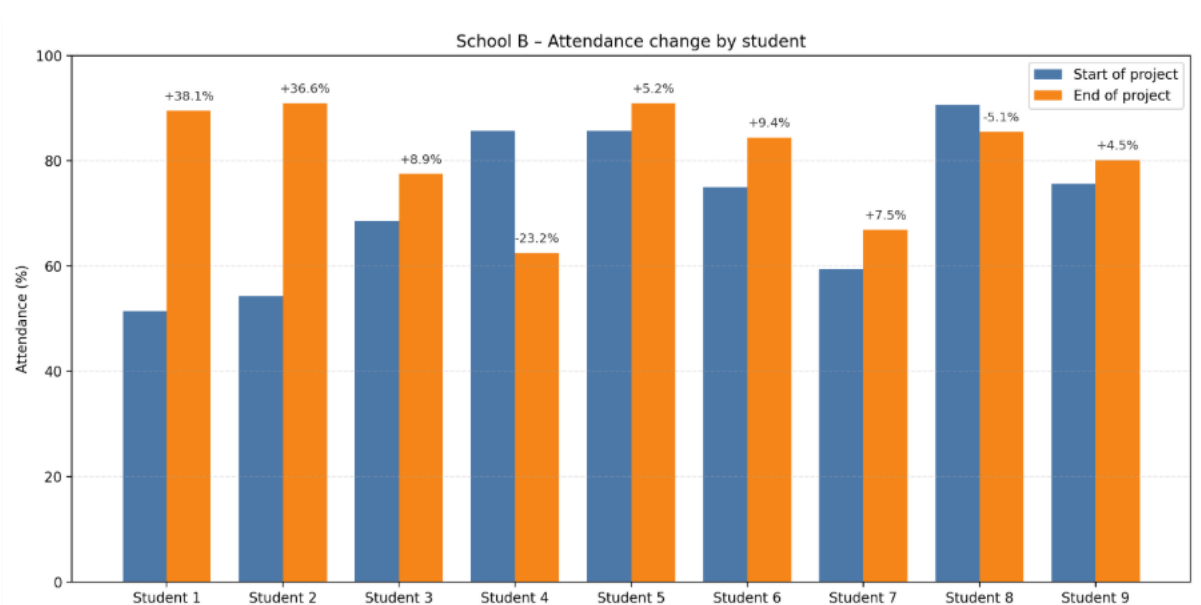
School A	Ethnicity code	Attendance at the start of the project	Attendance at the end of the project	Percentage change
Student 1	WROM	65.2%	71.4%	+6.2%
Student 2	WROM	95.7%	86.6%	-9.1%
Student 3	WROM	100%	81.9%	-18.1%
Student 4	WROM	100%	70%	-30%
Student 5	WROM	80%	81.9%	+1.9%
Student 6	WROM	52.2%	65.9%	+13.7%



## Individual school data: School B

School B is a junior school. All the pupils tracked were of Romany heritage. 78% (7 out of 9) of the pupils made an improvement in their attendance over the course of the two years of the project. Students 4 and 8 in the table below, whose attendance dropped quite considerably, were siblings who were experiencing issues in their home situation which were reflected in their attendance. This school were very good at engaging parents through focused coffee events eg vardo building, book looks, baking etc.

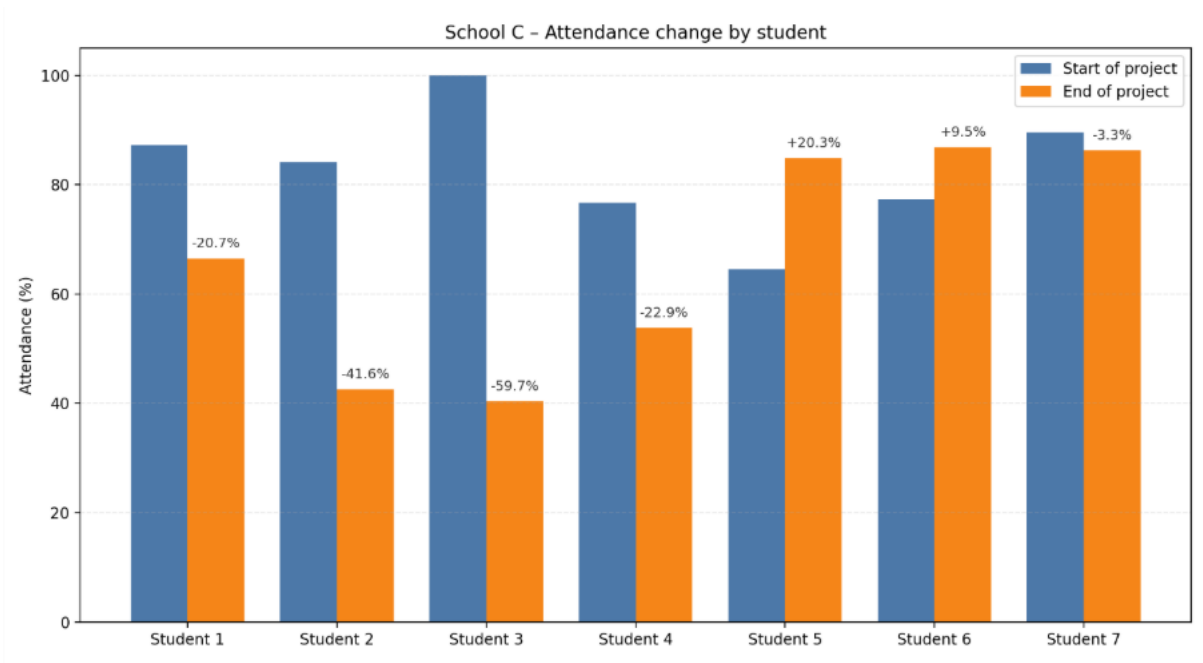
School B	Ethnicity code	Attendance at the start of the project	Attendance at the end of the project	Percentage change
Student 1	WROM	51.4%	89.5%	+38.1%
Student 2	WROM	54.3%	90.9%	+36.6%
Student 3	WROM	68.6%	77.5%	+8.9%
Student 4	WROM	85.7%	62.5%	-23.2%
Student 5	WROM	85.7%	90.9%	+5.2%
Student 6	WROM	75.0%	84.4%	+9.4%
Student 7	WROM	59.4%	66.9%	+7.5%
Student 8	WROM	90.6%	85.5%	-5.1%
Student 9	WROM	75.6%	80.1%	+4.5%



## Individual school data: School C

School C is a primary school. Out of the 7 pupils tracked only one pupil (Student 1) was of Romany heritage and their attendance dropped by 20.7% due to lack of parent engagement. The other pupils were of Irish Traveller heritage. Only 28% (2 of the 7) pupils made any improvement in their attendance over the two-year course of the project, Students 5 and 6. Those two pupils were of Irish heritage and were siblings. This school was innovative in their approach to attendance in that they gave children specific responsibilities that had to be carried out by 8.45am every day. The parents engaged with coffee events and telephone calls.

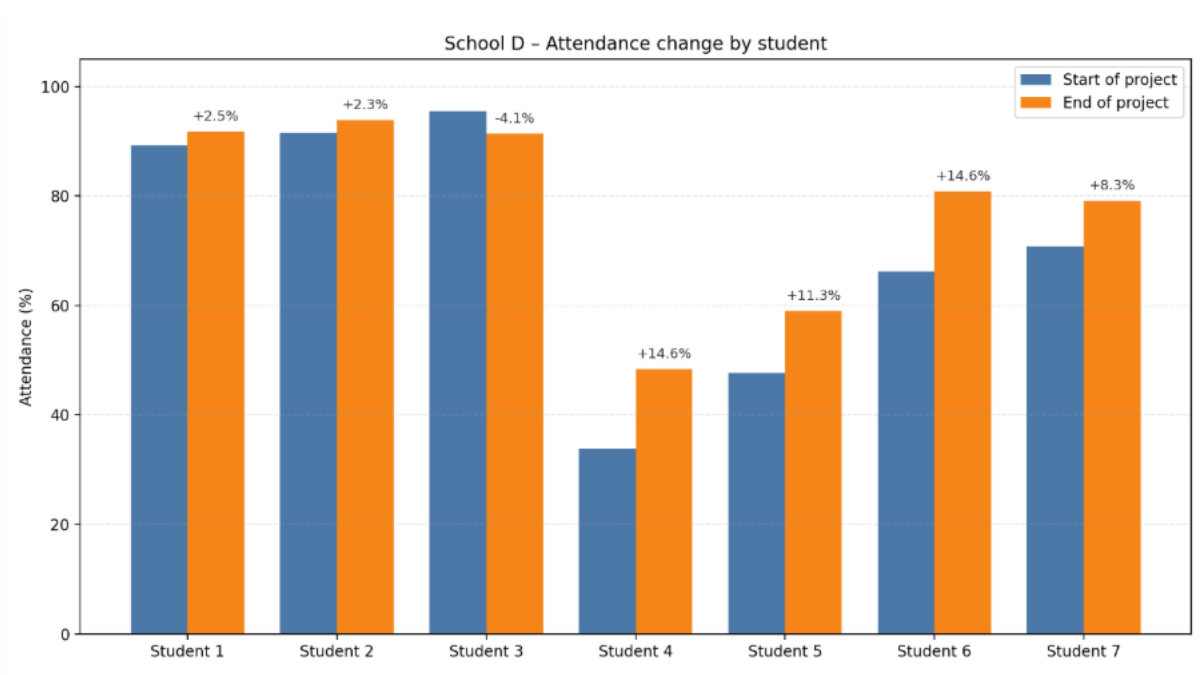
School C	Ethnicity code	Attendance at the start of the project	Attendance at the end of the project	Percentage change
Student 1	WROM	87.2%	66.5%	-20.7%
Student 2	WIRT	84.1%	42.5%	-41.6%
Student 3	WIRT	100%	40.3%	-59.7%
Student 4	WIRT	76.7%	53.8%	-22.9%
Student 5	WIRT	64.5%	84.8%	+20.3%
Student 6	WIRT	77.3%	86.8%	+9.3%
Student 7	WIRT	89.5%	86.2%	-3.3%



## Individual school data: School D

School D is a primary school. All of the pupils involved with this project were of Romany heritage. 85.7% of the pupils made an improvement in their attendance over the two years of the project, ranging from 2% to 14%. One pupil sustained higher than 91% attendance over the two years. This school told the parents about the attendance project and invited them to attend coffee events. Attendance at coffee events was very low but parents responded to regular telephone calls from the EMTAS Traveller Team.

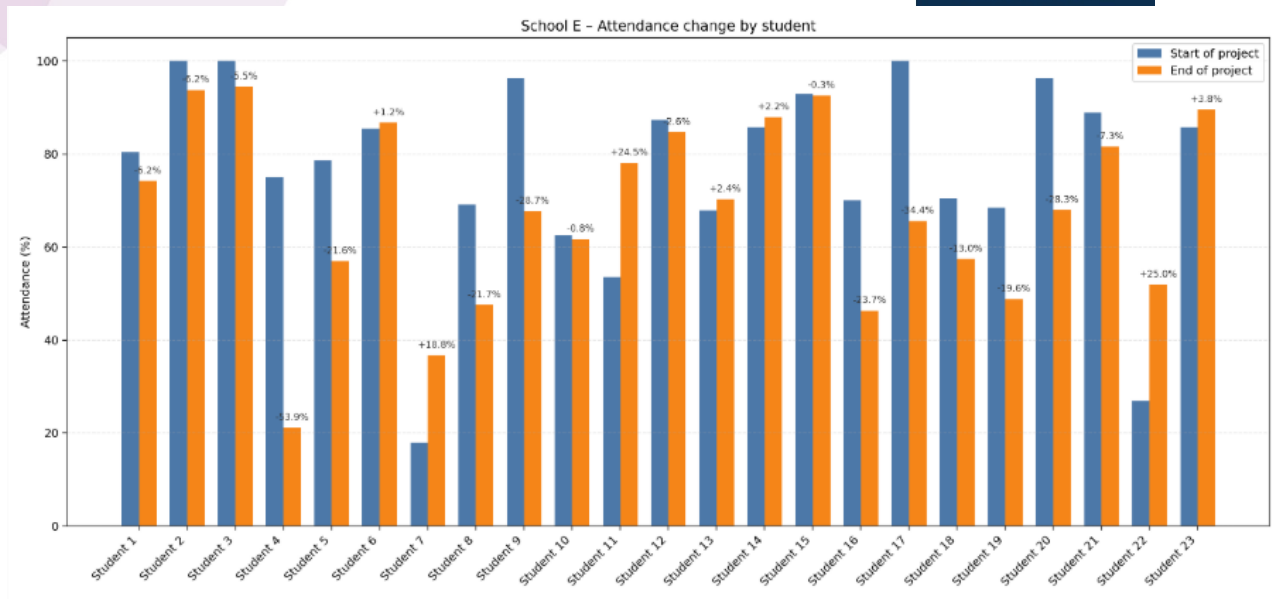
School D	Ethnicity code	Attendance at the start of the project	Attendance at the end of the project	Percentage change
Student 1	WROM	89.2%	91.7%	+2.5%
Student 2	WROM	91.5%	93.8%	+2.3%
Student 3	WROM	95.4%	91.3%	-4.1%
Student 4	WROM	33.8%	48.4%	+14.6%
Student 5	WROM	47.7%	59.0%	+11.3%
Student 6	WROM	66.2%	80.8%	+14.6%
Student 7	WROM	70.8%	79.1%	+8.3%



## Individual school data: School E

School E is a primary school and they only took part in the second year of the project. 23 pupils took part; 9 were of Romany heritage, two of whom are ascribed as WBRI with their sibling ascribed as WROM. 14 were of Irish Traveller heritage. 50% of the Romany pupils made some improvement to their attendance. 29.17% (7) of the Traveller pupils overall made progress with their attendance, 14% of these being Irish Traveller pupils, however, 70.83% (16) showed a decrease in attendance. This school managed a steady increase in parental attendance at coffee events and the parents responded to telephone calls.

School E	Ethnicity code	Attendance at the start of the project	Attendance at the end of the project	Percentage change
Student 1	WROM	80.4%	74.2%	-6.2%
Student 2	WBRI	100.0%	93.8%	-6.2%
Student 3	WBRI	100.0%	94.5%	-5.5%
Student 4	WIRT	75.0%	21.1%	-53.9%
Student 5	WIRT	78.6%	57.0%	-21.6%
Student 6	WROM	85.5%	86.7%	+1.2%
Student 7	WIRT	17.9%	36.7%	+18.8%
Student 8	WIRT	69.2%	47.5%	-21.7%
Student 9	WIRT	96.4%	67.7%	-28.7%
Student 10	WROM	62.5%	61.7%	-0.8%
Student 11	WROM	53.6%	78.1%	+24.5%
Student 12	WIRT	87.3%	84.7%	-2.6%
Student 13	WROM	67.9%	70.3%	+2.4%
Student 14	WROM	85.7%	87.9%	+2.2%
Student 15	WROM	92.9%	92.6%	-0.3%
Student 16	WIRT	70.0%	46.3%	-23.7%
Student 17	WIRT	100.0%	65.6%	-34.4%
Student 18	WIRT	70.4%	57.4%	-13%
Student 19	WIRT	68.4%	48.8%	-19.6%
Student 20	WIRT	96.3%	68.0%	-28.3%
Student 21	WIRT	88.9%	81.6%	-7.3%
Student 22	WIRT	26.9%	51.9%	+25%
Student 23	WIRT	85.7%	89.5%	+3.8%



## Conclusion

The data indicate that attendance outcomes varied significantly across schools, largely influenced by the characteristics of each individual cohort. While some schools experienced notable improvements in student attendance, others reported declines. These fluctuations can be attributed to a range of external factors beyond the schools' control, including differing family attitudes and expectations regarding school attendance.

EMTAS will continue to support schools and Traveller families on the journey to improving attendance outcomes.

**EMTAS Traveller Team**  
**January 2026**